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**Relocating the Body: Memory, Ritual, and Form in
Caribbean Literature**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of Warwick, Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies.
September 2006

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank in particular my supervisor Prof. David Dabydeen for all his help with my thesis. His kind support and generous advice have been invaluable.

I would like to thank him too for all that he did in helping to organise my research trip to the Caribbean, as well as for his practical support with various other aspects of my research. I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding my PhD in full over the last three years, as well as for funding my overseas research and conference trips. I am grateful as well to the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies and the Centre for Caribbean Studies for their kindness and support. Thanks also to the Ali family for making my stay in Guyana so enjoyable and interesting. I would also like to thank my family and friends for all their help; I am very grateful to Kerstin, Teresa, Chris, Rochelle, and Jim for their support and kindness.

Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This thesis approaches the issue of form in the Caribbean novel from the perspective of the key role played by the body as an alternative repository of memory in the region. Whether in terms of the production of the wage-labourer under capitalism or the regulation and exploitation of the slave, the body was the locus of a series of power relations upon which colonialist / capitalist expansion hinged. Yet for the colonised, its connection to cultural practices such as vodun ritual meant that it served too as the amanuensis of an historical legacy denied 'legitimate' expression. Tracing the impact of the various material and ideological constraints imposed upon not only the body but also land and language from the time of slavery, the thesis explores how three writers in particular – Patrick Chamoiseau, Wilson Harris, and Earl Lovelace – have sought to integrate this embodied tradition in order to transform a body politic scarred by racial polarisation, underdevelopment, and victimhood.

The thesis examines how the need for an original epic form able to express the complexity of the Caribbean's history requires a re-visionary approach to memory. It suggests that the latter in turn requires the formulation of an original philosophy, one that, reflecting the admixture of cultures in the Caribbean, makes use of a diversity of intellectual traditions, including traditional African religion, to forge ontological and epistemological modes capable of conveying cross-cultural community. The incorporation of the insights provided by rituals based on ego-displacement, for example, contributes to a form that seeks to undo the consolidation of character and narrative, consuming or re-ritualising the past to release a new vision of the future. Moreover, the worldview behind this form offers a means to envisage the renewal of the national project and the transformation of the capitalist world system.

Abbreviations

<u>BS</u>	Frantz Fanon, <u>Black Skin, White Masks</u> .
<u>DA</u>	Édouard Glissant, <u>Le discours antillais</u> .
<u>EC</u>	Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, <u>Éloge de la créolité</u> .
<u>EPD</u>	Patrick Chamoiseau, <u>Écrire en pays dominé</u> .
<u>ES</u>	Wilson Harris, <u>Explorations</u> .
<u>GD</u>	Earl Lovelace, <u>Growing in the Dark: Selected Essays</u> .
<u>IPD</u>	Édouard Glissant, <u>Introduction à une poétique du divers</u> .
<u>LC</u>	Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, <u>Lettres créoles</u> .
<u>LP</u>	Pierre Bourdieu, <u>The Logic of Practice</u> .
<u>LSP</u>	Pierre Bourdieu, <u>Language and Symbolic Power</u> .
<u>PR</u>	Édouard Glissant, <u>Poétique de la Relation</u> .
<u>RI</u>	Wilson Harris, <u>The Radical Imagination</u> .
<u>TWS</u>	Wilson Harris, <u>Tradition, The Writer, and Society</u> .
<u>WE</u>	Frantz Fanon, <u>The Wretched of the Earth</u> .
<u>WOS</u>	Wilson Harris, <u>The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination</u> .

Introduction

Among the Caribbean folk tales collected and reworked in Raphaël Confiant's Contes créoles des Amériques, the story of "The Seven-Headed Beast" recounts the encounter between this devilish creature and Ma Lôlô. On discovering one morning that the Beast has not only "devoured all that she had planted in her garden" but also left in its wake a "mountain" of excrement (65), Ma Lôlô bursts into such a fit of anger that the monster reappears and, via a magic incantation, forces her to eat its faeces.¹ The next day, accompanied by the eldest of her three sons, she returns to the garden only for the same fate to befall them both. On the third day she and the second son are forced to swallow the excrement. However, on the fourth day she arrives with her youngest son, Ti-Pascal, whose powerful talisman causes the Beast's heads to fall off. The monster immediately grows a new set and a series of beheadings and re-headings ensues. Finally, Ti-Pascal wets his adversary with the contents of a phial, thereby preventing any further re-growth. Thus does the youngest son outwit and defeat the Beast.

Integral to this story are a number of themes and concerns common not only to the Caribbean folk tale but also to Caribbean literature in general. Foremost is that of the body, which has been central to the physical and discursive struggles played out in the region. Its position here as a site of contestation points to the context in which such tales were forged: plantation slavery. The control exerted by the white master over the land and bodies of others is imaged in the Beast's theft of Ma Lôlô's produce and ability to make her eat excrement. Indeed, the latter motif alludes to one of the physical tortures inflicted on the slaves, as well as to the psychological torment caused by their being force-fed colonial ideology. Moreover, Confiant's narrative retains

elements of performativity (songs, chants, calls to the audience) that stress its origins in the oral tradition of plantation storytelling. Significantly, the physical gestures of the storyteller were central to the ritual surrounding the recital of the tale; and just as the story's content implied the desired triumph of the oppressed culture over the aggressor, so its ritualised performance was a challenge to the attempted regulation of the body by the colonial power.

The tale therefore draws attention to some of the characteristics of the resistant culture of the slaves that developed upon the plantation. Of course, this culture was necessarily creolised, an assemblage of disparate influences fragmented and eroded by the Middle Passage. As the transplanted African population was forcibly re-settled in the Caribbean it was transformed: seeking to come to terms with the 'New World' it entered into what Édouard Glissant calls the "constantly shifting and variable process of Relation" (Le discours antillais 42). Thus, despite the rigidly hierarchical, segregated system imposed by the plantation regime, the latter also inadvertently provided a crucible in which an original cultural formation could be moulded under the pressure applied by slave resistance to colonial norms. Moreover, as the geographical origins of the stories selected by Confiant for his collection attest – ranging as they do from Louisiana through the archipelago of the Caribbean islands and into the Guianas –, the spread of this regime across the region produced comparable societies, all shaped by the dynamics of creolization.

The potential for creative transformation that subsists within catastrophic or disorientating cultural contact has remained fundamental to the development of the Caribbean. As successive waves of arrivals – including Indian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern peoples – have followed the earlier European and African

influx, the interpenetration of traditions has continued. In light of the overlap and admixture of histories and cultures that has occurred in the Caribbean, uniting the region in its diversity, this thesis assumes the necessity and validity of comparing literature from across the area in terms of its approach to such heterogeneity. To this end, my focus will be on three writers who have placed particular emphasis upon issues of cultural interaction and creolization: the Martinican Patrick Chamoiseau, the Trinidadian Earl Lovelace, and the Guyanese Wilson Harris.² Significantly, each has suggested that it is within the arts and practices that have evolved out of, or in reaction to, these cross-cultural conditions that one can locate the principles by which to narrate the entangled history of the region. The original situation that has arisen in the Caribbean requires an original approach to its conceptualisation; and it is the originality of the culture that has been created here – with the body and ritual central pillars in its architecture – that provides the basis for an appropriate response to the complexity of its social reality.

The writers highlighted seek to excavate a depth of resources capable of laying the foundations for ‘native’ identity.³ Though obscured by colonial history, these resources are regarded as offering the tools essential to the crafting of a philosophy coincident with Caribbean experience. Lovelace, for example, counsels that it is “only when we look at our creativity and achievements that we will discover the true value of our traditions and [. . .] find a clearer vision of our future” (Growing in the Dark 36). These traditions must be returned to as “a source of philosophy or ethics or economics”; and if colonial distortion has circumscribed their meaning – as it has with the folkloric figure of Anancy, for example, who is seen only as “a scamp, a smart-man” – nevertheless it is possible to revise such bias, to conceive of Anancy not as a “‘smart-man’ but as a subtle

philosopher tricking the individual into the recognition of the consequences of bad choices and bad faith” (GD 99).

Likewise for Chamoiseau, creole culture forms the spine of what he, Confiand and Jean Bernabé termed *créolité* in their 1989 manifesto *Éloge de la créolité*.⁴ As the “*interactional and transactional aggregate* of Caribbean, European, African, Asiatic, and Levantine cultural elements,” assembled on the same soil by the yoke of history, *créolité* issues from that need for deterritorialized peoples, when confronted by a new environment, to “reinvent life” (EC 26). It is the pre-condition for “interior vision” or for the recognition of oneself and of Caribbean reality on their own terms and not those of Europe or Africa (EC 15). Hence, claim the Créolistes, “[o]ur writing must accept without reservation our popular beliefs, our magico-religious practices, our marvellous realism, the rituals tied to the ‘milan’” (EC 40). Harris too emphasizes the importance of these traditions. Limbo, vodun, Carib bush-baby omens, Arawak zemi, Latin and English inheritances – all contain the creative resources through which to rethink the Caribbean beyond the static frames imposed by colonialism.

In effect, these practices and cultural vestiges comprise the “epic stratagems available to Caribbean man in the dilemmas of history which surround him” (Harris, “History, Fable and Myth” 156). The gateway into consciousness offered by a ritual such as Haitian vodun provides a means to visualise the mutation in perception experienced by those peoples whose traditional social moulds had been left behind, fragmented, or dissolved. Broadly, therefore, my concern is with the way in which Chamoiseau, Lovelace, and Harris, by engaging the creativity and eclipsed perspectives embodied (often literally) in the arts of the folk, seek to narrate a new epic of the community, one that necessitates a re-

visionary approach to memory and reality, as well as to established literary and historiographical forms.

The colonial encounter was defined initially by the expropriation of land. As the capitalist mode of production emerged in Europe from the sixteenth century onwards, it became vital that territory be expanded and new sources of raw materials secured in order to sustain the growth of industry and commerce. The ‘discovery’ of the Americas sparked a process of primitive accumulation which reflected that already underway across the Atlantic. But what in Europe took the form of the dispossession of the peasantry and their conversion into landless wage-labourers – yet was to appear as their emancipation from serfdom –, in the colonies was exposed in its most naked form. The conquest of the indigenous peoples and the importation of deterritorialized Africans structured the genesis of the plantation system in the Caribbean, the exports from which helped fuel European expansion. Indeed, the “veiled slavery of the wage-labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal” (Marx, Capital 925). And what “unqualified slavery” thereby unveiled was precisely capitalism’s need for the body as commodity, that is, for it to be ‘produced’ in such a way that it was adjusted to – and so could be easily inserted within – the capitalist mode of production and its particular physical and ideological demands.

Whether in terms of the overt control exercised via slavery, or the more covert pressures associated with the capitalist / worker relationship, the constant axis is the body as the locus of a series of relations through which power is asserted. On the plantation, corporeal restraint and compulsion are obvious. After emancipation, with the move towards a more fully capitalist economy, such

visibility may diminish but the domination exerted over the body remains. As Marx observed, because the labour-power of the workers has been appropriated and their products converted into alien commodities by the capitalist, the latter appears to produce labour-power in the form of “a subjective source of wealth which is abstract, exists in the body of the worker, and is separated from its own means of objectification and realization; in short, the capitalist produces the worker as a wage-labourer” (Capital 716). As capital seeps into the pores of the body, that is, as the splitting of the mass of the people from the land and their insertion into the system of production structures their movements and lifestyle, so too is an effect produced on perception. Constant exposure to the ideology of the system through participation in its practices results in the inculcation of its values and their appearance as a natural law. Indeed, they are naturalised precisely because they are instilled in, and connected to the material requirements of, the body. Once perception has thus been imposed upon, it in turn influences practice and, because now structured by the system, ensures the reproduction of the latter.

That the confluence of practice and perception as expressed through the body enables such domination is an idea explored in depth by Pierre Bourdieu. His theory of practice posits a dialectical relationship between material determinants and mental schemas. It is, he contends, the interaction between the body and a structured organization of space and time that shapes existence. By extension, since this spatio-temporal order is determined by the socio-economic necessities of a certain mode of being, these conditions circumscribe reality. However, within the “limited generative capacity” thereby instituted, there resides the potential for the production of an infinite series of “thoughts,

perceptions, expressions, and actions,” which can also ‘feed back’ to – and so perpetuate or modify – the underlying structure (The Logic of Practice 55). The mediating link here is provided by Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus.” Habitus are “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations” (LP 53). In other words, the structures characterising a determinate set of conditions of existence produce the structures of the habitus, which in turn “are the basis of the perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience” (LP 54). As the product of the history inculcated into individuals via practices shaped by objective conditions, the habitus is an incorporated history, one durably inscribed in the body, which, due to the physical movements and symbolic representations with which it is instilled, is adjusted to these objective conditions. Thus is the corporeal realm again spotlighted as the key site in the contestation of power, for it is here that an imposed history can be most effectively legitimised as an historical inevitability.

While Bourdieu’s analyses apply to social reproduction and the cultivation of class distinction and domination in general, much of what they expose is most clearly visible in the “unqualified” context of slavery. Through physical violence, as well as symbolic domination in the form of educational and religious instruction, the colonizers sought to inculcate the slaves with a habitus attuned to the power relations of the plantation regime, to regulate how they walked, talked, felt and thought in order that their actions reinforced the ‘inevitability’ of this system. Chapter One will investigate these issues in more detail. At present I wish only to emphasize how the physical and ideological production of the body in this instance is predicated on an ideal of the latter as

complete, restrained, and manageable – an abstract entity to be utilised as an object or unit of energy able to satisfy the labour demands of mass production. This ideal was imposed on the slaves *en masse*, since they were viewed as a homogenous block to be disposed of at will. Consequently, their bodies, or social body, would seem to have been produced in accordance with very different precepts to those that structured the body of the colonizer. The latter was defined by the notion of sovereign individuality, or the self-sufficient rational subject. The emergence of this genus in Europe, however, its context that of the “transition from the feudal to the capitalist mode of production [. . .] and the rise of the modern state” (Barker 11), entailed the creation of the private body, its confinement and control to ensure its utility in the restructured socius and its abstraction vis-à-vis the primacy of the mind.⁵ Bodily regulation not only effected the newly formed proletariat, then, but was also an integral factor in the development of the bourgeois class, as well as in the ideology behind colonialism. By contrasting a restrained corporeality taken to signify order and rationality with the “free, uninhibited body movements of the slaves” taken to signify an “unformed, undisciplined nature” (Juneja 98), the colonizer justified the regulation of this movement as civilising while consolidating his own identity through the conquest of an apparently radically different Other.

Earlier it was noted that the end of slavery brings only a change in form and not an end to bodily domination; and it is in terms of the mould of sovereign individuality as the embodiment of a specific socio-historical and economic formation that such regulation is perpetuated post-Emancipation. For the continuation of this mould points to the persistence of those ideological and socio-economic structures central to capitalism, which, even as they seemed to

produce freedom in the form of the 'emancipated' wage-labourer or self-sufficient bourgeois subject, entrenched a restricted, atomised corporeality and correspondingly delimited consciousness. The writers studied here address these issues so as to visualise that which enables and constitutes true freedom from oppression. Again, the basis of this visualisation is the original rituals and arts of the Caribbean peoples. For the imposition of habitus adjusted to the colonial order was never absolute: there always existed an alternative perspective, however eroded. The constant attention to corporeality by the colonizer, that obsessive regulation of the "uninhibited body movements of the slaves," was at the same time meant to erase the body, to reduce it to nothing more than an automatic component in the system, for within its "undisciplined" gestures lay the means to contest the 'natural' status of this system.

The rituals, dances, songs, and crafts of the slaves, which were continued and developed by the blacks after Emancipation, make manifest not only another physical but also another socio-cultural body to that produced via the imposed habitus.⁶ Since habitus generate "all the 'reasonable,' 'common-sense,' behaviours (and only these) which are possible within the limits of [their objective] regularities" (Bourdieu, LP 55), the colonial variant, as it thereby delimits reality, creates a 'commonsensical' world that is the embodiment of official – that is, the colonizer's – History.⁷ But an alternative habitus persists, one derived from traces of African custom retained over the Middle Passage and remoulded in the attempt to come to terms with the 'New World' – a remoulding fired by contact with Amerindian, European, and, later, Indian influences. Because it is excluded from the History it would otherwise disrupt, and hence denied the legitimacy of habitual reality, this habitus functions out of step with

the 'common-sense' world.

Salutary here is Jacques Stephen Alexis's concept of 'marvellous realism.' Developed in relation to Haiti, yet applicable to the Caribbean as a whole due to the "cultural confluence" of the region, the marvellous real arises first from the diversity of cultural contributions present on the same soil (Alexis 262). Such heterogeneity inspires an art that "does not shrink from deformity, from shocks, from violent contrast," but also "achieves a new balance, [. . .] a composition equally harmonious in its contradictions": alongside Western "logic" it presents the mythic, the "stylised, the heraldic, even the hieratic" – elements that shape African philosophy but which the West represses in its construction of the 'rational,' 'modern' subject (267). Crucially, the foundations of this art are precisely those folk traditions through which the people have expressed – in opposition to the bounded, 'reasonable' world of the colonial order – their "whole consciousness of reality" (269), that is, their experience of the violent juxtaposition of heterogeneous traditions. In contrast to Alejo Carpentier's comparable *lo real maravilloso*, Alexis's 'marvellous' American reality is not a fixed cultural essence but a lived condition that emerges and mutates in relation to historical pressures; it is a dynamic process bound to the contemporary situation and not an eternal given.⁸ The 'marvellous' is hence underlain by that multiply inscribed divergent habitus derived from cultural interpenetration and replete with its own philosophical resources – something Alexis images in the vodun ritual and in the body that "responds naturally to music without following a pre-ordained plan, in contrast to other men who exercise a constant restraint over their bodies in order to conform to the social usages of polite society" (269). Such cultural practices *embody* the 'marvellous'

not only in the sense that they have been confined by colonial ideology to an ‘irrational,’ non-legitimate real, but also in that they manifest alter/native epistemological and ontological approaches.

Emphasis again falls on the body as the vessel of tradition therefore. Silenced in official discourse and denied access to legitimised – namely written – modes of representation, the slaves had turned to the amanuensis of the flesh to preserve and articulate a counter-memory. Hence, writes Lovelace, when

we look at our dances and listen to our songs, when we experience the vitality and power of the steelband and hear a stickfight chant and watch the leaps and dexterity of the bongo dance [. . .], we know we have a history of ourselves as subjects. It has not been erased, for it is carried in our bodies. (GD 31)

The body as it links to the practices of the people thus opens onto a history that has persisted beneath the apparent history-less condition wrought by colonialism. Yet the recuperation of this alter/native, ‘marvellous’ repository of memory requires far more than its retrieval and installation as the dominant habitus. Indeed, due to its particular form it must be socially instantiated in a re-visionary manner and, as suggested above, necessitates a new literary form for its expression. It is in this respect that the writers considered here, I will argue, specifically differ in their re-narration of the community from conventional accounts, even when such accounts have sought to identify and celebrate the buried epic of the people.

Given the significance Harris, Lovelace, and Chamoiseau attach to rituals and arts shaped by the socio-historical conditions instituted by colonialism, the key role they grant to material determinants in their thought is clear. All stress

the importance of practice – for instance: craftsmanship based on Amerindian techniques; the cultivation of slave gardens; the use of traditional medicines – in the preservation of a reality coincident with the lived experience of the people. As Chamoiseau puts it in Texaco: “Craft is good memory” (59). Not only is the need to inscribe oneself onto the land crucial to the re-vision of History performed by these writers; one must also exert control over the means of production in order to come to terms with a landscape made hostile by slavery and the plantation regime. I want to stress in particular that Harris is as much concerned with these issues as the other two, despite the oft-made claim that his work places a reduced emphasis on the politico-economic sphere in comparison with that placed on consciousness.⁹ For in tandem with his advocacy of a revisionary perception of space runs always the call for a scientific appreciation and material re-organisation of the land, necessary if one is to understand it in a way other than that sanctioned by colonial agricultural policies. In Jonestown, for example, the belief held by the colonial engineers that the land was flat is said to have resulted in “the sugar plantations [. . .] [being] laid out in rectangles and squares. As a consequence they smothered the breath-lines in a living landscape. And when the peasant rice farmer came into being he had to contend with disfigured catchments, in the coastal river systems, that would occasion excessive floods and droughts for him” (171-72). The transformation of the institutional structure is hence inextricable from the perceptual shift required to unlock the imaginative as well as economic potential of the land for the benefit of the peasant as opposed to the plantation owner.

On one level, then, such changes could be understood as driven by a dialectic in which the alteration of the socio-political order concomitant with a

revolution in sensibility arises out of the historical contradictions – here engendered by the conflict between imposed Euclidean principles and the diverse “breath-lines” of the landscape – that inhere in the reality sanctioned by this order. These contradictions stimulate a new consciousness of the latter’s limitations, which in turn impels action against it. A similar approach to history underpins Éloge de la créolité. The plantation structure is considered to harbour also the potential for the negation of its own absolutism. Bound together in a plantation-based economy, note the Créolistes, the African and European populations are “*forced to invent new cultural schemes that enable their relative cohabitation*” (EC 31); and born from these schemes is the créolité that challenges the ‘pure’ identity moulds imposed by the colonizer.

Such approaches can be seen to reflect what Paget Henry in Caliban’s Reason identifies as the historicist strand in Caribbean thought. Henry argues that since the late nineteenth century Caribbean philosophy has been broadly divided between two schools, the historicist (concerned primarily with re-structuring politico-economic and institutional relations) and the poeticist (concerned primarily with re-structuring ego-consciousness relations). Although stressing that a greater unity exists between these fields than at first appears, Henry nevertheless overemphasizes, I think, the divisions between them. Harris is placed firmly in the poeticist camp, for example, whereas, as the above remarks might indicate, I consider that his work occupies a far more dialectical position between the two schools than Henry allows. That said, the latter’s description and periodization of the historicist and poeticist traditions is highly useful; and his account of the principles underlying the poeticist understanding of ego-consciousness interaction highlights those elements, outside the conventional

dialectic of history, which become integral to the creation of a philosophy able to articulate the complexity of the Caribbean's development.

Speaking in 1970 on the need for a "philosophy of history which is original to us and yet capable of universal appeal," Harris suggested that the closest West Indian historians have come is "in terms, firstly, of the Marxist dialectic," citing in particular C. L. R. James's work ("Continuity and Discontinuity" 180). He emphasized, though, that this by itself was not sufficient; it must be allied to another perspective, one that he located in the native arts of the imagination – those folk rituals, crafts, and practices such as vodun, shamanism, and limbo which were transformed by, or forged out of, colonial contact. To understand Harris's claim one must first broach the issue of the particular form of history that is to be articulated here, and of the limitations of what Henry defines as the historicist approach. Although the latter is vital in terms of identifying the institutional pressures and distortions that have circumscribed or disrupted Caribbean society, it neglects certain questions surrounding consciousness, which in turn restricts its vision of historical transformation. Specifically, Henry argues that it tends to treat the ontology of the ego as a non-problematic given, with any deviations to be "put on hold and addressed in the future" following institutional recovery (110). Consequently, the ontology of its subject remains defined strictly by a self-constituting process fulfilled by the realisation of a project pursued by the activist self as a response to the challenges of the social environment. As Henry suggests with regard to James's work, such a conception continues to close off the subject within a limited historical horizon. Moreover, the constitution of selfhood via the realisation of a social project entails the eclipse of one institution or past mode of

subjectivity by another: historicism's activist self, contends Henry, assumes a "closed and one-sided sufficiency"; it relies on an "ontological supremacy that sustain[s] one-sided modes of self assertion" (258). Hence, while the resistance to and transformation of the dominant order by this activist self are crucial undertakings, the historicist vision only goes partway since it fails to provide the necessary reconfiguration of ontology.

The inability to move further in this respect stems from a neglect of resources beyond the conventional historical horizon, that is, from a failure to integrate that 'marvellous' tradition and its alter/native worldview, one that sustains the possibility of a radically different future. Due to the polarised conditions of colonial and even 'post-colonial' reality, the cross-cultural community inherent in the 'marvellous' mutated beneath the habitual, 'commonsense' world: it comprises what Harris terms a "phenomenal legacy" (Explorations 45) since its potential for an original reassembly of histories did not – indeed, could not – come to fruition amidst the atrocities and excisions of History. Greater consideration must thus be given to consciousness and to the unconscious depths – the realm in which this phenomenal history gestates as a "latent threshold" within the population (Harris, "The Amerindian Legacy" 170) – if such reconstructive promise is to be unearthed and fulfilled.

The failure of straightforwardly historicist accounts to engage this alter/native potential derives from an inability to countenance a philosophical perspective that is itself 'marvellous,' that is, itself derived from the elements of, for example, African or Indian philosophies contained in the ritual practices and religious or mythic beliefs present in the Caribbean. There has been a tendency in some historicist critique, even as it emphasizes the importance of the region's

diverse cultural contributions, to disregard aspects of these philosophies. As Henry shows, again in relation to James's work, this is the result in part of an internalisation of particular assumptions present in European philosophy concerning traditional African thought, especially the dichotomy posited by the former between itself as 'modern' vis-à-vis the latter as 'pre-modern.' Enmeshed in this opposition, James was incapable of embracing 'premodern' African philosophy, argues Henry, treating it only as an "abstract presence that helped [him] to construct the modern African historically," that is, as a "stage in which nature was the important fetter on the historical process" – a stage that would be surpassed with "the advances of modern technology" (56). Consequently, the possibilities this philosophy held out were missed. To access the potential inherent in the 'marvellous' history of the Caribbean requires the dismantling of the premodern / modern binary and the incorporation, as still active influences, of the ontological and epistemological modes associated with 'other' worldviews (just as Alexis's notion of the 'marvellous' includes the "hieratic" aspect of traditional African thought). The original Caribbean philosophy postulated by Harris must be melded from a combination of perspectives in accordance with the cross-cultural condition of the society from which it emerges and about which it seeks to speak.

This thesis will explore how just such a Caribbean philosophy is articulated by the writers considered here. I want now to outline some of its key features as a preliminary to the analysis that will be undertaken in later chapters. For example, the significance of traditional African thought to those rituals such as vodun that play a central role in the re-articulation of history by Chamoiseau, Lovelace, and Harris will be a pivotal theme in the thesis. African philosophy is

inextricable from traditional African religion, the primary aim of which, observes Henry, is the “transcending of the everyday ego in a search for balance and harmony with the creative womb or original matrix of forms and energies” (62). Consequently, at its heart is an existential critique of egoism: it challenges the ego’s tendency to enclose and consolidate itself, to absolutize the reality it has constructed and thus exclude other possibilities inherent in the spiritual ground that surrounds it. The solution to such blind fixity is for the ego to be disrupted or voided, for it to temporarily let go “its self-positing and centring activities and surrender to the correctives and directives of the deities and ancestors” (Henry 63). These “periodic baptisms in the waters of spirit” reconnect the ego to the larger spirit world, leaving it “more fully aware [. . .] of the whole range of spiritual claims for which one is responsible” (Henry 63, 35).

With this in mind it is possible to re-read Éloge de la créolité, recognising that there is something else at work here in addition to that dialectical movement identified earlier. Throughout the manifesto, the reappraisal of past models of identity, as well as the drive towards a new vision of subjectivity, is accompanied by persistent references to the “break up” of the self, the need to “decompose what we are”; words such as “plunge” and “baptism” recur frequently in the sense of a plunge into the depths of oneself that transforms subjecthood by bathing it in the fluid currents of submerged cross-cultural flows. Although there are a number of problems with the manifesto, especially in terms of a tension between creolization as an original process and the seemingly essentialist notion of Creole as identity, one can nevertheless understand it in part as posting a radically different notion of ontology, one influenced by those aspects of traditional African philosophy it incorporates.¹⁰ For the images and phrases

quoted above recall the African religio-philosophical notion of the voiding or displacement of the ego and the baptisms in the waters of spirit that ‘correct’ its biases and open it to a range of influences. The spiritual or mythic perspective therefore unlocks an alternative way of conceiving the Caribbean situation. Its features can be historicized, with the waters of spirit understood as the morass of unfixed cultural legacies that traverse the region, and the voiding of the ego understood as the erosion of traditional identity precipitated by the colonial encounter and the collision of cultures it enacted. Yet this perspective, with its emphasis on the redemptive rebirth or reassembly of influences that follows ego-collapse, suggests too, in parallel with the terror wrought by colonial erosions, the possibility of reconstruction from the very heart of this void.

Of course, such possibilities again indicate an unborn potential or phenomenal legacy as opposed to a historically realised project. Nonetheless, as this thesis aims to demonstrate, the route provided by not only African but also Indian and Amerindian beliefs and practices into a revised notion of identity opens the way to the recognition of this submerged, ‘marvellous’ legacy. The alter/native epistemologies pursued by the writers studied here via native arts and rituals unveil the material and imaginative transformations that must take place in order that such potential be realised.

Thus far we have touched on issues concerning approaches to history and the possibility of the recuperation of more than just the brutalities and victimizations that scar the skin of the past. I want to end this introductory section by sketching the historical and literary background against which Harris, Chamoiseau, and Lovelace write. For they confront a period – the post-1945 Caribbean – when

great social change seemed to herald the thoroughgoing transformation of society. Much of the undoubted success of this period was followed by disappointment, however. Hence, these authors have sought to articulate new means by which such promise could now be fulfilled.

In a broad sense, Harris characterises Caribbean history as marked by frequent collapses, transitions, and re-orderings in both socio-economic and psychological terms. He suggests that

the raw material of life lived in the West Indies and the Central or South Americas has involved not only peoples from Asia, Africa, Europe who were alien to each other (and therefore caught, as it were, in culture shock) but situations of change (conquest, slavery, indenture, emancipation, etc.) which precipitated crises again and again in economic terms. (“The Amerindian Legacy” 170)

Again indicating a more dialectical stance between a historicist and poeticist position than Henry allows, Harris connects these socio-economic crises to ruptures in social or symbolic structures, for with “each material advance, whether in terms of conquest, emancipation, self-government, etc, there has occurred the breakdown of an accepted rule, moral privilege” (Tradition, the Writer and Society 61). Further, he has theorised the impact on the ego of institutional structures. Should the latter entrench a partial ideology as an absolute they will circumscribe the “extent to which one is genuinely at liberty to make choices in the context of certain cultural and social and political forces” (ES 44). By inculcating the individual with one-sided imperatives (such as fixed identity moulds and habitus that conform to the demands of an oppressive ruling order and its socio-economic framework) these forces instil psychological biases

that become a “ritual wall or curtain” blocking “a descent into complex and hidden forces of truth”; and this blockage or paralysis is “cultivated more and more in the name of ruling ego or pure order” (ES 98). The breakdown and transformation of institutional and psychological paralysis results partly from changes in society engendered by that dialectical movement of history we observed earlier. As Harris’s observations in “The Amerindian Legacy” indicate, the extreme nature of various events in the Caribbean has meant that its historical transitions have tended to be of a crisis-ridden or violently eruptive kind. Yet at these points of rupture, with the habitus torn from the milieu that has conditioned it, a new sense of freedom can emerge, for at that moment, to quote James on the Haitian revolution, “society is at boiling point and therefore fluid” (The Black Jacobins xix).

Significantly, however, this fluidity and the possibilities it gives birth to recall as well the notion of the voiding of the ego and the descent into the waters of spirit – instigated by pressure exerted from a wider consciousness or mythic ground – as the traumatic but ultimately beneficial prelude to rebirth. Again, the incorporation of this worldview provides an alternative yet complementary perspective, for it establishes an optic through which to conceive Caribbean history as driven also by that cross-cultural consciousness which subsists as a phenomenal legacy, a heterogeneous pressure straining under one-sided or homogenous social orders and habitus. Thus, in addition to the conventional socio-economic / activist historical dynamic, there pushes against the imposed frontiers of reality a medium of consciousness, as Harris puts it, that seeks “a dimension of creativity and freedom” (ES 85). The Caribbean’s juxtaposition of diverse traditions fuels a revolutionary unconscious drive to make connections

across cultures, bespeaking the “capacity of the intuitive self to breach the historical ego” (ES 134); the individual becomes aware “that the limits of community fall into mysterious otherness; a pressure accumulates, as it were, from nowhere and everywhere, upon the imagination to obey a conscience-in-depth that breaches fashionable optimisms, fashionable pessimisms, or dictates of commerce, class, race” (ES 99).

This thesis will pay particular attention to these eruptive moments and to the transitional periods of fluidity they inaugurate. The changes that occurred in Caribbean society from the 1930s to the 1950s, when politico-economic shifts encouraged, and were encouraged by, a rise in popular consciousness, signalled one such juncture in history. If authors from this period, such as Claude McKay, Aimé Césaire, and V. S. Reid, made society aware of the cultural problem confronting it, then Lovelace, Chamoiseau, and Harris belong to what Kamau Brathwaite calls the “second phase of West Indian and Caribbean artistic and intellectual life,” which, with society now conscious of the problem, seeks to “transcend and heal it” (“Timehri” 36). However, they write also in the shadow of the dissipation of many of the possibilities that had arisen. The reassertion of imperial power via the capitalist world system, the disappointments of a number of post-Independence states, the persistence of racial violence between Afro- and Indo-Caribbean peoples – all contributed to the reconsolidation of oppressive power relations, and to the congealment of the fluidity that had challenged them.

Generally speaking, the early twentieth century saw workers and peasants in the Caribbean confronting a society in which, as Gordon K. Lewis observes,

despite formal emancipation, they were still regarded as merely supplies of cheap labour to sugar kings and oil barons in search of

quick fortunes. Slavery had been abolished; but the economic foundations of slavery, especially in the general picture of land ownership, had remained basically untouched. [. . .] [T]he social pattern of slavery – the vast masses labouring in poverty on the property of the minority – remained stamped on West Indian life. On the industrial side, the power of the local business class was strengthened by the virtual absence of effective trade unions, and the general inadequacy of industrial law. (88-89)

By the 1930s, however, various factors had cohered to fire the potential for change in the region. As the Great Depression sharpened the economic misery, the experiences of West Indian soldiers in the First World War, industrial unrest in the United States, and the spread of elementary education precipitated a rise in class consciousness.¹¹ In addition, increased industrialisation in many islands, such as that surrounding the development of Trinidad's oilfields, aided the formation of working class opinion and, ultimately, trade unions. Consequently, the capacity for socio-economic resistance grew, with the result that in 1935

there were sugar strikes in St. Kitts and Guyana, a coal strike in St. Lucia, and a strike protesting customs duties in St. Vincent; in 1936 there was a general strike of waterfront workers in Guyana; in 1937 a general strike tied up the entire island of Trinidad, with Barbados workers striking in sympathy, and there were sugar strikes again in Guyana and St. Lucia, spreading this time to Jamaica; in 1938 there was further unrest in Jamaica and Guyana. (Cudjoe 45)

Meanwhile, in 1933 strikes spread throughout Cuba, while in Martinique there

was a major strike of cane-cutters in 1935. Thus, an increasing amount of pressure was being exerted on the ruling economic order, opening the way to its reconstitution in a form more favourable to the Caribbean people.

The breakdown in the traditional order and the challenge to established socio-political patterns is the subject of many Caribbean novels written in the 1950s but set in the turbulence of the 1930s. Works such as George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1953) and Ralph de Boissière's Crown Jewel (1952) portray the emergence of a new political consciousness following the crumbling of old hierarchies and the rise of unionism. Similarly, in Joseph Zobel's La Rue Cases-Nègres (1950), the rigidities of Martinican society are shown to be under pressure from a greater class / race mobility and a heightened recognition of oppression. However, the economic modernisation and improved access to schooling behind this pressure also herald future difficulties, notably cultural alienation and the renewal of class domination. The dangers that accompany modernisation are a central theme in the early works of Chamoiseau and Lovelace. In Lovelace's The Schoolmaster (1968), the construction of a school in the remote village of Kumaca benefits the community, yet also brings violence when the schoolmaster, newly arrived from the city, rapes a village girl, causing her suicide. The novel ends with a new road about to be opened that will link the village to the neighbouring town: modernisation, it is implied, is inescapable but has tragic consequences when not coincident with the people. In Chamoiseau's play, Manman Dlo contre la fée Carabosse (1982), the unsustainable development of Martinique is – perhaps a little too schematically in comparison with his later works – similarly indicted. With her new technologies, Carabosse “imprisons the land in an architecture of steel, decomposes Nature and forces

Life into strict channels” (6). She represents both the colonizer and the ‘post-colonial’ forces of *bétonisation* and assimilation that perpetuate the suppression of the ‘marvellous’ traditions of the people.

Chamoiseau’s play thus highlights the freezing of the potential inherent in the new socio-political formations that had been achieved – independence for Trinidad (1962) and Guyana (1966); *département* status for Martinique (1946). Chapter One of this thesis examines in more detail the failure to break fully with the repressive legacies of the past. Through an analysis of Harris’s The Secret Ladder, Chamoiseau’s Chronique des sept misères, and Lovelace’s The Wine of Astonishment it traces the impact, from the colonial encounter onwards, of the imposition of various material and discursive structures upon the land and body. The enclosure of the latter within the mould of the atomised sovereign subject is considered in terms of the inimical impact this has on notions of community in the Caribbean, and of the blindness its reifying tendencies produce as regards certain historical and political frameworks. Finally, I explore how this blindness is replicated in particular literary forms, interrogating the inability of the tropes of tragedy and martyrdom to raise consciousness in a world where insidious symbolic domination has replaced more overt oppression.

Chapter Two takes up these themes in relation to language. Beginning with Chamoiseau’s Solibo Magnifique it explores the disappearance due to modernisation of the ‘marvellous’ creole reality of Martinique and the impact of French on the Creole oral tradition. Subsequently, I examine how Lovelace, in The Dragon Can’t Dance, tackles the commodification of cultural practices, such as Carnival, that had previously articulated a resistant posture. The role of the artist as revolutionary is interrogated as the petrification of rebellious positions is

matched by a petrification of political language into empty slogans. The chapter ends with an analysis of The Far Journey of Oudin. Developing themes raised in the other works, Harris's novel unravels conventional literary form as it seeks to undo the consolidation of character and express a diversity of historical legacies.

Chapter Three explores how this re-visionary textual approach is, in Harris's The Four Banks of the River of Space and Chamoiseau's Texaco, moulded into an epic form able to articulate the collective memory of the community. Analysing the alter/native concept of memory put forward by these writers, I consider how they re-ritualise history to uncover a buried, 'marvellous' tradition of cross-cultural reassembly. Integral to this recuperation is the ritualised body and its manifestation of a vision of consciousness, one expressive of an original ontology. In light of the latter, the chapter returns to look again at form, positing a shift from tragedy to Harris's new Divine Comedy or cannibal epic. Finally, I delineate the concomitant transformation of space that occurs, something concretised in the rhizomatic settlement of Texaco.

Chapter Four scrutinises how these ideas play out in material terms, examining the problems that have beset nationalist projects in the Caribbean. I consider what the re-visionary epic form of Lovelace's Salt implies with respect to renewing these projects so as to bring their promise to fruition. In turn, I explore how such renewal is only truly possible in the context of a re-imagined and re-structured world order. Analysing The Infinite Rehearsal, I show how Harris re-narrates post-1945 history on a global scale, pointing the way towards the kind of socio-economic changes that will secure sustainable development for all nations, countering the polarising effects of capitalism. Finally, I sketch the original philosophy of reality that underpins Harris's re-conception of global

relations, a philosophy that entails a relocation of the body in history. Freed from the atomised, reified mould of sovereignty, the body, in terms of the material relations it establishes between individuals and with its environment, becomes the prism through which to conceive the transformative interconnection of peoples and cultures.

Chapter 1. Rooting the Body: Land, Sovereignty, and Sacrifice.

Cast thine eye around thee, and see the thousands of Nature's productions . . . Reader, canst thou not be induced to dedicate few months to the good of the public, and examine with thy scientific eye the productions which the vast and well-stored colony of Demerara presents to thee? . . . Would it be thought impertinent in thee to hazard a conjecture that, with the resources the government of Demerara has, stones might be conveyed from the rock Saba to Stabroek to stem the equinoctial tides, which are forever sweeping away the expensive wooden piles round the mound of the fort! Or would the timber-merchant point at thee in passing by, and call thee a descendant of La Mancha's knight, because thou maintainest that the stones which form the rapids might be removed with little expense, and thus open the navigation to the woodcutter from Stabroek to the great fall . . . In thy dissertation on the Indians, thou mightest hint that possibly they could be induced to help the settlers a little . . .

Charles Waterton, *Wanderings in South America*¹

When Charles Waterton penned this account of his journey in 1812 through the Dutch colony of Demerara (later to become part of British Guiana), he did so in the train of many a European traveller come to explore and document the 'New World' of the Caribbean and South America.² I begin with the above passage, however, for it draws immediate attention to the discursive traits common to such narratives: the "scientific eye" of the cultured outsider at one remove from Nature; the injunction to tame the wilderness and render its resources productive for the "good of the public"; the power of technology to achieve this aim; the imposition of tropes ("La Mancha's knight") to classify the 'adventure' within recognisable European paradigms; the 'inducement' of the indigenous population to labour for the settlers. Such chronicles were inextricable from the colonial project initiated by Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas. In 1492, observes Wayne Franklin, "America was, from the European standpoint, simply an event. But in 1493 it became a collection of words" (xi). Fired by the demands of capital, this linguistic explosion not only reflected but also helped justify the violent expropriation of land and people that lay behind the "collection of words." Waterton's narrative is an exemplary one: his commonsensical attitude towards clearing the river for the timber-merchant's benefit and his suggested

“hint” as regards the Indians serve to efface issues of legitimacy and coercion; in his breezy prose the subjugation of “Nature’s productions” can only be to the advantage of all.

Central to this naturalisation of conquest is the opposition established between Culture and Nature, between the active “scientific” subject and a passive landscape in need of ‘improvement.’ More broadly, the Culture / Nature division was fundamental to the claim made by Europeans to be engaged upon a civilising mission. Around it there arose a series of homologous dichotomies (mind / body; subject / object; words / things; writing / orality; rational / irrational; private / public) structured by the material and social order imposed upon the environment. In turn, these categories shaped the perception of reality. In this chapter, I will examine their production following the conquest and their reinforcement by the plantation system, before turning to the way in which such oppositions, and the social tropes they engendered, continued to hold sway after Emancipation and, later, the end of colonial rule. In the Introduction it was suggested that the period from the 1930s through to the 1950s was one gravid with potential for the Caribbean, culminating in independence for a number of states in the 1960s. However, it was noted too that in some respects this potential subsequently dissipated. Hence, my focus here will be on Chamoiseau’s Chronique des sept misères and Lovelace’s The Wine of Astonishment, both of which are set partly in the tumult of those mid-century decades, and both of which point to the perpetuation of inimical power relations, as well as to the increasing inability of traditional forms of resistance to combat these in their modern guise.

I want to begin, however, with Harris’s The Secret Ladder, for although it

too is set sometime in the mid-twentieth century, the novel's allusive breadth renders its account of surveyor Russell Fenwick's work on the Canje River evocative of a range of periods from Guyanese history. As Fenwick and his multiracial crew make various forays upriver, charting its flow as part of a proposed scheme to construct a reservoir that will irrigate East Indian coastal plantations, they encounter Poseidon, the elderly ruler of the descendants of a tribe of runaway slaves whose land will be flooded if the reservoir is built. Thus, the encroachment of modern technology on the landscape becomes enmeshed in the past of conquistadorial expeditions and slavery, the parallels indicative of the continuities in power struggles over possession of territory. Indeed, the novel has much in common with Palace of the Peacock, the first volume of The Guyana Quartet, with Fenwick an updated version of Harris's archetypal conquistador Donne, who likewise travels upriver with his crew towards an encounter with the folk. The opening of The Secret Ladder stresses the affinities between the surveying project and the exploration and conquest of the 'New World.' Studying the gauges installed to measure the river's height, "staring up curiously as if he saw an introspective ladder of climbing numbers" (357), Fenwick is the embodiment – or rather, disembodiment – of Waterton's "scientific eye." The transformation of the gauge into an "introspective ladder" emphasizes the abstraction of the mind from the fixed object-world of nature that Fenwick is there to record and classify.

The division implied here between nature (homologous with inert matter or the corporeal world) and culture (homologous with scientific progress or 'civility,' as well as the conceptual world) is strengthened by Fenwick's description of his encampment:

He pulled his boat against the bank at last and stepped upon the ground. It had been easy to clear this side of the stelling, where he now stood, of long-john trees, razor grass and moca-moca. On the other side – twenty paces away – the ground was low and swampy, and the jungle kept crawling and returning, stretching its ancient wiry knuckles and long grassy sleeves high up as well as across the black face of the river. (385)

An opposition is clearly established in this passage between the untamed jungle and the ‘civilising’ influence of man, who rationalises the wilderness. The inventory of plant species that have been removed recalls the impulse to name and categorise so beloved of European explorers, while the “twenty paces” points to the quantification of the landscape. In contrast, the threatening encroachment of the jungle is imaged in terms of the body, with the split between mind and flesh – the latter codified as messy and primitive – emphasized by the distinction between the clear, modulated tone of the first two sentences and the sensuous, treacly prose used to describe the vegetation – the cloying insistence of the homophonic endings: “swampy,” “grassy,” “crawling,” “returning,” and “stretching.” In addition, the characterisation of the river as having a “black face” hints at the colonizer’s justificatory conflation of blackness with nature.

The nature / culture dichotomy and its implication in the colonial project stems from the socio-economic and intellectual shifts taking place in contemporary Europe. As noted in the Introduction, the development of colonialism was inseparable from the emergence of the capitalist mode of production from the sixteenth century onwards. Integral to both the material and ideological demands of capital was the expropriation of the worker from the land

and the creation of the ‘freed’ wage-labourer. Not only did this have a direct economic impact; it also precipitated an ontological mutation as a result of what Marx in the Grundrisse describes as the dissolution of the worker’s “relation to the earth – land and soil – as natural condition of production – to which he relates as to his own inorganic body” – indeed, which forms “so to speak, his extended body” (497, 491). The continuity between nature and humanity is therefore severed. In turn, because this separation is inaugurated as a fundamental principle of reality, it naturalises the constitution of the human body as an abstracted presence vis-à-vis the object of the land, increasingly seen as *per se* monopolized land due to capitalist reification.³ Simultaneously, this split is interiorised by the individual, with the physical body (nature) reduced to an inferior (and suppressed) object in opposition to the mind (culture).

Such transformations were bound to concurrent philosophical revolutions: the division not only of mind from body, but also of words from things – the result in part of the emergence of natural history as a scientific discipline. Whereas signs had previously been an indivisible part of the fabric of an entity, contends Foucault, in the “seventeenth century they become modes of representation” (141). The structure imposed by new classificatory schemas enabled a binary relationship to be established between the thing observed and an abstract sign system through which it was assigned meaning. Thus, by virtue of structure,

the great proliferation of beings occupying the surface of the globe is able to enter both into the sequence of a descriptive language and into the field of a mathesis that would also be a general science of order. And this constituent relation, complex as it is, is

established within the apparent simplicity of a *description of the visible*. (Foucault 149)

In this way, reality is fixed within a series of self-sufficient tropes which ‘clarify’ an object in terms of its surface appearance; and it is here that this new relationship between language and the world intersects with the separation of nature from culture as driven by capitalist expropriation. For as reification occurs, land *qua* commodity becomes a self-evident ‘fact’: nature appears necessarily as an object, the power relations that constitute it as such thereby concealed. As Lukács notes, the reification and autonomisation of the economic system under capitalism – with each relation and element of production (including labour power) frozen as an apparently self-sufficient thing – must “embrace every manifestation of the life of society if the preconditions for the complete self-realisation of capitalist production are to be fulfilled” (95). By thus restructuring the inner life, capitalism institutes that harmony Bourdieu describes between the objective conditions of existence and the individual’s disposition, which in turn delimits the commonsense world. In this instance, with reified reality driving a “wedge between the subject of knowledge and ‘man,’” transforming “the knower into a pure and purely formal subject” (Lukács 128), it is the split between self and world (or self and other) that emerges as a given. Once such divisions are inculcated and naturalised, moreover, it becomes increasingly difficult for the individual to penetrate the underlying structures of the real: constituted as a “pure” observer divorced from the object, she or he cannot recognise their contingency with respect to “all human relations,” which assume “the objective forms of the abstract elements of the conceptual systems of natural science and of the abstract substrata of the laws of nature” (Lukács 131).

Therefore, it is due precisely to the type of subjectivity – the type of body and mind – produced by this socio-economic formation that individuals are unable to recognise the dialectical field in which they stand. The history of social interactions that shape specific power relations is occulted; and the more this genus of subject ‘reflects on’ reality, the more deeply is this history buried. For by studying the world from the perspective of the subject / object divide, the individual entrenches this split as the accepted principle of reality; hence, even as the latter is documented, its petrification is intensified and its structuring axes further effaced. Thus, what we are returned to, as the locus of these material and ideological forces, is the sovereign body. Enclosed, atomised, private, divided between consciousness and corporeality – this body is strictly adjusted to the requirements of the modern, capitalist age. Indeed, it is *the* modern body: “isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies,” it supersedes the premodern body, which, “unfinished and open,” is “blended with the world, with animals, with objects” (Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World 29, 26-27). By taming the passions and messy boundaries of its corporeality, the modern subject ‘progresses’ beyond the blurring of nature and culture, characteristic of the mythic world,⁴ towards the ‘civility’ of the rational being, now encoded, as Francis Barker observes, as “an individual, privatised and largely passive ‘consciousness’ systematically detached from [the] world” (36). But Barker also points to the seeming contradiction between capital’s need for free individuals able to actively appropriate the world and its need to manage society. This contradiction is only skin-deep however: the apparent freedom of the bourgeois subject results from bodily regulation, which effaces itself once inculcated to the point where it becomes self-reproducing; under the auspices of the internalised

limit as to what constitutes 'rational' behaviour, the subject becomes self-regulating.

The result, therefore, is the self-sufficient individual possessed of a body from which all traces of the human and socio-economic relations that enable its abstraction and definition have been effaced; its ordered, ordering constitution becomes *the* order for individuality. As such, it is possible now to "narrate the outer world from an inner place, by means of a clarified and transparent instrumental language, and similarly to reflect on others as Other" (Barker 53), with the right either to excise or assimilate this Other in the name of the dominant cultural (and 'cultured') order. Hence, it becomes clear why, as Russell McDougall claims, "the great age of global exploration solidified into Empire at roughly the same time that [the] relocation of the body took place. The age of imperialism 'completed' the body" ("Music in the Body" 11). To conquer the New World 'wilderness' was to achieve the final triumph of culture over nature and the consolidation of the sovereign subject. Fenwick, in that he reflects aspects of the colonizer, plays out this triumph. His gauging and quantification of the landscape – the consumption of nature within scientific frameworks – is an act of possession (it is viewed by Poseidon as equivalent to the appropriation of the land for the reservoir). When Jordan, the cook, tells Fenwick "you been poring over them chart and tide-map [. . .] too hard" (366), he underlines the extent to which this 'framing' dominates the surveyor's perception of the environment. The abstract plan has now become the prism through which the land is first conceived; and although Fenwick knows this approach risks distortion, he appears unable to free himself from its reified prism.

Take, for example, his reaction to the news that Poseidon's followers fear

the reservoir will flood them out. Gesturing to “his tidal graphs and notebooks,” he stresses that the people will be compensated, a desirable outcome in his mind since

‘[t]he land isn’t all that rich up here – in fact it’s a mess – and they wouldn’t want to keep it in face of a scheme that would do untold benefit to the sugar estates and rice-lands of the Courantyne and Berbice coasts’ – he found himself speaking as if he were recounting an obsession and a lesson – ‘which draw their irrigation supplies catch-as-catch-can mostly from an unaided river now. (381)

Fenwick’s obsessively scientific apprehension of the landscape prevents him from understanding the project in any way other than as a necessary form of (economic) progress to be welcomed by all. Moreover, the human ties to the land established by Poseidon’s followers due to their having worked upon it for years are unappreciated by Fenwick. Indeed, these ties contrast with his own abstracted or theoretical stance, something emphasized by the flat, instrumental language he employs (though his sense that he is merely “recounting [. . .] a lesson” suggests a growing awareness of his detached position). Thus, reality is again produced as an object vis-à-vis the rational subject, with the material re-organization of space, in line with what Fenwick calls “the unadorned facts of science, the plain economic structure of society” (396), fixing and framing it beyond human interaction.⁵ The physical relationship to the land inculcated, thus, subsequently generates principles of vision and division, categorising tropes which in turn reinforce the ‘naturalness’ of reality as inert matter to be made productive and assigned meaning by a sovereign individual in command of an

abstract sign system.⁶

Such processes assume greater clarity when we turn to the institution that was to be central to the colonial domination of the land: the plantation. Commenting on the topography of Guyana, Harris notes how colonial engineers, assuming the terrain was flat, organised coastal estates “on Euclidean principles: rectangles and squares” (The Radical Imagination 74). However, in their drive to “lay things out in a commonsense way” (RI 74), they ignored subtle geographical variations that ran counter to the apparent uniformity. Nevertheless, this geometric patterning was useful to the dominant order, despite its topographical crudity. Its very regularity enabled the production of what Deleuze and Guattari call striated space. The latter, enforced by the state, entails a regimented space criss-crossed by “walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures” meant to help control the movement of labour and maintain the stability of the social order (Thousand Plateaus 381). Thus striated, space becomes static and homogenous: divided up into neat parcels and compartments its uniformity is assured. Simultaneously, this same striation – the fragmentation and geometrical reassembly it performs – enables the imposition of a unified symbolic order; it allows space to be grasped as a totality and thereby subsumed into a plan, which subsequently appears as the a priori condition of reality since all now conforms to its abstract principles. As the material world is again sundered from the conceptual, the ‘rational’ order of quantified, scientific space becomes the ‘natural’ order. It is in this way that the plantation is reified as the constitutive principle of the intelligible real, with that outside its plan reduced to meaningless chaos: thus does the New World ‘wilderness’ become a “wasteland,” for “so much of its profusion is ‘wasted’” (Franklin 76)

In The Secret Ladder Jordan's perception of the land occupied by Poseidon's followers is circumscribed by such tropes. Because it lies beyond the organised agricultural structures represented by the coastal estates, the area, Jordan claims, is a "wasteland" that "everybody long since abandon except them" (382). This resistance to the forces of 'progress' is believed to affect the character of Poseidon's people also: they are, says Jordan, a "pack of crude children [. . .]. Savages, too!" (381). These images are part of the *tropological* justification of conquest. As such, they intersect with those the colonizers wove around their exploits, many of which were indebted to medieval chivalric romance. The sovereign European becomes the sovereign knight of the Grail legend, out to restore the 'wasteland' to fertility; the act of settlement, as Franklin observes, becomes a "deed of mythic transformation" that helpfully elides all the "disagreeable violence of his own announced intent" (77, 75). Fenwick alludes to this genre of tropes (which Waterton's "La Mancha's knight" taps into) when he recalls men "who pretended they were attacking an enormous worth-while devil as they chopped and cut their lines through the thickest marabunta jungle. [. . .] How quixotic one was!" (367). The chivalric defeat of the bestial landscape is inextricable from the naturalisation of the plantation as the fulfilment of this making productive. Hence, "plantation *is* creation, not just a human echo of a divine act" (Franklin 80); it becomes the moment of Genesis, the origin into which the epic of the New World – propelled by the colonial 'knight' – is rooted.

This epic is of course of the European kind: it is structured by principles bound to European history and thinking, in particular the notions of sovereignty that attended the birth of both the modern individual and state. Indeed, the

inscription of this epic narrative onto the land is inseparable from what Glissant terms “root identity.” Just as a root (or tree) structures growth from a single central point, so root identity affirms its legitimacy by tracing an origin back through the linear time-span of filiation to a “founding episode” (Poétique de la Relation 158). It is this “retelling (certifying) of a ‘creation of the world’ in a filiation” that allows a community to “proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land, which thus becomes a territory” (PR 59, 158). Rooted in a single origin, filiation requires either the assimilation or annihilation of the other; it hence strives for a homogeneous order inaugurated by an individualising act, that is, by the agency of a sovereign individual (Christ, for example, or, in this instance, the colonial explorer). The result is History in the form of the exclusive narrative of the ‘right’ of an undivided ethnic community to a territory.

Moreover, the genealogical sequence of filiation, which moves upon “the fixed linearity of time [. . .] towards a projection, a project” (Glissant, PR 59), resembles the teleological order of the plan, which, after the fact (that is, as a consequence of the geometric organization of space), structures and justifies the plantation. Filiation therefore combines with the plan to assert a unified symbolic order over reality, recounting a cause-and-effect movement from Genesis (the ‘discovery’ or plantation) to the consecration of the community (the colonial state). History and space, shoehorned into the moulds cast by the colonizer, are thereby demarcated as ‘white,’ with any legitimate claim to the land now contingent on conformity to this principle.

The petrification of reality beneath this trelliswork impacts upon the body also. Just as Fenwick’s reified vision prevents him from recognising the value in the practices of Poseidon’s followers, so the abstract structuration of space seems

to deny bodily practice as a valid means by which to apprehend reality. In fact, such practice and its regulation are central to the creation of the commonsense world via the inculcation of habitus. But it is precisely only the highly regulated practice of the dominant order that is permitted. And because this is so deeply instilled in the motor schemes of the body, its pedagogic past is effaced: “[w]hat is ‘learned by body’ is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished,” writes Bourdieu, “but something that one is” (LP 73). The more fully is practice embodied and ‘forgotten’ in this way, the more is the body denied, for actions and tastes appear only as natural properties requiring no external correction.⁷ Thus, ‘other’ practices are not just suppressed as illegitimate; because the uncultured ‘natural bodily-ness’ of those who perform them is so visible vis-à-vis the ‘natural cultured-ness’ of the dominant bodily mould, they are also consigned to the corporeal, irrational, premodern side of the dichotomies that structure reality. The denigration of particular practices as vulgar or primitive acts to be transcended by progress serves to deny the history they contain and reinforces the negative demarcation of those who perform them. Nowhere was this approach more evident than in the case of slavery, where (as we saw in the Introduction) the ‘excessive’ body movements of the slaves were coded as a sign of wildness to be corrected through the regulative norms of the ‘civilising mission.’ Jordan’s description of Poseidon’s followers as “‘crude children’” and “[s]avages” points to the persistence of the attitudes inculcated by the colonial order. The upshot is that he, like Fenwick, is alienated from those led by Poseidon and the history (of resistance, of independence) they embody, which is his (buried) Guyanese history too.

The behaviour, more generally, of Fenwick and his crew indicates how

lodged in their present personalities are shards that reflect the past of slavery, underlining the entrenchment of its structures. “Every social order,” writes Bourdieu, “systematically takes advantage of the disposition of the body and language to function as depositories of deferred thoughts that can be triggered off at a distance in space and time by the simple effect of re-placing the body in an overall posture which *recalls* the associated thoughts and feelings” (LP 69). On the plantation, such “re-placing” was brutally effected by the strict labour regime. Turning briefly to Chamoiseau’s Chronique des sept misères, we confront the literal disinterment of this buried past. The hero Pipi discovers the location of an entombed jar of treasure and with it the ghost of a slave, Afoukal, who describes how his fellow slaves’ lives are structured by the “rhythm of the steward’s call,” their days spent “bent over the soil” and subject to the “whip or whistle” of the overseer (152-53). The repetition of these practices renders the body suppliant to the dominant order. “Imagine not misery or distress,” explains Afoukal, “but well-trained reflexes for which there was no reason at all to Exist” (152). The deculturation initiated by the enforcement of plantation rituals over the cultural practices retained or newly forged by the slaves was reinforced by the imposition of a symbolic order, predicated on colonial norms, that re-structured their perceptions. The continuing influence of this ingrained legacy is felt in The Secret Ladder through the way relations between Fenwick and his crew mirror those between master and slave. For example, Jordan constantly propounds the idea that Fenwick must be hard on his men; he cannot show “too much real sympathy” (424), but should

‘trip them up like if the net you tangle them in is the biggest joke of all. You got to hide you desperate seriousness, and shelter

behind something or somebody not half as good as you. They may hate you for it but it's all they really and truly understand. [. . .] Let them talk behind your back about you. Let them say you is a scheming devil riding the hell out of me. All that means no harm in the end. It's the sort of game they understand.'

(422-23)

The admonition that Fenwick should govern through dictatorship, abstracted from the ruled via intermediaries, recalls the planter's position as the supreme power (enclosed in his house at the centre of the plantation) who exercises control via overseers and managers. This structure of authority has percolated down to the men and become the only system they recognise. Hence, it is repeated by Fenwick's foreman, Weng, who informs the surveyor that he has modelled his disciplinary style on the latter's own behaviour: "the men say I resemble you in this [. . .] – I can be *hard*, hard as stone" (391). This in turn has fostered a group dynamic based upon the separation and confinement of individuals, the men transformed into isolated bodies unable to forge connections between one another.

That such connections could and should exist as the upshot of Guyana's cross-cultural history is frequently exposed in the novel, only for the legacies of slavery and capitalist reification to reassert themselves. When Weng visits Fenwick, for example, the latter is seized by the impression that he is "regarding himself, not Weng": "In that flash [. . .] Fenwick had seen Weng focused in the reflection of himself, and being drawn out again from within his own (Fenwick's) eye like a rubber twin turning into substantial alien being – Weng, quite distinctly, after all" (389). Here, the unfinished, 'premodern' body described by

Bakhtin, which extends outwards and blurs a sense of self and other, momentarily erupts before its ‘modern,’ sovereign avatar re-imposes itself, leaving Weng and Fenwick “quite distinct[. . .]” again.

That each man has become locked in this alienated, apparently inevitable form of corporeality (Bryant refers to them as “complacent bod[ies]” [395]) is highlighted by Fenwick’s realisation that Jordan is

his shield against importunity, an agent of governance to exercise over the men in lieu of a genuine and profoundly human natural understanding he would have given all he possessed to possess.

[. . .] It was always Jordan’s head – Medusa-like – that inspired in them a certain cynical helplessness, the helplessness of men who could be contained by forces of greed or self-interest or guile. It was a strange fellowship and barren condition. (378-79)

Jordan / Gorgon personifies the reifying effect of the atomised social framework. The “contained” and isolated condition of the men negates an understanding not only of each other, but also of their relationship to the land and of the history it contains. The reference to the “barren” state their petrification induces makes this link to the drought that has taken hold in the area; indeed, the embalmed nature of each man’s ego is reflected in the equally static Canje: “[Jordan] pointed to the river which scarcely appeared to flow in the late afternoon light like a snake whose motion had been reined into graver stillness than ever and embalmed for good” (374). The impenetrability of the stagnant river suggests the crew’s inability to see beyond their own stultifying sovereignty. Harris has stressed the need for dialogue between “one’s psyche, and [. . .] the landscape. There has to be some connection, *some sort of bridge*, which allows one to see all sorts of

relationships which one tends to eclipse, which one tends not to see at all” (qtd. in Gilkes, “The Landscape” 33). No such bridge exists here at present, and so a depth of histories is missed by the crew. They remain pinioned to inimical behavioural patterns, unable to free themselves because blind to such patterns as in fact an arbitrary, inculcated legacy. From the standpoint of sovereign subjectivity, moreover, they will continue to be incapable of revisiting and penetrating the dry integument of History: as noted earlier, this self-sufficient mould, inextricable from the subject / object divide, can only reflect on rather than pierce the reified husk of the same ‘real’ that conditions its existence.

The inability to break this stasis and reintegrate the “buried community” (389) represented by Poseidon is best illustrated when Fenwick first encounters the old man:

There was the faint hoarse sound of an approaching body swimming in the undergrowth. Fenwick adjusted his eyes. He could no longer evade a reality that had always escaped him. The strangest figure he had ever seen had appeared in the opening of the bush, dressed in a flannel vest, flapping ragged fins of trousers on his legs. Fenwick could not help fastening his eyes greedily upon him as if he saw down a bottomless gauge and river of reflection. [. . .] The old man’s hair was white as wool and his cheeks – covered with wild curling rings – looked like an unkempt sheep’s back. [. . .] Poseidon addressed Fenwick at last. His mouth moved and made frames which did not correspond to the words he actually uttered. It was like the tragic lips of an actor [. . .] galvanized into comical association with a foreign dubbing

and tongue which uttered a mechanical version and translation out of accord with the visible features of original expression. (371)

The surveyor continues to exhibit an exclusively ocular apprehension of the world, his abstracted eye “greedily” consuming and scientifically gauging all within its purview. The emergence of Poseidon from the jungle, however, is the emergence of a distinctly bodily presence, one that overwhelms Fenwick, leaving him “disturbed to the greatest depth” (373) by his incapacity to adequately categorise the old man. The very name Poseidon (the Greek sea-god) indicates a resistance to being fixed (he is both ‘Greek’ and ‘African’), while pointing also to the fluidity of his movements (emphasized by his “body swimming” through the bush). This fluidity and the – to Fenwick’s eyes – ‘wildness’ of his appearance evokes the movements of the slaves – their gestures, dances, and rituals – and so the history contained therein. Moreover, Poseidon’s body exceeds the bounds of the sovereign human subject to merge with the animal and plant worlds. His appearance thus signals another eruption of that ‘premodern’ or ‘mythic’ body, which extends outwards and refuses to be contained by a sovereign carapace. But it is this that renders Poseidon “out of accord”: his lips do not correspond to the words he utters because his habitus is, as Bourdieu would put it, “out of phase” (LP 62) with the commonsense world imposed by the dominant order and embodied in Fenwick. The latter, his perception limited by the framework of self-sufficient subjecthood, requires that the “visible features of original expression” –the corporeal, ‘premodern’ element of Poseidon’s speech – be translated into the clarified, clarifying word of an abstract sign system. However, this “mechanical version” cannot articulate the fullness of the old man’s expression, becoming a distorted and, to the surveyor,

unintelligible form of communication.

Fenwick, therefore, remains split off from a past that is an integral facet of his own identity, as well as that of the crew's and of the Caribbean's. He must move beyond the myopia of 'modern,' sovereign subjectivity and reattach his scientific eye not only to the body of the past but also, as is underlined by the corporeal presence of Poseidon, to the body itself, its history and the social relations made tangible within it. However, it is necessary to stress that this is not simply a case of reconciling the two sides of the 'premodern' / 'modern' dichotomy, nor of suggesting that Fenwick must return to the 'nature' that Poseidon supposedly represents, nor of showing how the latter *really is* 'cultured.' Again, these dichotomies are themselves the problem: they are what demarcate Poseidon as 'purely natural' vis-à-vis the 'cultural,' for example. Consequently, the reintegration of legacies must entail rather the dismantling of such binaries, with the forces each side contains brought into a more complex interaction. Thus, that which Poseidon should embody is the potential, when his history is recognised, for the dissolution and dialogic entanglement of worlds. Yet he too has not fulfilled this promise; and, as the frozen consciousnesses of the crew attest, an architectural or 'marvellous' form of reintegration has yet to materialise.

Modernisation, Rationalisation, and the Marvellous Real

O! plantation wither,
factory close down,
brothers of de country
raisin' Cain in town.

Mervyn Morris, *For Consciousness*

While The Secret Ladder does finish by pointing towards the dissolution of the static framework of reality, I want to focus on why this transformation has

hitherto been thwarted. Not only are the crew blind to the alter/native history that would free them from the invidious behavioural patterns they trace; also, the promise inherent in the autonomy Poseidon achieves on the land has not served as the forerunner of greater change. As Fenwick muses, “in this creature Poseidon, the black man with the European name, drawn out of the depths of time, is the emotional dynamic of liberation that happened a century and a quarter ago [. . .]. Something went tragically wrong then. Something was misunderstood and frustrated” (385). The frustration of community is down in part to the overlap we have noted between the slave body and the ‘free’ sovereign body of the worker: emancipation often resulted merely in the chains of slavery being replaced by the invisible fetters of the market. This continuity in power relations can be conceptualised in terms of Harris’s notion of block function, the uniform identity or mode of operation that a person may become trapped within as a result of their position in the social structure. The slaves *en masse* were subsumed into the block function of chattel, while the individual worker under capitalism, due to the rationalisation of the labour process via its atomisation and specialisation, is frozen as “a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system” to whose laws he or she “has to conform” (Lukács 89).

Such is the case with Fenwick’s crew, locked within their partial yet absolute allotted roles (surveyor, foreman, boatman, cook and so on).⁸ Although encasing people in block functions creates an apparently stable society, its members delimited by sharply defined, hierarchical moulds, the repression this entails frequently causes reactionary violence to erupt. The tension and conflict between the men in Harris’s novel not only reflects this block mentality, but also symbolises Guyana’s fate in the 1960s as a ‘block society.’ Published in 1963,

The Secret Ladder appeared as the country was toppling into the racial-political violence between Afro- and Indo-Guyanese factions that would engender a prolonged national crisis.⁹ The seeds of this disaster are there in the splintering of Fenwick's multiracial crew and their failure to forge a community predicated on the "stamp of a multiple tradition" Poseidon represents (411).

Since this block mentality (inextricable from the absolutism of root identity) equates stability with homogeneity, its complicity in what goes "tragically wrong," as Fenwick puts it, is clear. Incompatible with the heterogeneous nature of modern Guyanese (indeed, Caribbean) society, it was also inimical to the potential present at Emancipation, a potential harboured in a legacy, derived from the period of slavery, that was necessarily creolised and marked by multiplicity. As indicated in the Introduction, the total control desired by the plantation regime always ran up against the alter/native history embodied in the slaves' rituals, songs, dances, and crafts; yet these were defined by the grafting together of imposed colonial codes with cultural traces retained over the Middle Passage. As Chamoiseau observes, the repetition of certain chants and gestures by the Quimboiseur on the Martinican plantation keeps alive the memory of Africa in the slave; but with no autonomous cultural framework to rely on the healer must also invent memories, combining the knowledge he has preserved with details derived from the new environment. He "draws analogies between the plants from here and those from the lost Territory, between the gods from here and the gods from there. He superimposes the landscapes" (Écrire en pays dominé 175). Similarly, the drums used by the planter to regulate the slaves' work-rate nevertheless convey, suggests Chamoiseau, a "symbolic African presence" that resuscitates in the movement of the slaves their "broken"

memories (EPD 171). The posture instilled by the dominant order thus becomes multiply inscribed, transformed into a “polyrhythmic gesture [that] carries the voice stripped of speech” (EPD 170).

It is the promise heralded by this ‘marvellous’ reassembly of cultures, and of everyday, lived practice with the sacred, that is suffocated by static block identity. Before turning to the responsibility borne by colonial / ‘post-colonial’ forces for such suffocation, however, I want first to broach the issue of resistance. The problems identified in The Secret Ladder are not all on the side of Fenwick and his men; Poseidon too has become locked in a block function that intensifies the difficulties of reintegrating the history he embodies. That “multiple tradition” is lost even to him as he and his tribe “become fixed physically on their barren land and psychologically in their condition of victim” (Maes-Jelinek 41). Like the crew, Poseidon is unable to move beyond his static position towards the complexity of society and a more productively engaged stance. As Fenwick muses, he owes “allegiance” to the old man because of the history he has both suffered and kept alive in memory, but ““surely this does not mean I must reduce myself to his trapped condition, become even less human than he, a mere symbol and nothing more, in order to worship him!”” (396). Poseidon has ensconced himself in the purity of his victimhood, resulting in the denial of the ‘marvellous’ real both as an entanglement of influences and as an active *practice* of culture. Consequently, he fails to bring this history into the present as part of a new, lived modernity.¹⁰ Stuck within the ‘premodern’ mould forced upon him, he does not integrate his traditions into the contemporary situation – a failure of leadership that parallels Fenwick’s abdication of responsibility via dictatorial intermediaries. If the surveyor is blinded by his

fixation on a scientific apprehension of reality, then it is Poseidon's refusal to countenance this worldview in combination with his own that entraps and blinkers him.

That said, the underlying reason for the loss of potential nonetheless inherent in Poseidon's obsession with the land remains the perpetuation of colonially-inspired spatial / socio-economic structures. Earlier we saw how the striated space imposed by the colonizer codified the land as 'white' in relation to a European root identity. It hence intensified the alienation of the slaves from the landscape "[E]very community lives a space-time that is *more or less* socially mediated," argues Glissant, "and [. . .] this relationship structures the behaviour of each member of the community 'through' episodes of individual history and physiological determinants" (DA 145). Collective control over material factors and, subsequently, over the principles of the construction of social reality (division of labour, kinship patterns, property rights) enables a community to constitute itself in relation to its surroundings, a process Glissant refers to as "structuration" (DA 146). When structuration is imposed from without upon a community lacking control over its environment, as happened to the slaves on the plantation, a traumatic disjunction is created between the wants of the people and the institutions that define social reality. To overcome this, a connection must be established to the milieu so as to forge a mediated space-time relationship coincident with the people; only then can identity be inscribed fully within a particular place. Poseidon attempts to craft such a connection, just as the new black peasantry did after Emancipation. Across the Caribbean, however, control over the land remained largely in the hands of the colonial power: the old system retained its dominance – albeit in transfigured guise – as plantations were

amalgamated and production rationalized to ensure greater efficiency and lower costs.¹¹ As Walter Rodney has shown in relation to Guyana, this system sought to stifle the peasantry, forcing labourers back to the estates or into the factories. The importation of Indian indentured workers was used to create “a labour surplus which made unemployment and underemployment endemic” and left people dependent on the dominant socio-economic order (Rodney 59). Such control was reinforced by the policy of land division vis-à-vis the racial groups. The system, notes Rodney, “found it advisable to accommodate some Indian demands for land [. . .] at the expense of Creole Africans” (182). The planter class thereby cultivated a racial conflict between Afro- and Indo-Guyanese that helped obscure the underlying socio-economic exploitation. The potential for (class-based) community was hence distorted.¹² Root identity in the form of the sovereignty of race was perpetuated as the principle through which to inscribe oneself onto the land, making discord inevitable in a heterogeneous nation.

The Secret Ladder highlights the persistence of these tensions via the struggle over the land farmed by Poseidon’s followers, who associate the threat they face with the perceived machinations of the Indo-Guyanese. As Jordan explains to Fenwick, ““they believe because they *black* you want to punish them, and the crafty East Indian man on the Courantyne savannah going get what they lose”” (382). However, it is in The Wine and Chronique that we witness the full extent of the impact had by the perpetuation of a particular form of space-time structuration, although here in relation to the modernised town or cityscape. With the rationalisation of the plantation system, and so low wages and fewer jobs in rural regions, came increased migration to urban areas. Due to investment from the colonial centre these areas had become increasingly prosperous; and by

the mid-twentieth century the pattern of urbanisation and industrial development was well established.¹³ Though set in the village of Bonasse, The Wine's account of how modernisation affects the community reveals in microcosm the changes in Trinidad society in the post-war period.

Like Poseidon, the villagers have maintained an alter/native history to the one enforced by colonialism; unlike him, however, they have preserved its fluidity and 'marvellous' character. Their rituals and practices, which still vie with official codes and structures, retain that polyrhythmic complexion able to reinscribe imposed frameworks into an expression of lived experience. The stickfight ritual, for example, replays in symbolic form the violence of the plantation system; yet at the same time the ceremonial dances and gestures of the stickfighter transform such violence into a proclamation of communal identity. Thus, when the village champion Bolo enters the ring, performing "the dance, the adventure, the ceremony to show off the beauty of the warrior," it is as if he is "offering himself up with his quick speed and rhythm, as if what he really want was for people to see in him a beauty that wasn't his alone, was theirs, ours, to let us know that we [. . .] was people too" (21-22). Similarly, the Spiritual Baptist church demonstrates how colonial institutions can be transfigured into structures capable of articulating the values of the people.

The Spiritual Baptists were a revivalist Christian sect born from "a cultural transaction between the African inheritance of the slaves and the new religion acquired in the new world" (Juneja 90). In 1917 the sect was banned: its manner of worship, which included "handclapping, dancing, stamping and loud singing of hymns all leading to possession by the spirit" (Juneja 90), was considered to violate norms of respectability; the colonial authorities desired that

such people should attend more conventional (and less subversive) Anglican or Roman Catholic ceremonies. But as Eva, The Wine's narrator, explains, the Spiritual Baptist church offers to the people a sense of self that the Catholic Church cannot. Unlike the latter, says Eva, where one must "kneel down in front of white saints," the Baptists' church has no "white priests or latin [sic] ceremonies. But is our own. Black people own it. Government ain't spent one cent helping us to build it" (32). This feeling of ownership emphasizes how the people have taken control of their material reality, initiating a structuration process that leads to a coincidence between their experience and the surroundings. They have transformed the imposed institution and made it practicable in relation to their condition, manifesting a lived modernity that contrasts with Poseidon's static 'purity.' Such structuration has in turn produced a genuine sense of community, reflected in the 'we' of Eva's narration. Unlike the isolated, reified individuals of The Secret Ladder, the Bonasse villagers embody a connectivity, out of which emerges the distinct yet – because intertwined with all – omnipresent voice of Eva.

The affinity between the rituals of the church and the material reality of the community is underlined by the description of the Baptists' worship:

The rain was falling and the church was leaking and the brethren was humming deep in soft rhythm to Bee preaching, and all of us was moving and the church was a sea and we was the boats rocking sweet [. . .]. And in between the humming and the jumping, Sister Lucas [. . .] get up trembling, walk to them and she balance on one leg and she step off in that sweet, graceful, noble walk that black women alone have from generations of

carrying on their head buckets of water and baskets of cocoa, and she go to the Centre Post [. . .]. (61-62)

Aside from the equality of power relations within this ceremony (all can be touched by the Spirit and may dance around the Centre Post), the physicality of the Baptists' worship is made clear. The rhythmic movement of the body is again associated with the opportunity for full expression. Indeed, the ritual allows for both the release and transformation of the memories carried by the body. Sister Lucas enacts the toil women have been forced to undertake historically, yet turns it into something "sweet, graceful, noble." The reference to the "sea" and to the congregation as "boats" could, if read solely in terms of victimhood, allude to the Middle Passage; here, however, it serves rather to stress the fluid, non-hierarchical relationship between the worshippers. The smooth, rolling cadences of the narrative – its undulating syntactical patterns ("was falling . . . was leaking . . . was humming") – further emphasize this fluidity, the tripping metre ("and she balance . . . and she step . . . and she go") suggesting the graceful steps of Sister Lucas. As she participates in the ritual, then, Eva's account affirms the bond between the movement of the people, their language, and their multiply inscribed history. Moreover, her incantation-like style foregrounds orality as an integral facet of this culture. Indeed, the entire text is an oral tapestry woven by Eva from her own testimony and the stories told to her; its patchwork quality reflects the polyrhythmic dynamism and interconnection between members of the community that the authorities would limit within regimented, static frames.

However, in responding to the ban placed on their church the Baptists display an ambivalence that contradicts the apparent strength of their collective

identity. Their uncertainty when confronted by the authorities points to the power still exerted by the colonial legacy. Often their only response is inaction or compromise: the men fail to help Bolo when he is beaten by the police, for instance, and Eva's husband Bee hesitates so long over his stated aim to break the ban he "make a fool of himself" (51). In part, such behaviour has its roots in the equally ambivalent nature of their religion. While its combination of African and European religious practice is now representative of their history, the residue of Christian doctrine continues, in some respects, to have the same pernicious impact it did when used by the colonizers to enforce control. This is especially the case with the notion of suffering as a prelude to future release. When Eva asserts that the community has been made to suffer by God because the "strong suffer most" and "we could bear it" (2), her beliefs appear to encourage only acquiescence to the constraints imposed by the dominant order. In addition, there persists an inculcated reliance on the 'mother-country' that blunts any reply to repression. "'We will have to talk to the authorities,'" claims Brother Oswald as regards the ban. "'Let them know that we is British citizens too. [. . .] We have to get a man they will listen to, a man who they respect and who could talk for us'" (38). By seeking to assert themselves via the same framework that denies them autonomy, the people circumscribe the power of their own cultural expression.

Nevertheless, by the middle years of the twentieth century the social changes spawned by modernisation appear to have made it easier to pursue the struggle for legitimacy. In Ivan Morton, the educated schoolmaster newly elected to the Legislative Council, Brother Oswald even has his man the authorities "will listen to." Morton's ascent (and, more generally, a growing

political awareness in the village) is tied to the opportunities that have arisen as a result of the development of the island:

The government had some people from England making a report to give teachers and civil servants more pay, and a lot of Americans was coming in to put up industries in the island with a tax holiday.

New schools was building, giving children more places in high school, and we was hearing that soon there would be free secondary education on the whole island. (6)

But modernisation is a double-edged sword. More education, for instance, entails also a more comprehensive indoctrination into colonial ideology, for it is the 'civilised' values of the white world that are instilled in opposition to the 'wildness' of the black. The result is the alienation of a younger generation from the knowledge and practices of their community, neatly symbolised by the anecdote Bee tells about Crosby and his son:

'The boy come home for a few days holiday, see some crabs Crosby have in a barrel. This is the son: "Dad, what are those thangs there?" Talking like Englishman. Crosby ain't tell him nothing. When he poke his finger in the barrel and the crab catch hold of him, he bawl: "Pa! The crab! The crab!" A well educated boy, yes. Lawyer, economist or something.' (14)

The split consciousness imbued in Crosby's son via his education underlines how the 'premodern' / 'modern' dichotomy imposed by colonialism has been reinforced by modernisation. Nowhere is this more clear than with Morton, for whom to be modern is to be white; thus, the new society he will represent cannot

include what to his mind is the premodern barbarism of the Baptists. Indeed, he tells Bee that “he not against the principle of the freedom of worship but what worrying him is that I, we should still be in the dark ages in these modern times when we could settle down and be civilize” (13). The repetition of these colonial tropes again results in the suppression of the ‘marvellous’ history of the community; in its place is installed a static modernity, which, divorced from the practices of the people, denies the productive and inclusive lived modernity forged by the Baptists.

The persistence of this exclusionary discourse is bound to the continuation of a structuration process designed to enforce the official order. Not content with publicly vilifying the Baptists as “uncivilized and barbarous” (33), the authorities physically marginalize them too. As Eva explains:

They claim that we sing too loud, we disturbing the peace. They send six police with a paper to make us move the church from off the main street. We build a new church. They decide that it ain’t build strong enough; they make us break it down. (34)

Eventually, they re-establish the church on “the edge of the village, high up on a steep hill, far up in a wilderness place” (34). In an echo of the plantation / jungle divide, the town constitutes itself as a site of restrained, cultivated order, banishing all that is ‘wild’ and excessively corporeal into the wilderness. Subsequently, it aims to tame this ‘primitiveness’ (though it is now not the colonial ‘knight’ but the new strata of black officials who are charged with doing so) by regulating the body, forcing the Baptists to worship in a “dead way, without bellringing or handclapping or shouting” (17). Such spatio-social control is paralleled by the way Morton proclaims his status as a councillor. Leaving his

family home, he moves into the former house of the white estate owner, an old mansion “that stand up on top of Bonasse hill looking over the sea and the whole village. A tall, white building with stain glass windows, it was big, bigger than any house in Bonasse” (8). Thus, Morton inserts himself into the same spatial matrix that concretised the power of the colonial master, who, resident in the central dwelling on the plantation, became an all-seeing overlord. Using the inculcated perception of the mansion as synonymous with authority, Morton reinforces his symbolic capital; by ensconcing himself in a ‘white’ space, he feeds off the ‘legitimacy’ of the root identity it inscribes onto the land.

I will return to Morton in more detail later. For now I wish only to stress how ‘modern’ perceptions – traditional practice as barbarous; the civility of the mimetic elite – gnaw away at the villagers’ sense of self. Thus intensified is the disjunction between a “lived experience through which the community instinctively challenges the imposed unity of History and an official mode of thought through which it passively consents in the ideology ‘represented’ by its elite” (Glissant, DA 275). The tensions thereby created are captured in the Baptists’ desire to assert themselves yet impotency when called upon to break the law or challenge Morton over his broken promise to have the ban lifted (““You have to give him time”” is Eva’s desperate refrain [3]). Moreover, as the colonially-inspired, socio-political framework of the elite becomes ever more entrenched, the Baptists confront an increasingly acute structural inarticulacy that threatens their cultural life with extinction. It is this same danger that Chronique examines: the expiration (the title of part two of the novel) of a community under the weight of a modernisation process dictated by the colonial past and its present incarnation. In Chamoiseau’s text, the focus is on a group of djobeurs, market

porters in Fort-de-France who transport goods by wheelbarrow; and the danger is more insidious due to the psychological and economic contortions fostered by French colonial assimilationist policy and the poisoned chalice of departmentalisation.

The novel opens by briefly recounting the *djobeurs*' emergence. At first they merely give "a helping hand" to overloaded vendors; later, their services are paid for each day by the marketer:

Soon this developed into a know-how whose rules were passed along. How could we know who are forefathers were? They had certainly – like many others who were doubtless less talented – left the mud of the plantations in order to confront life on the pavements of the city, less likely to cause them to skid. In their wandering in exile, they had to have taken the habit of passing the time in places full of life and of the reassuring presence of their native countryside. (15-16)

Not only are the *djobeurs* the result of that historical drift towards the cities, therefore, but also – like the Baptists – they preserve a link to the alter/native history their ancestors forged on the plantation. Indeed, the means of survival invented here (such as the slave gardens, which often became the basis for peasant agriculture) have been woven into the life of the city.¹⁴ Adapted to the urban milieu, these rural techniques enable working-class blacks to make a living in the interstices of the economy: the market women, for example, "connect the factories, warehouses, countryside and seacoasts to the centre of the city" (51), while the *djobeurs* mediate between vendors and consumers. Though it is a precarious existence – as the *djobeurs* admit, with only a "wheelbarrow and our

skill with them, we farmed nothing, fished nothing, brought nothing to market” (15) – such practice, by nurturing a connection between their lived experience and material reality, allows them to assert a history and so a collective identity. In fact, the narrative voice of the text is the ‘*nous*’ of the *djobeurs*: like Eva’s ‘we,’ this not only stresses the bond between them, but also points to the way in which their articulation of identity emerges in relation to the communal practice of the group and not – as in Western thought – the individualised consciousness of the sovereign subject who “opposes the *Nous* [the group] in order to refashion it and to give it a new dynamism” (Glissant, *DA* 265).

The lineaments of this collective identity are most clearly elucidated through the tool that mediates the *djobeurs*’ connection to reality: the wheelbarrow. In a way that the slave alienated from the instruments of labour could not, the *djobeur*, via his skill with the barrow, can bring his body into a coincident and controlled relationship with the environment. Cultural knowledge is materialised in this craft, which becomes the focal point for other cultural rituals. An oral tradition of songs and work cries surrounds the *djobeurs*’ art, which is passed on through “little hand signals, winks, silences and rare words” (86). Significantly, the construction of the barrow is explained in a poetic interlude that emphasizes the sense of identity this craft endows: “You had to be born with it truly feeling the quiet possession that increasing density of self [. . .] / With *djobs* come / the modelling of the fingers / the patina of the handles / and / the birth of the shoulder muscles” (87). Here the body is moulded by the *djobeurs*’ own practice, the history it preserves given a coincident articulation in the oral tradition; yet crucially all this is done in relation to, and in the interstices of, the dominant (neo)colonial hierarchy, which still shapes the city’s socio-

economic landscape. Thus, as Michael Dash observes, the barrow can be seen as an expression of the “liminal space that [the djobeurs] inhabit, since it both draws on the symbolic hegemonic order they live in and reveals their capacity for improvisation, or bricolage” (140). It is emblematic not only of the Creole language, therefore, but also of that creolised history which emerged beneath History as a ‘marvellous’ architecture of influences.

This ‘marvellous’ reality appears relatively healthy in the early part of the text. Indeed, during the war years, when the Allied naval blockade isolates the island, the history contained in folktales, rituals, and a traditional knowledge of the cultivation of food is very much alive:

[F]amine had lead to the return of forgotten vegetables and vanished fruits, and before boats from France arrived to re-provision the island, the market women reigned like queens. They were so numerous you had to jump over one basket after another to move around in the market. [. . .] *Oh those were the days!* The city council had laid things out with a compass: meat, fish, vegetables were sold separately, under roofs, between partitions and on worktops. The djobs did not stop. (75)

Even amongst all this vitality, however, the seeds of its future suppression have been sown. The decision of the council to lay “things out with a compass” points to the rationalisation of the market space and of the culture that surrounds it. The return of imported produce from France will only intensify this trend, resulting in the extinction of traditional practice and of the potential for autonomous production. However, such rationalisation is not a new phenomenon; rather, it is the fulfilment of the order upon which the city was founded. Structured in

accordance with the same spatial and economic principles that defined the plantation, the cityscape remains tied to a striated framework that transforms the regimented physical order into merely the realisation of an abstracted conceptual order. Adjusted – materially – to the external demands of the colonial power and – symbolically – to whiteness as legitimate identity, this order is in turn construed as the a priori condition of reality.

I will explore fully the issue of city space when discussing Texaco in Chapter Three. Here I wish only to stress how, in Chronique, there appears no escape from the modernisation process as a reification of reality in relation to French norms. The djobeurs' ability to reinscribe the ordered cityscape is progressively eroded as the tragedy of expiration unfolds. Even when Pipi asserts a more concrete link to the land by cultivating it himself, his efforts are thwarted by the council. The “miracle garden” he creates in the forest supplies native fruits and vegetables to local vendors at prices so reasonable the supermarkets, with their made-in-France produce, cannot compete (199). Pipi's success, in which improvised tools made from margarine tins and mirrors help maintain a “delirium of plants apparently as free as a jungle,” alerts the authorities (198). Heralded as proof that independence is possible, this autonomous productivity earns Pipi a visit from the mayor, Césaire, who promises to “personally support any large scale enterprise employing your methods” (201). But when Pipi's methods are “industrialised” (another instance of the “jungle” as something to be tamed by ‘civilised’ progress), it spells the beginning of the end (202).

A slew of “black botanists and agronomic engineers” are sent to study Pipi's gardening techniques:

The learned blackmen asked him for his formulae, for his statistics regarding the physiological stages of maturity of the primary tubers [. . .]. In formidable French, they spoke to him of Convolvulaceae, of Dioscorea, of *Xanthosoma saggitaeifolium*. When they saw he was incapable of theorising his practices, they overwhelmed him with documents. (202)

The insistence of the “learned blackmen” on statistics and scientific reasoning proves incomprehensible to Pipi (and the reader). Their French speech and world of written theory not only confounds Pipi’s linguistic skills, but is also at odds with the ethos of the garden. Informed by the oral knowledge of the Rastas but eschewing their belief in the purity of nature, Pipi’s horticultural practice represents a materializing of that ‘marvellous’ creole culture with its improvisational capacity, non-linearity, and ability to combine diverse influences. Indeed, in contrast to how it is regarded by some of its champions, the garden is not a Négritude-like expression of an essential nature: Pipi in fact ‘engineers’ his crops (albeit in a non-industrial manner) by sowing them “on dates chosen so as to obtain plants completely out of phase with their natural cycle” (197).

However, this science is also not a ‘modern’ technique that (echoing the divide between Fenwick’s worldview and Poseidon’s) must exclude the ‘premodern’; rather, it is a practical science developed in combination with traditional knowledge and a feel for the garden born from Pipi’s bodily experience within it. Thus, when forced to reduce this practice to the theoretical moulds of the scientists – to view it through abstract “principles of agronomy” (202) – Pipi distorts his methods and can no longer comprehend them himself. His confidence shattered and the ‘rational’ logic of the learned men in the

ascendancy, the garden goes awry. Eventually, the technical solutions imported by the scientists – fertilisers, pesticides, and an electronic watering system, which are unsustainable in the forest – devastate the garden: its trees are left “as sterile as male papayas”; its plants are “turned black” (203).

The fate of Pipi’s garden is a potent symbol of the Martinican experience. Its destruction via the imposition of metropolitan concepts and an abstracted ‘rational’ order is mirrored in the market. Old forms of subsistence disappear under the weight of the “new city sanitation department,” the crushing of the once vibrant reality symbolised by the way the “old city” is “dissolved under asphalt” (118). As increasing amounts of French produce arrives to fill new supermarkets, many of the vendors desert their stalls for “house-keeping jobs in office buildings or immense villas” (134). The island moves towards that stage of economic development Glissant has labelled “exchange”: it is thrust into a “passive consumerism” whereby imported “finished products” are “exchanged ‘directly’ for services” (DA 104). Local production is marginalized at the expense of the tertiary sector, which, overindulged by French subsidies, becomes hypertrophied. Though this bloated superstructure provides new jobs, it divorces individuals from Martinican reality, entrapping them within postures tied, economically, to the French economy and, symbolically, to the ideal of French citizenship. The result, contends Glissant, is “on the collective plane, artificial social strata whose dynamic is neutralised *from the exterior* and the systematisation of hollow representation: a non-functional elitism; on the individual plane, the development of dependent mentalities” (DA 105). In this “exchange” society, the *djobeurs* become irrelevant: “victims of an invisible eraser, we seemed quite simply to be fading from life” (216); and with them

fades the other reality they embodied and the potential it contained for the articulation of a collective identity coincident with the Martinican landscape.

Tragic Fates: The Rebel, the Politician, and the Community

As the reified constitution of reality – its “artificial” and externally orientated form – increasingly renders the wants of the people structurally inexpressible – indeed imperceptible even to themselves – the question arises: how can one resist? How can one break through these frozen structures to an articulatory compatible with the history of the community? And how can the institutions that would sustain this be fashioned? Already we have seen one type of response, exemplified in the reaction to Pipi’s garden and the faith placed in Ivan Morton. In both cases the appeal for autonomy or for the right to cultural expression is articulated through an elite figure or group supposedly able to use the imposed structures for the benefit of the people. As regards Pipi’s garden, this entails its co-option by Césaire and the council as the answer to the quest for autonomous production and independence. But the attempt to realise this promise involves an approach that can only foster dependence: both the theoretical model and the industrial techniques applied to the garden reveal the inability of the elite to free itself from imported strategies. The rush to fix the garden as a *symbol* of independence, rather than to engage with the reality of the (bodily) practices that have produced it (which are dismissed as ‘premodern’), is ultimately what transforms it into a symbol of failure instead – a symbol of the disjunction between those in power and the community they ‘represent.’ With Morton, the dynamics (or lack thereof) behind this problem are clearly illustrated.

Morton of course is chosen to represent the villagers of Bonasse as the

man the authorities will listen to since he has “education just as the people in Britain” (84). As we have seen, however, such education breeds alienation and leads Morton to distance himself from the village, both physically – via his move to the old estate house – and emotionally – via his increasing concern to imitate whiteness. ““We can’t be white,”” he informs Bee, ““but we can act white”” (13). Abandoning the village girl Eulalie for a “starched, tall, light-skin lady” (49), he becomes encased in a mimetic trope. Just as the effects he adopts – a jacket and tie – to project this carapace stiffen his movements by forcing him to walk slowly in the heat, so the superficiality of his persona turns his body into a hollow shell “empty of spirit” (Juneja 99). The petrification of Morton’s gestures not only symbolises his alienation, then, but also materialises his suppression of that very history – tied to the polyrhythmic movements of the body – which defines the people he is there to speak for.

The lack of connection to the community on the part of the elite is inextricable from its dismissal of the productive structures linked to the practices of the former. It favours instead the power and prestige associated with the imposed politico-economic system; yet it has no real control over this either. As Fanon observed, the elite “in the colonies is, before independence, a Western bourgeoisie,” which, having adopted “the ways of thinking characteristic of the mother country, [. . .] will realise, with its mouth watering, that it lacks something essential to a bourgeoisie: money” (The Wretched of the Earth 143). As such, it cannot spark radical change and must rely on the colonial structures to maintain its power. Certainly in Trinidad this had proved to be the case: the Crown Colony system provided a Legislative Council for local elites, but ensured that “the decision-making power still remained unilaterally with the Governor”;

thus denied real control, they became concerned only with “their efforts to stand well with the governing officials” (Lewis 205, 199). Hence does Morton become complicit in various government schemes to encourage investment from the USA, yet fail to help his local shopkeeper secure a loan to expand his business. Because the energy of such politicians is directed towards the appearance of power, moreover, there occurs a hypertrophy in the sphere of political discourse to parallel that noted in the economy’s service sector. The elite assiduously projects postures of leadership to mask its impotence – in the words of Ralph Singh in V. S. Naipaul’s The Mimic Men, the colonial politician becomes “a symbol” possessing only “the trappings of power: the motor car marked M, the suits on the hottest days, the attendant white men and women” (229-30). During his election campaign, for example, Morton repeatedly holds up “the fingers of his right hand in a V for victory sign, like Winston Churchill” (84); six months later, he is still making the same sign yet has achieved little of note. Similarly, he impresses the villagers with his oratory. However, such speeches are meaningless; like his body, Morton’s language has become locked in a hollow trope of imitation.

As these political rituals petrify, their transformative potential is lost: the elite ultimately offers not an alternative to the entrenched colonial power relations but a change in their colour code; the dominant class becomes black or brown rather than white. Moreover, race now compounds the problem. As Glissant notes, the colonial powers often promoted the non-white bourgeoisie because its success – an indication of the ‘success’ of the colonizer’s proclaimed civilising mission – helps conceal “the maintenance of the status quo as regards the exploitation of the rural population: that of the agricultural workers” (DA

189). The 'racial victory' of the elite (like the Afro / Indo conflict in Guyana) deflects attention from the need to challenge the socio-economic forces central to the repression of the other classes; it also fosters the belief that 'progress' towards freedom can be achieved via the colonial model. Indeed, since the elite depends upon this model for its power, it can propose no other. Nevertheless, in Trinidad the increasing influence of the brown bourgeoisie in the first half of the twentieth century, coupled to the rise in political consciousness amongst the workers, meant the anti-colonial struggle was linked to an internal class struggle, which helped produce a dynamic between these different strata. Consequently, come independence the potential did exist to shape the country in terms of this autonomous dynamic. In Martinique, however, the 'success' of departmentalisation short-circuited such developments and made it harder to move beyond the non-functionalism of the elite. The absorption of the country into the French model meant that its class system was manipulated and structured externally; consequently, with an internal dialectical linkage between classes lacking, the Martinican nation is prevented from "appearing as the place for the resolution of their conflicts" (Glissant, DA 122). Thus negated is a sense of collective connection to the island's social structure, which in turn retards a consciousness of the overall system.

When the elite social strata does resist, therefore, it cannot do so structurally: its radicalisation, contends Glissant, will be in relation to "choice individuals" (DA 120). Through education or exposure to the realities of decolonisation, these people accede to "a critical but always personalised vision of the ensemble of the system. This strongly individualised (non total) aspect of resistance among the middle 'class' [. . .] will reinforce the tendency for the

adoption of charismatic, popular leaders issued from this class” (DA 120). While Glissant’s arguments refer to Martinique in particular, this individualism has been a common feature of Caribbean politics (Lewis points to its prevalence in Trinidad in the 1940s and 50s, for instance [208]). Equally common has been the tendency for the people to place their faith in such leaders. The community invests in them a desire for change that cannot find expression elsewhere, converting the leader into a messiah sent to save the oppressed. Understandably, the theme of the saviour, of the Christ come to lead his people out of the wilderness, has been a common one in Caribbean literature, with the ‘chosen one’ not always the politician, but appearing too as the militant rebel or the religious leader.¹⁵ These three types (obviously they are not exclusive or exhaustive) are represented in The Wine by, respectively, Morton, Bolo, and Bee – all of whom are compared to Christ in the text.

Staying with the political saviour for now, the hope pinned on Morton is clear: he must, notes Eva, “make the miracle, qualify himself and rise to take up the greater burden to lead his people out of the hands of the Pharaoh” (40). This expectation founders on Morton’s precipitous assimilation. Yet the problem lies too in the way he is made a symbol by the community. In their rush to anoint a new saviour, the people imprison Morton within an absolute trope and so blind themselves to the inadequacies of his behaviour:

[W]hen he pass us in the street, his chin up, scenting another air and his gaze far away as if he wasn’t here in Bonasse, not seeing the people or the place, we nod our heads and smile: we understand. We understand that a boy with all that brain and that great burden on him at such a early age, wouldn’t have time to see

people. (41)

Like their councillor, the people appear to have become stuck in a form of ritual. By transposing their religious ideology into the political sphere, they deify Morton and fall back on the spiritual polarities of good and evil, paradise and inferno. Writing on the political situation in Trinidad, Shiva Naipaul recalls his “sense of shock, when in 1955 or 1956, I saw a group of black women parading with placards that proclaimed Dr. Eric Williams – our future Prime Minister – as the Messiah appointed to lead his people out of bondage. It was my introduction to the idea that the language of religion could be transformed into the language of politics” (15). Compounded by the politicians’ projection of themselves as heroic saviours, this concentration of power in the personality of one man denies responsibility to the masses, or at least makes easy its abdication.¹⁶ Certainly the villagers in Bonasse seem to have become caught in the latter trap: ultimately, realises Eva, Morton’s failure is not his alone for “if we wasn’t standing up on our own as a people, what was he there standing up for?” (136).

This adherence to an exalted leader who will fulfil, as V. S. Naipaul puts it, the “dream of redemption” (“Michael X” 189) perpetuates the ambivalent identification with a master imposed by slavery. The “myth of the ‘Good Massa’ [. . .] lives on in the doctor-politician [and in] the black spiritual ‘shepherd’” (Burton, *Afro-Creole* 260). Though this figure can be empowering, he also aggravates a dependent mindset. On the plantation, the attempted inculcation of colonial norms – visible to all since it took the form of overt domination – sparks the resistant counter-rhythm of the slaves and the diverse memories carried in their bodies. However, once this explicit brutality is replaced by the veiled constraints of the market and civic institutions the

contradictory impulse to resist is short-circuited. With ‘racial redemption’ apparently imminent, the need to dig beneath the colonially-inspired structures that shape the emergence of such saviours is deferred. Moreover, the stasis of this political ritual is self-perpetuating: the reduction of discourse to the sovereign polarities of race, or the simple moral dichotomy of good versus evil, not only distorts complex social issues, but also means that when the all-too-human Messiah inevitably ‘falls,’ the tragedy is absolute. And having lost their saviour upon whom all hopes rested, the people may sink into despair and hence become more susceptible to placing their shattered faith in the promises of the next elite hero to appear.¹⁷

However, it may be that such disappointments encourage the community – as happens eventually with the Baptists – to break this political cycle. Towards the end of The Wine, Eva recognises that in Morton “[i]s not a leader we choose [. . .], but a star, a star to be alone” (136). Bee concurs, asserting that the councillor is “so stupid he don’t even know that unless black people is people he cannot on his own be a man” (136). Final confirmation comes when Morton fails to do anything to help the Estate workers who have struck for more pay and are subsequently beaten and arrested. Hence does the strategy of elite mediation as means to attain cultural legitimacy give way to a more resistant posture. Such resistance is already present in the village, though; it comes in the form of the rebel, Bolo, who attempts to destroy the imposed structures absolutely and to affirm the cultural practices of the people within an oppositional trope. But, as was noted earlier, the rebel is another incarnation of the individual saviour, and as such replicates – albeit in a different way – many of the difficulties that attach to the elite political hero.

Despite their absolute opposition, Bolo and Morton can be viewed as twinned protagonists. Just as Morton's imitation suppresses the very culture he is supposed to represent, so Bolo, in trying to fix and preserve this culture, stifles its unique character. In the stickfight ritual he is the embodiment of the fluidity and movement through which the resistant history of the community is expressed. But his attempt to assert this history as an absolute Other to replace the dominant order (which excludes the possibility of its opening onto an alternative social structure altogether) will only succeed in inverting the current power relations. Thus can his resistance be read in the context of the ambivalent relationship between Carnival and political action in the Caribbean. On the one hand, Carnival historically has been a vessel for transgressive practices that subvert the status quo, turning the distinction between dominant and dominated, sacred and profane, on its head. On the other, this inversion may be only temporary, strengthening the hegemonic order by allowing "the people's frustrations a licensed imaginary outlet" (Burton, Afro-Creole 218). Moreover, it fails to challenge the fundamental framework of this order. By simply cleaving to one side of the Carnival dichotomy, Bolo ensconces himself within a block function – the sovereign rebel – that prevents him from tackling the premises that sustain the oppressor. To free oneself from this polarity – oppressor / oppressed – one must instead seek to "understand who the oppressor is, how he relates to one, who the oppressed are, how the oppressed relate to one" (Harris, "Literacy and the Imagination" 85).

Bolo's stance in part parallels the fixity of Poseidon's resistance, therefore, but perhaps finds a more direct resonance in Harris's own portrayal of this ritual inversion in Carnival. Here Flatfoot Johnny, the "czar of Carnival"

(43), presides over the New Forest Market Square. A one-time revolutionary, he is now an “embalmed Lenin” (43) whose dictatorial attitude has caused the mask of Carnival king he wears to become the “shadow-resemblance” of that of Masters, the plantation king (49). He asserts his suffering in a “violent climax” (48) that not only repeats the brutality he once resisted, but also occasions his own death. A sense of deadlock and cyclical violence hence surrounds his behaviour, the stasis reflected in his physical condition: Johnny has “an awkwardness of pace, so awkward it made him seem old and crippled as he shuffled along” (43). In the same way, Bolo’s movements harden as he assumes his rebellious posture: whereas he once had “that free easy stride, that smooth fluent joyful walk,” now a “stiffness come over him” (27). Again, this “stiffness” not only symbolises the stultification of a revolutionary potential, but signals the material loss of the ritualised gestures that sustain an alter/native worldview. Indeed, by attempting to establish the ‘purity’ of his resistance – to freeze it only as an assertion of traditional “warriorhood in this heathen country far away from Africa” (101) – Bolo denies the diversity of historical legacies that defines the community.

This desire for purity is evident in Bolo’s attitude from early on in the novel. When a ban on Carnival reduces stickfighting to a series of mock battles, he worries that he is becoming “a clown performing for a drink of rum” (25). The calypso singer Clem advises him to remember for whom the ritual is really for, even as he makes a show of it: “What you worrying yourself for? [. . .] When I take up my guitar, I don’t sing for them, I sing for me; and when you dance in the stickfight ring, you dance for you” (25). With Clem, no matter how much he “play the clown, nothing could make him less than himself” (25). Bolo,

however, is less adaptable; and while his refusal to bow to the folklorisation of the stickfight ritual is a necessary one, his refusal also to contemplate how his cultural practices could be made to engage the contemporary situation becomes problematic. In shielding them from the ‘corrupting’ influence of the modern world, he ultimately blunts their power to resist the conditions that foster such folklorisation. Like Poseidon, he does not see the community’s practices as part of a lived modernity, mutating endlessly in relation to everyday events. By contrast, Clem recognises that, with modernisation, things “had to change”: he begins “taking the old music, stickfight tunes, and bongo songs and putting words to them and singing them as calypso” (28). Calypso, by melding the “old music” with new forms, becomes the means to articulate the resistant identity of a community confronted by new social conditions in a way that Bolo’s frozen gestures cannot. Indeed, at the end of the novel, the Spirit lacking in the church during the first Baptist ceremony after the ban is lifted is heard by Eva in the music of a steelband (146).

These new forms of expression, linked to the real relations established by the community to its lived materiality,¹⁸ point to the way in which history must be engaged in order to raise consciousness and craft a collective identity. But the path Bolo pursues would appear not to lead in this direction. His attempt to make the community reflect on itself entails the violent provocation of the people in order to unite them as a collective, first against him and then against the authorities. As Bee puts it: “He choose out himself [. . .] [t]o be the sacrifice. To be the one terrible enough and strong enough and close enough to our heart to drive us to take up our manhood challenge that we turn away from for too long” (122). But this violence only alienates the community without also initiating a

dialectical transcendence towards a revised conception of reality. Bolo's actions gradually become "a kinda joke" (109) before climaxing in tragedy.

By distancing himself from the people as the sacrifice, Bolo performs the role of the sovereign hero who steps outside the group to refashion it; he is the Christ-like figure whose individualising act inaugurates a new line of filiation for the community. His behaviour can be read in relation to traditional narratives of epic myth or tragedy, histories of the people in which "the achievement of collective harmony supposes the ritual sacrifice of the hero" (Glissant, DA 238). In conjunction with the image of the saviour, this form of epic awakening is a persistent theme in Caribbean literature. It is present in Jacques Roumain's seminal novel Gouverneurs de la rosée, for instance. Here its unfolding culminates in a successful resolution. In a village plagued by drought and conflict, Manuel (Emmanuel) assumes a quasi-divine mission to seek out a new source of water and restore peace to the community. Having found a fresh spring and attempted to bring rival factions together over its use, he is beaten by "the Judas" Gervilen (95). On his deathbed, Manuel asserts that reciprocal violence will only end and "life begin[. . .] again" with the "sacrifice of the man [. . .], the blood of the blackman" (164). And so it proves, for his martyrdom augurs the rejuvenation of the community.

In that sacrifice is thought to resolve social violence, its appeal to a people fractured by colonialism is plain, as is its connection to ritual practices such as Carnival, which manifest the symbolic transmutation of this violence into an assertion of survival and of an autonomous cultural formation. The notion of the sacrificial victim, therefore, is more than simply a popular trope of resistance; it can be integral to the attainment of collective expression. In La violence et le

sacré René Girard argues that the social order is in fact founded on this ritualistic death. Should reciprocal violence take hold of a people, it will spread throughout the community with disastrous effect; the sacrifice “seeks to control and to channel in a ‘good’ direction the spontaneous displacements and substitutions that are thus set in motion” (Girard 24). These “displacements and substitutions” are the result of the tragic symmetry that grips those involved in such violence. For Girard it is not the difference between individuals that perpetuates their feud but its effacement, which disrupts the stability imposed by the demarcations of the social order and enables the constant reversals in position that lock people into a cycle of vengeance. However, it is precisely this symmetry that will also allow for the resolution of the crisis, since once a unanimity of violence exists society can recompose itself around the belief that one among them is alone responsible (Girard 121). The death of this “scapegoat” provides a conduit for hatred that breaks reciprocity; hence, in subsequent sacrificial rituals it is this death that is re-enacted in order to affirm the social order. Just as the scapegoat is transformed into the cause of disorder, so his or her exit is mythified as the moment when the community was restored. Such rituals thereby reveal one form of violence, yet conceal the deeper conflict at the core of society, as well as perhaps the iniquities of the social demarcations that enforced the supposed original stability prior to the crisis. As Girard argues, a particular “version of events succeeds in imposing itself; it loses its polemic character to become the truth of myth, the myth itself” (116). The community narrates back to a founding act, establishing a line of filiation down to the root of identity. The sacrifice is hence inextricable from the birth of a people and the articulation of their culture via an epic narrative.¹⁹ Accordingly, the failure of Bolo’s sacrifice would

indicate that this concept, and its corresponding literary trope, is unsuited to the specific conditions that obtain here.

Why this might be so is illuminated if we compare the successful resolution achieved in Roumain's novel with another instance of its failure. Whereas Manuel's death is connected to both the spiritual and actual replenishment of the sterile village, in Andrew Salkey's A Quality of Violence ritual sacrifice as a means to exorcise drought is unable to help the inhabitants of a Jamaican agricultural community. Their religious practice – a mixture of Pocomania and Christianity – is infused with a violence that enacts the tragedy of their condition: the preacher Dada Johnson and his deputy flail themselves to death in a rite intended to prompt the regeneration of the land. No such miracle is achieved, however, nor is there any escape from the deeper personal conflicts that trouble the village. In fact, the sacrificial rituals serve only to conceal an internecine violence, evident in the way Mother Johnson seemingly manipulates the religious fervour in order to “grab power” for herself and “enslave the people of St Thomas” (130). In this context, ritual is reduced to repetitive form; the desire for salvation is “lost and contorted in the rhythm of the violence. Violence ceases to be simply an instrument for effecting change – it becomes a desired end in itself, an expression of the tragic resignation of the people to their fate” (Brannigan 10). Here the rite of sacrifice offers no regenerative vision or reconciliation with a revised social structuration. Indeed, the violence is turned inwards against the community itself, just as Bolo's martyrdom causes the death of an innocent village girl.

The stagnation of this dialectic, its inability to rouse the people to a new vision of reality, is linked to its disconnection from the history of the group and,

by extension, to the inapplicability of the principles upon which it is based, in particular the opposition between (sovereign) individual and community. In Gouverneurs de la rosée the people, although in a precarious position, nevertheless have control over their material reality through the working of the land. The drought may divide the group but the latter exists in relation to its own structuration process and so to its own history. Consequently, when Manuel steps outside it, his sacrifice and the associated replenishment of the soil is able to reunite the people, who, brought to recognise their commonality, once again assert mastery over the land and inscribe upon it a collective identity. In its articulation of a rooted-ness in an originary space-time, Roumain's novel (published in 1944) belongs to a specific phase in Caribbean literature, the key feature of which – the search, as Dash puts it, for “a utopian, prediscursive logos that confers a new intelligibility on the broken, fragmented, fallen world” (79) – becomes increasingly problematic. For many post-1950s novels, confronting a world where overt colonial violence is being superseded by symbolic domination, the reconstitution of such unity in place of an imposed or fractured real is less straightforward.

Though it returns to 1900, Salkey's novel points to the ideological impositions present in the community, which thwart the transcendence that is achieved via similar rituals in Roumain's text. The embedded nature of these colonial norms is such that their oppressive influence goes unrecognised. When the Marshall child asks her father to say prayers in the style of Anancy stories, for instance, Mr. Marshall despairs at her ““treatment of the word of the Lord””: ““Everything you think of have to have some connexion with the fool-fool spider [. . .]. The Lord is no Anancy story. I want you to understand the serious thing

that the Lord is'” (14). This denial of equal importance to African tradition indicates the extent to which the reality of the group denies the ‘marvellous’ character of its own resistant history. In The Wine of course the Baptists have retained their customs, yet suffer increasingly from an ambivalence generated by the exclusionary principles inculcated by the official order. Lacking sufficient control over their environment to displace the colonial legacy, they are unable to perform an autonomous structuration of the real. Thus, when Bolo emerges as the individual to oppose and refashion the group, his fight becomes stuck in the historical narrative imposed by colonialism, meaning he only replays the tragedy and violence of the latter.

By attempting to consolidate the community as a sovereign entity structured on the inverted axes of that which he opposes, Bolo seeks just to turn the ‘white’ root ‘black’ as it were; he does not challenge the ingrained dichotomies that institute these categories. Aside from not provoking the desired shift in the villagers’ consciousness (in fact, Bolo’s action, like Morton’s status, allows them to abnegate responsibility: “It just give us the chance,” muses Eva, “[. . .] to put aside our human challenge and blame it all on Bolo, [. . .] make him Christ [. . .] [and] pretend that his death solve the problem” [129]), Bolo becomes complicit in the perpetuation of inimical structures and tropes. His resistance is sucked into a space-time structuration bound to the principles of sovereign individuality and filiation; its articulation remains enmeshed in the exclusivity and linearity that marks the colonial epic vision. Interestingly, the narrative too is sucked into this mould. Lovelace presents Bolo’s rebellion in a syntax and structure which replicates that of classical European tragedy, highlighting the inability of a literary form locked into such tropes to offer an alter/native

perspective.

When Bolo first confronts the policeman Prince (the latter has just arrested the Spiritual Baptists for breaking the ban on worship) their encounter assumes a ritual character: “Slow, stiff-leg like one dog inspecting another, Prince walk up to Bolo and look him over from head to toe [. . .]. And Bolo stand up there in the middle of the road, tall, stiff, his mouth half open as the other fighting dog” (67). The situation may bear comparison to the stickfight; yet its description points not to the flowing gestures of the latter, but to a tragic symmetry in which the combatants stiffen into fixed postures. As they oppose one another, their differences are effaced. Just as the warring protagonists in Greek tragedy become interchangeable as their accusations fly back and forth (Girard 106-07), so Bolo and Prince exchange repetitious dialogue:

‘Listen,’ Prince say, and Prince still cool, still calm, still comfortable in his own power, ‘you obstructing the law. If you don’t move . . .’

‘If I don’t move?’ Bolo ask. ‘If I don’t move?’ Bolo ask again.

‘You *want* me to arrest you?’ Prince ask [. . .].

‘You want to arrest me?’ Bolo ask, his voice so polite and soft. [. . .].

‘You want me to arrest you?’ Prince ask again, in his softest words, wondering a little [. . .]. (69)

There is an infectiousness about this theatrical standoff as each character gets caught up in the other’s speech (although it is Bolo who at the outset is sucked into the official, declaratory discourse of “the law” as voiced by Prince). Indeed, the conflict generates an order of symmetry that appears absolute, the cyclical

syntax through which it is articulated creating the impression of an unalterable progression towards disaster. The narrative thus consolidates a flat, one-sided determinism – what Harris calls Carnival tragedy. The latter, linked to the notion of Carnival as only a reversal, rather than a profound questioning, of oppositions, “implies a passivity that accepts the fate of catastrophe with little or no genuine complaint, it accepts the ultimate inversion of all by a structured and tamed nature that becomes, in stages, a decadent and fatally exploited muse” (The Womb of Space 18). The dominance of this narrative form thus renders inevitable not only a tragic resolution, but also a lack of any sense of rejuvenation or liberation.

Having taken two village girls hostage, Bolo waits hoping that the people will “go against him with strength and anger” and so awaken to their own power (121). All that occurs, however, is a sterile ritual. The police are called by the girls’ father, which thwarts Bolo’s plan since it reintroduces the external discourse of colonial law. The scene at Bolo’s house has an air of static theatricality, with the “six policemen spread out in a circle with their guns on Bolo who stand up on the steps with the girls in front of him” (127). The actions of the characters appear pre-determined: the police sergeant talks to Bee “like he know already just what he going to do no matter what Bee say” (123); Bolo’s response to the gathering at his house is dictated by an absolute logic: “‘You come for the girls?’ Bolo turn now to the sergeant. ‘Then you come to kill me,’ he say in a matter-of-fact way” (126). This cause-and-effect fatalism manifests an inability to break through the ruling frameworks that define reality. Bolo’s speech becomes a symbol of his paralysis, beginning to conform always to an apparently unalterable position, best exemplified by his greeting to Bee: “‘You

bring police for me,' he say, not questioning it but fixing it as a fact in his brain'' (125).

Such language thus shares with the sacrificial act a crippling premise: it only affirms a normative principle. As Girard argues, the purpose of sacrifice is to restore the status quo, re-establishing the legitimate line of filiation. Hence, in the colonial context, if there is no move to go beyond the manifest meaning of the sacrifice, the latter will succeed merely in reconciling the community to the transgressed colonial law, reaffirming the pattern of a History based on a (colonially-structured) filiation. The 'Other' option in this respect would be to restore the line of filiation back to the ideal of Africa. Of these, the first is inimical, the second impossible since the African root has irreversibly mutated in the 'New World'; the community arises from that 'marvellous' entanglement of multiple lineages, not from a singular origin. Moreover, even if the colonial law is conquered through this sacrifice, it would again be a case of making a 'white' root 'black' without interrogating the socio-economic structures that sustained the former iniquitous order. Indeed, since the scapegoat combats one violence by superimposing another he can obscure the underlying violence. Bolo, as the sacrificial substitution for Prince, reveals the need for the villagers to oppose the latter; however, despite exposing the *individual* tyranny of this mimic man, Bolo's death occults, on a structural level, the asymmetric power relations and socio-economic exploitation that permitted Prince to gain ascendancy in the first place. Such obscuration perhaps also explains why the death of the youngest hostage, shot alongside Bolo, is never mentioned after the incident: excluded from the monolithic trope of sacrifice, she is as if erased from the text.

This excision highlights the fundamental problem with conventional epic

narrative. Inextricable from a filiation rooted in an individualizing act, it is bound to the notion of sovereign individuality, and so to a mode of subjectivity at odds with the network of overlapping histories that comprise the Caribbean person. Through his description of Bolo's last stand, Lovelace illustrates how this epic imposes itself over other possible stories and constructions of reality. From the moment Primus tells Bee that Bolo has abducted his daughters, the text, structured by the chronotope of epic tragedy,²⁰ seems to hurtle inexorably towards a bloody finale. But in the middle of the cause-and-effect sequence that precipitates this conclusion, there appears an interlude that disrupts the flow of action. Eva has just watched the men depart and the expectation is she will now recount, via Bee, the confrontation with Bolo. Instead, the text remains focused on her private thoughts for a brief period:

I remain there at the window long after [Bee] gone, watching outside, watching the marigolds [. . .] with their yellow flowers like turn up parasols catching the white rain and above them the coconut tree with its trunk straight and its head leaning to one side in the slow wind and its branches stretch out like two arms making a cross under the sky, and coming down the road is Brother Christopher and his son in their donkey cart rolling on their way to work the piece of land Brother Christopher have [. . .]. I stay there by the window, forgetting time, forgetting everything [. . .]. (125)

This diverting passage breaks into the epic chronotope and offers, through its lyrical descriptions, a sense of depth and possibility different to the linear momentum that defines the narrative of Bolo's death. The text momentarily wanders away from History and the space-time structuration it imposes. Eva dips

into another reality in which the rejuvenation of the community can be conceived otherwise. Although the passage is loaded with imagery tied to the crucifixion, its effect diverges from that produced by Bolo's death. There the cross is the rebel's lifeless body, lying on the ground with "feet close together" and "arms stretch[ed] out" (128). Here the cross is also the tree of life, the link made in Eva's consciousness between this resurrection symbol and her surroundings highlighting how the villagers must assume control over material reality if their 'resurrection' is not to be stillborn like Bolo's. By crafting a coincidence between lived experience and the environment (symbolised by Brother *Christopher's* working the soil) they can inscribe themselves onto the land. That this coincidence should be comprised of an overlap of traditions, and not a monolithic root, is emphasized by the interaction of legacies in the passage. The Christian strand, placed in relation to the specificity of the Caribbean landscape, is, via the fluid, rolling rhythm of the text, connected to the bodily movements inextricable from the Baptists' history as contained in their rituals (the style of the passage recalls the earlier account of their worship). Moreover, the juxtaposition of images such as "yellow flowers like turn up parasols" points beyond the culture / nature dichotomy; while the adjoining of the biblical to the quotidian evokes the 'marvellous,' its combination of orders and integration of the sacred with the everyday.

Thus, this textual interlude briefly uncovers that alter/native space in which the community can ground a resistant history. It is quickly concreted back over by the linear, univocal impetus of Bolo's epic tragedy. Nevertheless, we do catch a glimpse here of something other than the hammer blow of the binary inversion of power, its swing made torpid by encrusted ideology; momentarily

we encounter a fleetness of foot indicative of a diversionary movement able to challenge the very principles of the fixed frame of reality from an original, revisionary perspective.

Chapter 2. Language, Power, and the Trope of Writing.

In Chamoiseau's Chronique des sept misères the decline of the Fort-de-France market is signalled by the descent into madness of the djobeur Bidjoule. The loss of a wheel from his barrow, plus an inability to effect anything more than a "shameful makeshift" repair, removes "all life from his eyes" (137). His subsequent breakdown culminates in his being discovered "buried up to the waist in the brushwood of Bois-de-Boulogne [. . .] claim[ing] to be a yam" (138). Underlying this insanity is the suffocation of the 'marvellous' reality of the market beneath the burden of French 'progress.' As we saw in Chapter One, the imposition of a cultural framework structured in relation to external demands intensified the alienation of the Martinican people from their environment. Bereft of the mediating link his craft had provided, Bidjoule's grip on the world slips away. His condition is symptomatic of a people whose "relationship to its surroundings (what we would call its nature) is in a discontinuous relationship with its accumulation of experiences (what we would call its culture)" (Glissant, DA 223). Unable to structure its history autonomously, the community suffers the past as a series of convulsions that it cannot bring to light on a collective basis. Bidjoule's actions manifest this traumatic disjunction between lived experience and the imposed symbolic order; yet by clearly breaching the 'commonsense' world constructed by the latter, they also comprise a rejection of the dominant system. Glissant describes such mad deeds as unconscious refusals of the "historically imposed structuration" that reflect also a "traumatic search for a sense of security in lived space-time" (DA 148). Thus, the djobeur's burying himself in the ground could be understood as a delirious attempt to claim that which is denied him: a real connection to the Martinican landscape and its

history.

If this unconscious drive to re-connect with a buried past haunts the people of Martinique, it is no less present (albeit as a more conscious strategy) for the villagers of Bonasse in Lovelace's The Wine of Astonishment. Although the madness that afflicts Bidjoule is not present, a similar problem exists as regards the creation and legitimisation of structures in which to ground a marginalized identity. The failure of Bolo's rebellion highlights the difficulties of such an undertaking. Modernisation has inaugurated new forms of oppression that short-circuit traditional means of resistance. In addition, Bolo's affirmation of his community begins to asphyxiate its very specificity. Wanting to fix its identity, he loses sight of how this relates to a *practice* of culture that adapts to changing contemporary conditions, and instead reifies its present, victimized form. As a result, he negates its lived modernity and the 'marvellous' character – that ability to combine a multiplicity of influences – of its history.

In this way, Bolo could be said to replicate the mistake that in another context Glissant suggests is often made by "ethnographic thought": the enclosure of its object of study "in static time, where the entanglements of lived experience are effaced so as to promote an uncontaminated survival [. . .] thereby affirming a series of generalised projections which obfuscate the network of real relations" (DA 40). Hence, Bolo's failure also points to the wider problem of representation, as well as to the complexity of narrating Caribbean history specifically. His reduced or flattened articulation of the Bonasse community is all that is possible given his approach to the latter; for the collectivity does not exist in the historical dialectic save as a persecuted group. The unfolding of its 'marvellous' history as one of cross-cultural creativity lies beyond the surface

condition; mutations in consciousness and that “phenomenal legacy” Harris identifies must be explored, since it is here that this history subsists, conveyed by the rituals of the community with respect not just to what they reveal in an anthropological sense, but to what they tell of the imaginative life of the people. By focusing on the stigmatised skin of the group, Bolo fails to penetrate the depths of its collective body. And although we do glimpse these depths via Eva’s consciousness towards the end of the book, their re-burial beneath the conventions of tragedy (which dictate Bolo’s death) indicates that the novel form itself cannot express them adequately without transformation. In this chapter, then, I will examine in detail the problem of representation and language, exploring the ambivalences that surround writing and the position of the author through an analysis of Lovelace’s The Dragon Can’t Dance and Harris’s The Far Journey of Oudin. I begin, however, with Chamoiseau’s Solibo Magnifique, which dramatises the issue of representation through the inclusion of Chamoiseau as a character in his own fiction – indeed, as a writer striving to narrate the life of the titular storyteller. The relationship in Martinique between French and Creole, moreover, provides a clear example of how the linguistic struggle is at the same time a struggle for power.

Like Chronique, Solibo narrates the clash of realities that arises as Martinican space and time is organized in accordance with imposed structures. The importation of “French goods, French thought-patterns, French lifestyles, and [. . .] the French language” (Burton, “The Idea of Difference” 140) instils into people an externally-orientated habitus adjusted to the socio-economic imperatives of the dominant order. This habitus confronts, and increasingly suppresses, that shaped by the lower class Martinicans’ experience of the world,

a conflict neatly staged when Chief Inspector Pilon, investigating the death of Solibo, interrogates the witness Bête-Longue:

Monsieur Bête-Longue, what is your age, profession, and permanent address.

– Huh?

– The inspector asks you what cyclone you were born after, what do you do for the béké, and on what side of town do you sleep at night? Bouaffesse specifies.

– I was born just before Admiral Robert, I fish with Kokomerlo on Rive-Droite, and I stay in Texaco, near the fountain. (143)

To classify his witness, Pilon employs the language of the state and the principles of social construction it sanctions – principles tied to the bureaucracy of the service economy that has been thrust upon Martinique. Bête-Longue's incomprehension in the face of such abstract markers not only highlights his own practice-based conception of the real but also indicates its marginality; for it is Pilon's worldview that counts as legitimate, tied as it is to the ruling political framework and the official discourse of the law. The enclosure of individuals in disjunctive tropes of civic identity is another, more bureaucratic, version of that process of block categorisation that afflicted Fenwick's crew in The Secret Ladder. And as in that text, the upshot is the deformation of subjectivity as the specificities of Martinican life are shoehorned into alien schemas.

This distortion of selfhood is inextricable from the loss of the material structures that supported an alter/native, creole world. Tracing the repercussions of the developments described in Chronique, Solibo details the destabilising effect had on the community by the disintegration of the crafts and practices that

once provided a mediating link to the environment. As a number of the witnesses to Solibo's death contemplate how the island has changed –

Richard Coeurillon and Zaboca spoke of a time of harvests and smoking factories, at that time one man handled a machine, another a cutlass, that was time, but today the fields are deserted, the factory whistles no longer give rhythm to the day [. . .].

[W]here does time happen here, inspector? Some say that it is in France, that there, there is time. — Congo creolised about a manioc time [. . .] but today all he knew of time was the planes taking off over his hut [. . .]. (146)

– it becomes clear that if the modern service economy has emancipated people from labouring in fields and factories, it has also divorced them from any sense of control over reality: time itself is suffered; it is only meaningful elsewhere. With its already marginalized history in danger of total erasure under such pressures, the whole community could go the way of Bidjoule. In this respect, Solibo develops a concern that dominated many French West Indian novels in the 1970s. Then, a sense that the promises of departmentalisation had delivered merely “political and economic dependence [. . .] tied to cultural impoverishment” resulted in a series of protagonists “whose personal alienation [was] suggestive of national confusion and distress regarding cultural identity” (Ormerod 170-71).¹ Characters like the titular anti-hero of Vincent Placolý's La vie et la mort de Marcel Gonstran found themselves locked in a world of madness and sterility, the history of their fractured communities as exhausted as the despoiled landscape. Such themes perhaps found fullest expression in Glissant's 1975 novel Malemort. Here the obscuration of the community's

history has reduced people to a zombified or schizophrenic state, the latter most clearly evident in the final chapter when Silacier splits into two separate parts. This psychological mutilation is inextricable from an inability to articulate cultural memory, the struggle to represent oneself stressed by a corporeal tension: “the jerking of the body suddenly arched in the impossibility of saying anything” (124). As with Bolo and Morton, the stiffening of the body points to the petrification of the history contained therein.

In this regard, Chamoiseau’s portrayal of the stiffened cadaver of the deceased Solibo is indicative of the loss of the storytelling tradition and the history it kept alive. Solibo’s collapse is the last movement in the “quivering of a world coming to its end” (227). The manner of his death is highly apposite: he is choked by the word, strangled from within by the sounds caught in his throat. The struggle for articulation had been haunting the storyteller prior to his demise, however, and is connected to the disintegration of the material bases of creole culture and to the kind of madness and physical tension seen in Malemort. Modernisation has caused “the tales [to] die, Creole [to] lose its strength”; Solibo finds himself “seized by this fatality he thought he could vanquish,” and so he speaks

to the only one who could understand him, and we saw him go by, his lips beating out a silence, in discussion with himself. There were two of him, but not in accord with one another: abruptly stopping too many times when walking, arms flying too many times, too many hesitations at the crossroads when choosing a path. (223-24)

The world has changed and Solibo (like Poseidon in The Secret Ladder) is now

“not in accord” with the ‘commonsense’ world constructed by the dominant order. As a result he appears mad, living a reality that no longer functions in relation to the contemporary social situation, trying to express himself in a language that lacks what Glissant calls a “cultural hinterland” (DA 333). In this way, Solibo’s situation points to the wider problems that confront Creole itself.

“[A] national language is the language in which a people produces,” maintains Glissant (DA 333). In order to articulate the community, structuring effectively its relationship to a reality ordered symbolically by this same representation, a language must be bound to the practices and institutions through which space-time structuration is effected and the rapport to the environment mediated. The difficulty for Creole is that both the system of production in which it was forged – the plantation –, as well as the crafts it was later connected to, have disappeared. Replacing them is an imposed system of exchange (between French goods and Martinican services). And “with the standardization of business [. . .], with the importation of all natural and manufactured products [. . .], Creole in fact, in the logic of this system, no longer has a *raison d’être*. [. . .]. A language *in which* one no longer makes anything (so to speak) is a threatened language. A folkloric language” (DA 298-99). The dangers of folklorisation are acute for a mode of expression that has not been ‘structured’ in relation to a system of production, and so lacks the dialectical connection to the world which would enable it to provide a reflection on the history that has shaped it. For Glissant, the “folkloric background, represented, thought, given a cultural thrust, is raised to consciousness, fashions it, and [. . .] criticizes itself as consciousness under its new ‘form’ as ‘culture’” (DA 687). Here, however, the community has been denied the resources to reinforce its cultural articulation and

initiate a self-reflexive critique, while the elite, “who should take charge of temporarily guiding technical relations, [. . .] are precisely that part of the collectivity whose function is to be both alienated and alienating” (DA 699). Consequently, folklore is reduced to an abstracted ornament. Divorced from its historical significance and constitutive social relations, folkloric practice becomes not a key to the exploration of the past but a hollow trope or cultural commodity to be sold to tourists.

Solibo understands the dangers of such folklorisation, which, in its obsession with ‘tradition,’ reifies the community within a picturesque past and denies its lived modernity as effectively as overt colonial violence. As the character of the *marqueur de paroles* (‘Patrick Chamoiseau’) observes, the storyteller wants to “inscribe his word [*la parole*] in our ordinary lives, but this life no longer had the ear nor even the hollows where the echo could sound eternal”:

Besides a few odd places [. . .], the space [for this word] was disappearing. Organizers of the cultural festival had often solicited his participation in some storytelling shows, but Solibo, fearing these conservation measures where you left life to stand in an artificial framework, had excused himself with mysterious obligations. (222-23)

Preservation in this way serves only to reinforce the stasis imposed on the cultural memory of the community. As Glissant argues regarding folkloric displays: they are “never part of a politic of self-expression, which is what paralyzes them. Invariably, the ‘artist,’ obliged to resort to the circuits already established or in a rush to exploit them, depoliticizes his art [. . .] and, having

entered into these circuits, is in turn himself folklorised” (DA 702). Solibo sidesteps such pitfalls. He does not “grieve for tradition” (156), for he recognises that one cannot return to a lost or ‘pure’ creole past; rather, the practices of the people must be integrated into and used to re-shape modern conditions. Thus, his concern is not simply for the Creole language in isolation, or as merely a linguistic phenomenon. Instead, he necessarily points to the wider cultural struggle that surrounds the social conditions of its articulation, that is, its position in relation to institutional structures. Just as the ‘conservation’ of the storytelling tradition in folkloric institutes only stifles its vitality, so likewise the Creole language is turned against itself. As part of the inculcation of a habitus adjusted to the imposed social order, a particular linguistic habitus is installed as the model to which to conform; and the legitimacy this confers on French in opposition to Creole renders the latter and those who speak it inferior.

The importance of language in the constitution of power relations is connected to what Bourdieu describes as its ability to “produce existence by producing the collectively recognised, and thus realised, representation of existence” (Language and Symbolic Power 42). Amongst the range of languages or language uses present, each of which can assert a specific vision of the world, one will define ‘official’ reality, the order imposed as the norm by the dominant class. To secure assent to a particular representation of existence as the truth of existence, and so to a particular language use as invested with the power to define this, presupposes the unification of the linguistic field. From out of the different linguistic variants, a standard language must be designated or forged. Through the effects of domination – specifically, the ability to disseminate this language via institutions, its legitimacy reinforced by its association with these same

institutions and the capital (political, economic, cultural) they have accrued – there occurs a “generalisation of the dominant criteria of evaluation” (Bourdieu, LSP 50). With the field thus unified in relation to this standard, linguistic differences are compared to the ‘norm’ and their value judged accordingly: dialects, for example, will be viewed as deficient and those that speak them discriminated against. As such judgements accumulate, the hierarchy they both produce and reflect will increasingly be seen (as individuals are ever more inculcated with its values) as a universal or inevitable order.

In this way, the linguistic habitus becomes central to domination. “The social uses of language,” contends Bourdieu, “owe their specifically social value to the fact that they tend to be organized in systems of differences [. . .] which reproduce [. . .] the system of social differences” (LSP 54). To speak is to utilise a certain expressive style – in terms not only of pronunciation and vocabulary, but also of posture and bodily movement – that is marked by its position in the hierarchy of styles comprising the linguistic field. The social and historical determinants that shape an individual’s habitus similarly adjust his or her linguistic habitus to accord with a particular social condition; a person’s style will be profitable only in specific situations, that is, only when he or she is competent – meaning not only that they can speak effectively, but also that they have the authority and capital (cultural or educational or otherwise) to speak acceptably and to be listened to. Thus, writes Bourdieu, speakers

lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence. What is rare, then, is [. . .] the competence necessary in order to speak the legitimate language which,

depending on social inheritance, re-translates social distinctions into the specifically symbolic logic of differential deviations, or, in short, distinction. (LSP 55)

Solibo reveals how such distinction and the symbolic power it confers is especially significant in Martinique due to the French / Creole split. French is imposed as the ‘universal’ standard; linked to institutional spaces it is construed as the language of education, economics, civility, and the law. As Glissant observes, for instance: in the classroom the Martinican child is habituated to “the world of the serious, of work, of hierarchical relationships, with which he naturally associates the French language. At recreation, he reverts to Creole, with which he associates play, freedom, lack of restraint” (DA 596). Creole is thereby made synonymous with irresponsibility, which translates into a powerlessness vis-à-vis the symbolic power of French. Therefore, in this field even to speak Creole is to disenfranchise oneself.

Nowhere are such distinctions more apparent than when the market vendor Doudou-Ménar bursts into the police station, “flying towards” the desk sergeant to demand that he help the stricken Solibo:

Law! call the doctor, [. . .] you hear me Law? . . . Strengthened by his six years of experience, by his certificate of technical capacity [. . .] [and with] only his mask of imperial justice and his official way of unscrewing a Waterman fountain pen over the logbook, Justin Philibon knew how to calm such rabble-rousers. But there in front of Doudou-Ménar vociferating [. . .] he’s got nerves hard as a drumskin. Madame, I am guardian of the peace [. . .] calm yourself and furnish me you full name, address, and occupation

[. . .], you are here at the police station and not the fish market,
there's officiality, there's regulations, there's the Penal Code [. . .]
— Solibo's dying, I tell you! the Enormous One spat out [. . .]
insensitive to procedural refinements. (49-50)

Into the ordered, regulated realm of the law with its written French decrees erupts Doudou-Ménar, whose style of speaking – the violent, exclamatory nature of her cries and the physicality of her “vociferating” comportment – associates her with the oral tradition of Creole and the world of the “fish market.” Emphasized by the distinction drawn between Philibon's calm demeanour – his measured citations spoken in an “oily French” (50) – and the mad rush of the vendor, the flatness and fixity of the legitimate language and its institutional formulations is at odds with the corporeality and energy of the “Enormous One.” Insensitive to “procedural refinements,” Doudou-Ménar lacks the linguistic competence to be ‘heard’ in the police station (her pleas for help are dismissed as maniacal ranting until Bouaffesse detects in her voice “a gravity that escaped the rest” [58]). Her linguistic habitus leads her to be subordinated in relation to the misrecognised yet recognised symbolic capital that accrues to French and its speakers or, especially, writers.² The misrecognition of the violence that helped install French as the dominant mode, simultaneous with the recognition of the objectified form of this domination – its institutionalised status and the signs that surround it such as Philibon's official certificate –, enables Philibon (via his pen and logbook) to exert a symbolic power over Doudou-Ménar, one all the more effective since it is consented to – recognised – as the (French) Law's legitimate right.

The symbolic violence thus effected is given concrete expression later in the novel when the vendor is murdered by the police. Indeed, the text repeatedly

exposes the physical oppression underlying the domination exerted through the linguistic field. Chief Sergeant Bouaffesse, for example, uses French for the purpose of intimidating interviewees: “In order to corner this vicious old blackman, it was necessary to track him down in French. French numbed their heads, gripped their guts [. . .]” (105). This ‘tracking down’ of the witness recalls the use of dogs to hunt down marooning slaves. Later, Congo, who speaks only an old-fashioned Creole, is beaten with a logbook. As such violence is revealed, however, the misrecognition upon which its efficacy rests is short-circuited: while still terrifying, the repression loses its pernicious cloak of legitimacy. Moreover, the madness that seizes the police officers during their interrogatory use of French suggests that conflict inheres not only in the deployment by the elite of the legitimate language, but also in the elite’s relationship to this language. In fact, a comparable instability exists to that caused by the disjunction between lived experience and the symbolic structures of society; and the cause too is the same: the external structuration of Martinican reality by France.

Though the elite of course has power over the other classes in Martinique, this power does not originate in the elite itself but is the product of the machinations of an elsewhere. The dominant class is not what it thinks it is: it may be linked to the official social frameworks but, as noted in the previous chapter, it lacks autonomous control over these, and so over its own reality. The same holds true as regards the official discourse: the elite is in part defined by its use of French, yet this French has not been structured autonomously with respect to the Martinican real. As such, it occupies an inverse position to Creole. If the latter is no longer functional in relation to the modern economic system, French is inextricable from it but in consequence is orientated (at least when adopted

uncritically) towards the elsewhere upon which this system is predicated. The elite's use of French hence becomes not only a way to assert its power, but also, due to the compromised nature of this power, a compulsive means to reassure itself that it is what it thinks it is – French (even white) and in total control. The obvious disjunction between such beliefs and reality produces in the elite similar tensions to those that arise amongst the lower classes vis-à-vis the imposition of a French linguistic habitus over a Creole one. Indeed, the result for society as a whole is the manifestation, on a linguistic level, of the same kind of “disequilibrium” (as Glissant puts it [DA 174]) that afflicts Bidjoule.

Such disequilibrium has been analysed by Glissant under the form of a verbal delirium in Martinican society. Here, because “individual pathology results *directly* from social alienation,” psychosis becomes “a response to the social situation” (Britton 90).³ However, the appearance of this pathology in everyday life is accepted by the community as precisely that: everyday. “The analysis of what I call mental deprivation,” writes Glissant, “shows that the most obvious manifestations are not to be found in the pathological or delirious, but in the very texture of daily existence, through the absence of any reference to oneself” (DA 363). Due to the occultation of social relations, which encourages people to believe they are what they are not, the perversity of this distorted identification is accepted as normal. The social order as a whole is mad – the ‘norm’ is itself alienated or ‘abnormal’ – and so the manifestations of insanity appear quotidian. This schism between appearance and reality underlies “routine verbal delirium,” which Glissant divides into four types: the deliriums of representation, persuasion, communication, and dramatization [*théâtralisation*]. The first two are elite forms, the second two lower class. In addition, the first

three are “de-proprating”: they seek to “confirm in an obsessive and reassuring manner [. . .] the general ideological alienation” (DA 635), so to live and reconcile the disjunction between appearance and reality by consolidating an alienated pseudo-French identity.

The impact of this ‘everyday’ delirium is apparent throughout Solibo. On an elite level, for example, Chief Inspector Pilon displays a compulsive need to reassure himself of his official status. His verbal contortions suggest the delirium of persuasion: the use of facts, statistics, and formulas based on ‘commonsense’ in order to conceal “the deliberate refusal of one’s history, the panic of finding oneself but not *as one believes oneself to be*” (Glissant, DA 650-51). In his report into the Solibo affair, Pilon introduces himself as an “officer of the Police of Urban Safety of Fort-de-France, Criminal Brigade, officer of the Department of Criminal Investigation” (17). This obsession with status is echoed in his meticulous citation of legal regulations: “I am an officer from the Department of Criminal Investigation. [. . .] By virtue of Articles 76, 77 and 78 of the Code of Penal Procedure you should consider yourselves in custody for the purposes of a preliminary inquiry” (141). The Chief Inspector seeks to make reality comply with the French symbolic structures that legitimise his identity. Having been educated in “the land of Descartes,” he dreams “for [Martinique] [. . .] of a mystery drawn with a compass (and set square)” (118). However, his attempts to apply “cold logic” to the “irrational side of ‘cases’ in this country” – at “the price of a rather disagreeable mental exertion” – frequently come unstuck (117-18). This disjunction and its associated pressures are most evident in his approach to Solibo’s death. Wishing to fit events into a ‘rational’ pattern, he invents a conspiratorial murder plot inspired by the French detective novels he enjoys

(117). His imported assumptions are ‘confirmed’ by a geometrical plan. Yet the hypothesis of poisoning this consolidates not only obscures the real significance of Solibo’s *égorgette de la parole*; its ‘commonsensical’ appearance also conceals the (normative) madness of its unreal deductions. Eventually, the constitutive material violence behind this delirious distortion of experience, and so the neurotic relationship to French codes it presupposes, erupts into view, with those deemed guilty by the plan assaulted in a manner far removed from legal propriety.

If Pilon’s schismatic relationship to reality results in a compulsive verbosity, amongst the lower classes the pressure of living “at two speeds” (119) can manifest itself in a more physical fashion. When officer Diab-Anba-Feuilles becomes embroiled in a fight with Doudou-Ménar, for example, his official identity, forged in accordance with the sovereign mould laid down by the French-orientated civil state, is split by an eruptive, Creole selfhood. Confronting the market vendor, he begins to hit himself in a show of strength, biting and tearing his own flesh, his body seized by the agitated movement and physicality seen earlier in Doudou-Ménar. As if sloughing off his inculcated French skin, he enacts the violent, schizophrenic return of a repressed aspect of his self: “His eyes were swirling and his frothing mouth unleashed a string of untiring insults in a Creole he could no longer hold back” (94). Significantly, Bouaffesse can re-assert control over his fellow officer only by recourse to the “official civil status of the crazed one and a French-French (Monsieur Figaro Paul, if-you-please, you are forgetting yourself!), at which sound Diab-Anba-Feuilles became a statue” (95). By way of the standard language and the symbolic weight carried by one’s ‘proper’ name, Bouaffesse re-imposes the legitimate habitus – a fixed carapace

that suffocates bodily expressiveness and freezes the subject within a ready-made identity trope.⁴

But though Diab-Anba-Feuilles is reinserted into his alienated, pseudo-French role, his pathological breakdown does offer an alternative insanity to the everyday madness of Martinican society. In his frenzied state, the officer makes manifest the violent suppression of a cultural history. As such, his behaviour suggests the fourth type of verbal delirium: that of dramatisation. This type of routine madness is the closest to the pathological kind since it refuses the (in this instance, abnormal) norms of reality. The delirium of dramatisation “is the *torment of history*, whereas the other routine deliriums signal the absence of history or its refusal” (DA 655). Externalising and acting out the conflicts suffered by the people, the “*délinant de théâtralisation* tries dramatically to re-appropriate through the word”; and it is hence that, in contrast to those afflicted with the other deliriums, this person is perceived by the community “as mad (he forces it to really look at itself), but as a spectacular and important madman (for it has need of this look)” (DA 655). Solibo’s madness – his being out of phase with official reality following the modernisation (or Francisation) of society – reflects this type of delirium. Played out on the street, his schizophrenic actions are not just seen by the community; more importantly, they are recognised as insane. And it is precisely their visible nature – the theatricality that accompanies the doubling of Solibo’s identity – that brings to light the struggle for an eclipsed history. To articulate the latter in the present climate may be impossible for the storyteller, but by staging this conflict he forces the community to reflect on its position. Solibo shows, via his words or dramatic silences (“his lips beating out a silence”), that an alternative history exists, even if

currently it is an absent presence.

If Solibo enacts the potential for this alternative, however, its actual expression remains problematically delirious. Such madness must be re-structured, converted into a means to voice the cultural memory of the community. Of course, this requires the re-structuration of space-time in accordance with lived experience, and so too the imagining of the possibility of this change. With the shifts in society that have occurred, the difficulties of collective representation fall now to the modern day storyteller: the writer. In Solibo the struggle to find a form capable of articulating the complexity of the community is dramatised by the appearance of the character ‘Patrick Chamoiseau’ – a literary form of dramatising delirium that acts out publicly, as it were, the novelist’s attempts to continue the art of the *conteur*. In his fictional guise as the *marqueur de paroles*, Chamoiseau is shown following Solibo around, attempting to document his life and to learn from his techniques. In an intertextual reference to Chronique, he describes how he started visiting the market because he had in mind a “work on the life of the *djobeurs*” (43). Indeed, he becomes a “[p]retend ethnographer,” only to end up so immersed in his surroundings that he forgets his task: “I yelled, gesticulated just like everyone else [. . .], no longer even caring to listen, to scrutinise and understand life around here, or even [. . .] what I scribbled down to fool my remorse” (44). On meeting the storyteller, however, his interest in representing the fast-disintegrating cultural practices of the community is rekindled; it is “through him” that he is able “to find again sense in writing” (44). In fact, Solibo’s facility with expression leads the *marqueur* to question whether writing can replicate all that is conveyed about the collectivity through the oral tradition.

As 'Chamoiseau' pursues the storyteller he is met with a barrage of advice and criticism concerning the written:

'Oiseau de Cham, you write. Good. Me, Solibo, I speak. You see the distance? In your book on Manman Dlo, you want to capture the word in writing, I see the rhythm that you give it, how you want to grab words so that they sound on the tongue. You ask me: Am I right, Papa? I say: One never writes the word [*la parole*], only words, you should have spoken. To write is like taking the conch shell out of the sea to shout: here's the conch shell. The word responds: Where's the sea. But that's not the important thing. I'm leaving, but you, you remain. I spoke but you are writing, announcing that you come from the word. You give me your hand over the distance. That's fine, but you touch the distance. (52-53)

Solibo is wary of the difference between orality – the word or *la parole* – and writing. The storyteller understands that the *marqueur de paroles* wants to carry on his craft, yet he also recognises that this cannot be done by simply appropriating the written and deploying it in place of the oral. Writing is not speech, and to treat it as such risks stifling the reality one aims to describe. Indeed, the manner in which writing abstracts its subject from a living context (the conch removed from the sea) and fixes it on the page, replays the pernicious impact of folklorisation. The mimetic recreation of the oral in the written can turn the former into a picturesque ornament or hollow trope of an embalmed past. At the same time, Solibo knows that times have changed. As noted earlier, he does not “grieve for tradition”: though he distrusts writing, he accepts that

because he is “leaving” it should now be employed as the means by which to represent the community. To do so however it must be transformed, reconciled with – in order to “come from” – “the word,” but not reduced to a facile reproduction of the latter. The written must be interrogated for what differentiates it from the oral, in particular with respect to that “distance” from the real it tries to bridge but can only touch.

The questions Solibo poses here as regards the nature of writing are similarly raised on a practical level in the text as the *marqueur* seeks to record the storyteller’s words. Attempting that which Solibo counsels against, he produces “a reduced, organised, *written* version, a sort of ersatz of what the Master had been that night” (226). This “ersatz,” which comprises the final part of the novel, defies grammatical convention to replicate Solibo’s speech yet seems drained of vitality by its very fidelity; it embalms the word since it does not allow for the specificities of writing, attempting to overcome its “distance” without asking what this means. Consequently, it appears as a kind of inverted version of the official police report that opens the text, the static legal discourse of which dissects the particulars of the case yet misses its wider significance. The documented “word” is in danger of becoming a folkloric relic, something emphasized when the police, having had the “ersatz” read to them by the *marqueur*, conclude their investigation by filing everything in a dossier and consigning it to the archive.

The risks associated with the attempted preservation of the oral tradition tie into those surrounding the writer-as-ethnographer, who seeks to describe the cultural life of the community. Earlier we saw how ‘Chamoiseau’ in *Solibo* is a “pretend” ethnographer, his character dramatising Chamoiseau’s own dilemma of

how to capture the details of a people's history without fixing them in the aspic of supposedly unadulterated documentation, that is, without losing the potential for transformation inherent in a fictional elaboration. The *marqueur* knows that one cannot simply observe the community from an abstracted, 'objective' position. Not only would this risk enclosing the object of study in static time or imposing explanatory rules that perpetrate what Bourdieu refers to as the theory effect – a mistaking, as he puts it, quoting Marx, of “the things of logic for the logic of things” (LP 49).⁵ Also, as the user of an elite discourse complicit in the alienation of large sections of society, the writer cannot just step back and recreate this world; he or she is not straightforwardly contiguous with the people and their mode of expression.

At the same time, however, the *marqueur* points to the problems connected to the opposite extreme, that is, to the attempt to lose oneself absolutely in the community. As noted previously, the *marqueur*'s immersion in the life of the market derails his writing project; indeed, as he explains: “Though I tried during my lucid moments to imagine myself as a *direct participant observer*, like [. . .] Malinowski, Morgan, Radcliffe-Brown [. . .], I knew that not one of them had seen himself dissolve thus into what he wanted so rigorously to describe” (44). The trouble with this supposed dissolution is that it occludes the ethnographer's relationship to the group and hence fails to take into account the impact this has.

The same holds true for the author. The notion of the writer as at one with the community underpins Chronique, where narration is provided by the undifferentiated *nous* of the *djobeurs*. The novel seems to suggest that a communal oral discourse can be simply transposed into writing. (Indeed, its

repeated “*Messieurs et dames de la compagnie*” echoes the *conteur*’s traditional opening cry.) The appearance of the *marqueur* in Solibo and the evident anxieties surrounding the written indicate that Chamoiseau is no longer satisfied with this transferred *nous*. The latter overlooks the specificities of writing: the written word is uncritically made to do the work of the spoken; the group is shoehorned into the representational frames provided by writing rather than there occurring an interrogation of how this discourse could be most suitably related to the group. The difficulty is that, when deployed in its conventional form and confronting the particular history of the Caribbean, writing will be able to express only the surface of the imperilled community. As such, it will remain within the tropes of victimhood and tragedy, just as Chronique could offer no alternative to the extinction of the *djobeurs*, no way to convert their delirium into an articulation of a suppressed history. As Dominique Chancé observes: “To the madness and inspiration of Pipi, there is not yet a response in the universe of Patrick Chamoiseau. The writing does not yet exist; the symbolic order has not been forged. [. . .] Chronique des sept misères is the diagnosis of a morbidity and general breakdown” (173). The delirious dramatisation of the writing process initiated in Solibo manifests that which must be transformed if the community is to accede to a form of expression beyond the paralysis of tragedy.

Language, Form and Politics

I had often seen my master and Dick employed in reading; and I had a great curiosity to talk to the books, as I thought they did . . . I have often taken up a book, and have talked to it, and then put my ears to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me . . .

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*.

The written word is an instrument of power, but also the locus of trouble and torment. In the context of the conquest of the ‘New World,’ writing was

associated with the European colonial project and its actors (or at least, that is the historical narrative they imposed). As noted in Chapter One, the codification or consumption of the land within colonially-orientated tropes was inextricable from its physical expropriation. At the same time, the written word itself was cited as justification for this project: the ability to write was construed as a sign of civility vis-à-vis the ‘primitiveness’ of those who remained ‘trapped’ in an oral culture; hence, it legitimised the domination of the latter as part of the so-called civilising mission. As a result of such machinations, writing became a trope, a signifier of a kind of magical power arising from its capacity to act on and structure social reality (the continuation of which we have seen in the form of the symbolic power of Philibon’s pen). This trope finds its way into a series of colonial / postcolonial texts; one variant is the image of the talking book that crops up in a number of slave narratives – including Olaudah Equiano’s, cited above.⁶ Moreover, the trope is at the hub of a network of socio-symbolic struggles: to write is to appropriate the power invested in the Word; for the colonised it is a way to lay claim to a ‘civility’ that has been denied them, to demonstrate their equality.

But immediately a problem arises with this form of resistance: its terms remain defined by the dominant order. To establish an identity via writing as a ‘civilising’ medium is to accept its constitution as ‘superior’ in comparison to the ‘inferiority’ of other discourses, in particular – as part of the mind / body divide – that of orality and those bound to the corporeal. In addition, writing in the Caribbean was historically the discourse of the master. In the world of the plantation it was the slave-owner who handled a written word bound to the mechanics of exploitation (slave inventories, account books, records of sale or

emancipation). The slaves, meanwhile, were denied access to this discourse accept in those instances when its instruction was sanctioned as part of efforts to further inculcate the dominant value system. Writing's connection to this legacy of oppression and silencing underlies the ambivalence with which it is treated by later authors; it is enmeshed in the predicament of self-expression, not least because it was situated as antagonistic to the denigrated oral tradition through which the slaves sought to articulate their experience. But even this was problematic. As Glissant explains: the inseparability of the oral from the movement of the body means that, since the commodified body of the slave was alienated from him or herself, self-expression was "not only forbidden, but impossible to envisage," emerging instead in a "thwarted, distorted" guise (DA 405), that is, only via a camouflaged detour or the doubly inscribed gestures of permitted rituals. Subsequently, when "the body is freed [. . .] it follows the explosive scream. Antillean orality is always excited, it ignores stoppages, softness, sentiment. The body follows suit. It ignores pauses, languor, continuity. It jerks along" (DA 405). Though movement and open expression return here, they remain confused. The body conveys a history, but its jerkiness (recalling the body in Malemort) indicates the continuing difficulty of articulation, the lack of adequate mediating structures resulting in frenzied behaviour (exemplified by Doudou-Ménar's tendency to do everything in a "mad dash" [48] and her uncontrolled effusiveness at the police station).

Further light is thrown on this issue when the prerequisites for writing are considered. The latter requires non-movement, notes Glissant; indeed, to move from "the oral to the written is to immobilise the body, to subjugate it (to possess it). The being dispossessed of his body cannot attain the immobility where

writing takes shape. He keeps moving; he only screams” (DA 405). Again, the dispossession caused by the imposition of alien moulds distorts expression; yet a double-bind exists, with the apparent solution only intensifying the problem; for the structures that would provide the required control or immobility also deny the movement of the body that is here vital for full self-expression. To write can paradoxically mean to perpetuate the silence enforced by slavery, therefore, amputating the repository of memory constituted by the corporeal. And while the framework in which writing takes shape remains tied to the conventions that underpin the ‘civil’ concept of the written (which excises the ‘profanity’ of the corp/oral), it will offer only a false or restricted mouthpiece.

Writing in 1941, René Ménénil claimed that the “petit bourgeois Martinican is unable to produce a novel for the simple reason that he *is* a character in a novel” (117). Ménénil had in mind here a specific form of the genre; indeed, he goes on to distinguish between two types: an imitative one that is incapable of extricating itself from an imported ideological frame; and a revolutionary one that pierces the surface of reality to probe its depths. The bourgeois may write, but in Ménénil’s eyes he or she cannot write the latter novel, necessary if one is to convey adequately Martinican experience. This failure is the result of his or her entrapment within the empty tropes of an imposed identity. From here derives the charge that the bourgeois is a character in a novel: in the ‘unreal’ or perverse superstructure of a social order defined by an external power, he or she occupies the fiction of a self-determining sovereign subjectivity. This idea thus has very different implications to the later tendency in French Caribbean literature (from the 1970s onwards) for authors to appear as characters in texts – something we have seen in Chamoiseau’s work, but which occurs too in the novels of Glissant,

Confiant, Maryse Condé, and Xavier Orville.⁷ As Lydie Moudileno points out (referencing the arguments of the Créolistes), these texts “demonstrate that in order to ‘cease to exist solely in the imagination of the Other,’ it is a matter not of claiming to cease to be a character *tout court*, but above all of becoming one’s own character” (193). The latter ‘characterisation’ is a deliberate fiction, therefore, that serves as an imaginative strategy for breaking through the limits of the imposed real (a point I will expand on later). By contrast, the bourgeois variant is a ‘fictional’ identity that wants to believe in the reality of its appearance and in its ability to represent the community, when in fact the very form of this identity splits it off from the collectivity and distorts expression.

With this in mind, it is possible to develop further some of the concerns connected to the vexed relationship between writer and community that we have seen Chamoiseau broach in the guise of the *marqueur*-as-ethnographer. For example, there is a danger in the author claiming to speak as a metonymic extension of the community, since the identity or ‘I’ position he or she assumes will, if enmeshed in an imposed representational framework, disenfranchise both the people and the writer. “The ‘I’ intervenes when the community is more or less clear,” suggests Chamoiseau, “but when the community is problematic, the ‘I’ becomes artificial. When you meet a premature ‘I’ in our books, it is the occidental ‘I’ that is pasted over our reality” (qtd. in Perret 253). While thus far I have concentrated on Martinique because its legacy of assimilation has produced perhaps the clearest instances of such distortion, the need to fashion, autonomously, a coincidence between literary and social structures is, of course, an issue addressed by writers across the Caribbean. Harris, like Chamoiseau, is especially concerned in this respect with the status of the body vis-à-vis writing

and its significance to any discourse seeking to express fully the community's history.

Through the daSilva twin in Palace of the Peacock Harris vividly images the disquiet that writing will fix and encase the body, binding it to an artificial 'I':

[daSilva's] flesh was newspaper, drab, wet until the lines and markings had run fantastically together. His hair stood flat on his brow like ink. He nodded precariously and one marvelled how he preserved his appearance without disintegrating into soggy lumps and patches [. . .]. He shook his head again but not a word blew from his lips. (95-96)

The metamorphosis of daSilva's body into print as a prelude to his death points not only to that disjunction between reality and the symbolic order, but also to the fatal incarceration of the former within the tropes enforced by the latter. The twin has become a hollow shell, the decaying reminder – the other daSilva views him as “his own sogging fool's life” (96) – of an identity defined by that imposed habitus or “material nexus” binding “the spirit of the universe” (114), which, as an artificial frame unrepresentative of the community, has circumscribed expression (“not a word blew from his lips”). Hence, it must be sloughed off to approach both “the folk” and the possibility of articulating a diversity of cultural inheritances. These ideas offer a way to understand the disappearance and return of the I-narrator in the novel. As an artificial, sovereign 'I' he must be broken down, and can be restored only towards the end of the text when a new relationship to the community has been established.

Thus, the fear that the body will become encrusted with writing – that

identity will calcify beneath the dead weight of ideology – is emblematic of, and inextricable from, Harris’s wider concern with the novel form. Like Ménil, he highlights the problems that arise in the Caribbean context for the conventional novel, and calls for a revolution in the latter, its transformation into something that “seeks to visualise a *fulfilment* of character [. . .] rather than [a] *consolidation*” (TWS 28). The tendency towards consolidation is typical of the nineteenth-century form of the genre, one that has “exercised a very powerful influence on reader and writer alike”:

And this is not surprising after all since the rise of the novel in its conventional and historical mould coincides in Europe with states of society which were involved in consolidating their class and other vested interests. As a result, ‘character’ in the novel rests more or less on the self-sufficient individual – on elements of ‘persuasion’ [. . .]. (TWS 29)

In other words, those socio-economic and philosophical changes detailed in Chapter One – the formation and imposition of a sovereign subjectivity in connection with an atomised, ‘modern’ body adjusted to the burgeoning demands of capital – play out also on the level of literary form. Presupposing the sovereign individual, the novel sets out to ‘persuade’ the reader to identify with a fixed notion of character; the text rests on “grounds of apparent common sense: a certain ‘selection’ is made by the writer [. . .] of items, manners, uniform conversation, historical situations, etc, all lending themselves to build and present an individual span of life”; and having allied the reader to this ‘inevitable’ plane of existence, it consolidates a preconception of humanity (TWS 29). In this way, the narrative can be said to work like the habitus, invoking only those ideas that

reinforce the 'commonsense' limits its ideological biases prescribe; anything else is rendered unthinkable.

Harris goes on to suggest that this particular novel form continues to dominate in the work of West Indians. Writing in 1967, he argues that, given the contemporary situation, this again is not surprising since "the novel which consolidates situations to depict protest or affirmation is consistent with most kinds of overriding advertisement and persuasion upon the writer for him to make national and political and social simplifications of experience" (TWS 30). In the Caribbean context, the most inimical effect of such simplification, even (or rather especially) when it is employed to protest oppression, is its flattening out of cross-cultural complexity. To affirm an identity via consolidation, and so to presuppose the sovereign subject, enables the assertion of an apparently stable or strong selfhood, yet also limits this within a one-sided framework. Thus, to conform to this model is to suppress the "series of subtle and nebulous links" latent within the West Indian (TWS 28). For Harris, therefore, the question that arises is "how one can begin to let these parts act on each other in a manner which fulfils *in the person* the most nebulous instinct for a vocation of being and independent spirit?" (TWS 31).

To answer this it is necessary first to examine the way that writing – or at least a specific understanding of it – is enmeshed in the web of ideologies that surround sovereignty as it was constituted (with respect to individuals, nations, and intellectual disciplines) following the philosophical and socio-historical changes precipitated by the Enlightenment and the growth of capitalism. Such changes, in particular that separation of mind from body, culture from nature, impacted upon language in the form of the words / things split. Writing became

a transcendent practice that, via the abstract sign system that now defined it vis-à-vis the inert materiality of the thing observed, imposed order on, and assigned meaning to, the profusion of the world. As Glissant puts it: “Genesis, which is the fundamental explanation, and ordering, which is the ritualised narrative, anticipate what the West would ascribe to Literature” (DA 239). At stake here is the way in which the order imposed by the sovereign tropes of this sign system is of an absolute and univocal kind. Consequently, connections between images, and so between the elements or structures to which they refer, are occulted. The upshot is the same as – and indeed inextricable from – that driving of a wedge between subject and object detailed in the previous chapter, which resulted in the reification of the ‘given’ world, the subject losing sight of the human relations and processes that produce society.

Addressing these concerns, Harris maintains that the “ruling assumption” of the self-sufficient story-line, with its emphasis on “a ratio of clarity,” is

a misconception of the legacy of tradition. [. . .] [T]he convolutions of image, whether clear or grotesque, are related as diverse rooms, capacities expanding or contracting within one field of consciousness. To prise these images apart is in fact to lose the dialectical field in which they stand or move. (TWS 55)

Again, the danger of such compartmentalisation assumes an added significance in the Caribbean. By obscuring the connections between people, it thwarts the potential for the articulation of a cross-cultural history, denying the creative creolizations that have occurred and forcing individuals into repressive sovereign moulds. The prising apart of images, moreover, which blinds one to the complexity of their interaction, has repercussions for the position of the writer.

Indeed, it is a key factor in Chamoiseau's struggle with the trope of the author and in his ambivalent attitude towards being an observer of the community. The convention of writing as a transcendent act – as an ordering and a Genesis – turns the author into a sovereign 'creator,' shaping the profusion of reality through authorial (authoritarian) intention. This 'authorising' of the one who writes thereby reproduces that separation of self and world, with the writing subject in danger of eclipsing his or her own interrelation to the object, as well as the entanglement of influences that exceed tidy, self-sufficient tropes. The very position of author, therefore, can raise problems for the Caribbean writer beyond that of its being historically the 'role of the master.' Even when writing has been appropriated, the danger remains that the writer, by squeezing the real into a series of ordered, ordering tropes, will prise apart critical connections and hence – repeating on a literary level Bolo's failure – miss in the very attempt at articulation a 'marvellous' history and the potential for community present in the intermixture of traditions.

A consequent uneasiness with the trope of the author, like the fictionalisation of the latter noted earlier, can be found in particular in various post-1960s Caribbean novels. In Sam Selvon's Moses Ascending (1975), for example, it assumes the form of the parodying of the protagonist's literary pretensions, most comically when his author/ity is undermined by his own authorial malapropisms.⁸ More overtly, Glissant in Mahogany (1987) and Orville in Laissez brûler Laventurcia (1989) have their characters challenge the writer over his portrayal of them. In the former text, Mathieu liberates himself from his restrictive and, in his eyes, falsifying character trope so as to become the "all-powerful creator" (28). But by retaining this notion of the author as an

omnipotent sovereign, he repeats the reductive telescoping of experience he struggles against; consequently, the narrative relay must be taken up by someone else to ensure the complexity of relations is not distorted. The point here, therefore, is not that one cannot write, but that one must do so in a re-visionary, self-interrogatory way. From another angle, these issues are addressed in Lovelace's The Dragon Can't Dance, where they are connected to that of the heroic rebel and his increasingly problematic position as representative of the community.

At first, Dragon would seem to suggest that, due to the vitality of the cultural practices of the community, the articulation of an identity and history coincident with lived experience remains achievable in a way that in Solibo it no longer is. Most significantly, there is Carnival. Brought to Trinidad by French-Creole planters, this custom was appropriated by the lower classes and reinscribed in terms of their own ritual practice, which “goes back centuries for its beginnings, back across the Middle Passage, back to Guinea and Dahomey and Congo” (112). Carnival now re-enacts this past, keeping it alive in the present, with the emphasis again on the body and its postures as the key repository of memory. For the dragon-maker Aldrick, fashioning his costume, “every thread he sewed, every scale he put on the body of the dragon, was a thought, a gesture, an adventure. He worked, as it were, in a flood of memories, [. . .] letting them soak him through and through; and his life grew before him, in the texture of his paint and the angles of his dragon's scales” (28). Recalling the religious rites of the Baptists in The Wine, the expression of this selfhood is associated specifically with fluid or polyrhythmic movement (redolent of the multiply-inscribed rituals and gestures through which the slaves articulated their

own history). When Aldrick sees Sylvia at Carnival, for instance, dressed as a slave girl and dancing “with all her dizzying aliveness, dancing wildly,” he wishes he could “swirl with her in the cyclone of affirming tears [. . .], swirling away with her until they disappeared into the self she was calling back, calling forth, praying for” (119).

The manifestation of this resistant identity, one grounded in an apparently still dynamic cultural-historical hinterland, is not as untroubled as it seems however. Society is changing, and with modernisation comes the gradual commodification of Carnival. To put on his dragon costume had been for Aldrick to “enter into a sacred mask that invested him with an ancestral authority” (112):

Once upon a time the entire Carnival was expressions of rebellion. Once there were stickfighters who assembled each year to keep alive in battles between themselves the practice of warriorhood born in them; and there were devils, black men who blackened themselves further [. . .] to make of their very blackness a menace [. . .]. (113)

But now such figures are “all gone, outlawed from the city or just died”; and Aldrick worries that their “message” too will be lost

among the clowns, among the fancy robbers and fantasy presentations that were steadily entering Carnival; drowned amidst the satin and silks and the beads and feathers and rhinestones. But bothering him even more than this was the thought that maybe he didn’t believe in the dragon any more. (113)

Carnival is being sanitised. In a process akin to folklorisation, its

commercialisation is stripping it of its dynamic connection to and interrogation of history, turning it instead into an empty spectacle. The Carnival masks become the ornaments of a static past, there to be consumed rather than revived and made meaningful in relation to contemporary conditions. This is Aldrick's fear for the dragon: that it is now only a hollow symbol whose resistant edge has been blunted. As such, it is symptomatic of the stifling of the community's 'marvellous' history, of that legacy of cultural combinations out of which Carnival was forged. If the 'dragon can't dance' it is because collective memory is ossifying, and with it that mode of expression tied to the movement of the body.

Similar problems arise in relation to the steelband. Just as the dragon dance provided Aldrick with a sense of himself and of his bond to the community, so the steelband offers the local Bad John, Fisheye, an outlet for the expression of his identity. Having arrived in Port of Spain, Fisheye sets out to establish himself in the city. Initially, however, he is unable to find adequate structures in which to ground his selfhood. Frequenting the cinema to watch US Westerns, he models himself on a cowboy:

He began to develop a crawl, a way of walking that was kinda dragging and slow, [. . .] his legs spread apart to give the appearance of being bow-legged from riding a horse. He walked, crawled to and from work, to and from the cinema, tall, slow, a bow-legged cowboy [. . .]. [A]nd he went, almost a spectacle [. . .]. (43)

As he adopts this imported trope, Fisheye's movements start to congeal, signalling (as Morton's petrified gestures in The Wine do) that he is in danger of

becoming detached from the history of the community, from that cultural legacy connected to bodily expression, one linked explicitly to his family's past: his father was a Baptist preacher and a stickfighter who passed on this art to his children (40). Rendered only a hollow "spectacle" by the posture he now assumes, Fisheye's subsequent frustration leads to the kind of madness identified earlier as being the result of the disjunction between lived experience and the structures of society. When the streets of Port of Spain fail to live up to his cowboy-inflected imaginings – "he would pick his way between the garbage and the dog shit with his secret power, his eyes searching the shadows for a hidden gunman [. . .] but all he saw was maybe a few fellars gambling" (42) – he goes home and smashes up his room. His desire for expression can manifest itself only in a mad, violent rush: walking the streets after being freed from jail he senses "his own strength stifling him. He wanted to burst out of himself, to fly out and become himself" (45). Society, it seems, is unable to provide the framework in which he can just *be*.

However, on joining the steelband Fisheye at last discovers a "place where he could be a man, where his strength and quickness had meaning and he could feel pride in belonging and purpose to his living" (46). The 'indigenised' practice of the band enables its participants to re-connect with a history of resistance and "warriorhood" (47). Melding the people together, it permits Fisheye to express himself as an integral member in a larger community, offering him "a warm embracing brotherhood and comradeship" (49). Even the battles between bands from different districts of the city are for Fisheye a "celebration and consecration of a greater brotherhood – a love that gained its nurture in the fierceness of their warring" (51). Nevertheless, Lovelace also suggests that such

battles are becoming a comforting, unthinking custom rather than a challenging affirmation of identity; the idea of the warrior is itself in danger of petrifying into a reassuring yet impotent trope. Early on it is said of Fisheye that for all the “love and power” he receives from the culture surrounding the bands, he makes “no move to go beyond living his warriorhood; and he went into battle after battle with that dull, triumphing might” (50). When Fisheye’s girlfriend Yvonne points out that rather than fighting each other in this repetitive, sterile fashion, the bands should fight those “who keeping down black people. Fight the government” (51), Fisheye recognises the sense in it. The other bandsmen, however, remain unable to “turn their eyes away from each other outwards to the world [. . .] where resided the levers of power that moved people, that moved them. It was as if they were purposively blind to this world” (53).

This almost wilful failure to abandon their habitual postures and challenge the status quo is cemented by the bands’ eventual co-option by the dominant order. The peace between rival groups Fisheye sought as the prelude to their unification in one rebel army is achieved; yet “this peace was no furtherance of his dream. It was a pleasant peace [. . .] of ending rather than beginning” (53). The cessation of hostilities stems from its being a precondition for corporate sponsorship. Thus, legitimacy is not ‘taken’ by the bands but imposed upon them, short-circuiting their resistance and inveigling them into the ambit of ‘official’ culture. Like the wider Carnival, the bands are commercialised. Transformed into an affirmation of the values of the dominant capitalist order, the sense of community they once articulated is replaced by a sterile ideal:

When [the steelband Desperadoes] appeared on the road with new pans and emblem and waving a new flag: Sampoco Oil Company

Gay Desperadoes, well, [Fisheye] almost went out his head. Gay?
Gay Desperadoes. That was the end. And instead of the little
fellars pushing the pans, you had the sponsors: the sponsor's wife
and the sponsor's daughter and the sponsor's friends [. . .] their
faces reddened by the excitement and the sun, [. . .] singing, All
Ah We Is One. (60)

Even as they celebrate the island's supposed unity-in-diversity, the sponsors marginalize the lower classes – the “little fellars” from the slums. In this respect, the ‘all o’ we is one’ mantra is an empty and invidious slogan; it becomes a means only to pre-empt any real interrogation of racial issues – issues such as the fact that those with financial power continue to be the lighter-skinned. Indeed, the slogan is part of what Stefano Harney calls Trinidad's metadiscourse of race, which “masks deep economic and political stratification and limits all discourses to the boosterism of racial harmony” (54). *Dragon* depicts clearly this obscuration through the character of Miss Cleothilda, the mulatto woman who owns a shop in Calvary Hill. At Carnival time she repeats incessantly the ‘all o’ we is one’ cry; yet such protestations of unity are not only contradicted by her “hostile, superior and unaccommodating” attitude to her neighbours (10). They also conceal the fact that this superiority, and its acceptance by those around her, is based not on her Carnival role as Queen – her ‘natural’ status within the supposedly equalising ‘all o’ we is one’ bacchanal – but on her lighter skin and her position as a shop owner – the latter a key reason for her prejudice towards the Indian Pariag: her fear that he will pose an economic threat to her livelihood.

The silencing or deforming of a representative discourse for the community by the very provision of pre-constituted tropes afflicts the political

sphere in general.⁹ Having lost faith in the steelband, for instance, Fisheye's enthusiasm for social change is briefly rekindled by politics and the growth of the PNM. As it raises consciousness to the need to challenge the colonially-constituted political hierarchy, the party is fast becoming "like a religion, [. . .] capturing people" (57). For Fisheye, this is "the thing the steelband might have become, [. . .] something joining people to people and people to dreams and dreams to hope that man would battle for more than to proclaim the strength of his arms" (57). The potential the PNM holds out for the unfolding of an alter/native history is emphasized by the way in which, filled with renewed belief, Fisheye's "gestures were beginning to flow again, his rhythm came back" (58). Even as he displays his excitement at the PNM, however, Fisheye unconsciously points to its underlying problems:

Fellars was talking. He couldn't understand the words. He doubted that they could explain them; but you didn't really need words to understand. You don't need words to understand the roaring of an ocean. Words were just a kind of background dressing, a kinda screen, a sound, the sounds. Manifesto, Nationhood, Culture, Colonialism. (57)

What appear to be the rallying cries behind a social revolution are inadvertently shown by Fisheye to be only empty slogans, ready-made tropes of anti-colonial struggle applied with no real interrogation of what they mean in the Trinidadian context. They function merely as "background dressing," eliciting an emotive response. Of course, this plays a critical role in inspiring collective action; yet so long as the representative framework provided for the community, along with class that provides it (the elite), remains tied to the existing structures of power,

the shift in control will comprise just another form of that Carnival inversion seen in Chapter One. Re-branding the system turns it on its head but leaves intact the fundamental mechanisms behind it. For Fisheye, the “elections came, the PNM won. No fight. [. . .] He couldn’t understand what they had won. [. . .] [W]hite people were still in the banks and the businesses [. . .]. The radio still spoke with a British voice” (58).

The failure of conventional politics in this respect drives Fisheye to outright rebellion alongside the disillusioned Aldrick. From the outset, however, the portents for this rebellion are bad. Like Bolo, Fisheye’s reaction to political disappointment is to harden his warrior stance; he dreams of an unambiguous conflagration, with him leading “an army of warriors to take back the bands, to take back the streets and alleys, the hills and the lanes” (62). To a greater extent than The Wine, Dragon shows the inadequacy of this form of resistance as a means to confront the particular pressures associated with late capitalism. Locked in the posture of the rebel, Fisheye is left blind to the insidious, competing demands placed on the community, demands that no longer resemble the overt oppression he aims to crush. As Aldrick recognises, the people “had jobs now, had responsibility for the surviving of families, could no longer afford rebellion at the Corner” (156). Fisheye’s fantasy of a straightforward war cannot respond to the subtle inculcation of conformity performed by the system.

In fact, the rebels ultimately contribute to the social status quo, unintentionally consolidating a mindset and habitus propitious to the very network of oppression they wish to oppose. As Fisheye’s gang terrorise ordinary workers on the grounds of betraying the struggle they alienate themselves from the community, which regards them “not so much as the disturbing conscience

they had become, but as the root cause of [its] problems” (158). The rebels’ rejection of the encroaching commodity culture strikes at the commercial re-appropriation and sanitization of cultural practices; it is apprehended in terms of the historical resistance of a people determined – as a consequence of their ancestors being treated as property – to define their “humanness” other than “by their possession of things” (112). As such, it offers an alternative to the materialism of the ruling ideology. However, this resistant philosophy also runs the danger of freezing into a reductive, even vindictive social code if mishandled. Harris notes that a culture that has “suffered grave disadvantages tends to build on its humiliations as the everlasting model of experience, tends to invest in a vocabulary that impoverishes being, tends to build on the way it has been circumscribed by history” (“Fabric of the Imagination” 18). Such is the case here: as the rebels trumpet their struggle they fail to interrogate the context in which it is undertaken, turning what is a necessary and defiant principle into a sterile protestation of victimhood that offers no solution to the current malaise.

The difficulty stems from the binary framework of oppressor / oppressed into which the rebels are locked: they are unable to conceive the complete transformation of society as distinct from just the reversal of the terms of the dichotomy. As we saw in Chapter One, for Harris the only means to unshackle a people from this framework and prevent the oppressed from simply becoming the oppressor in turn is to engage with both sides, dismantling the polarities between them; and to do this, “one has to rehearse the implications” of the relationship of victor to victim (“Literacy” 85). The problem, Dragon suggests, is that such rehearsal is impossible given the consolidation of identity: petrified within absolute tropes, the people lack a conduit for the articulation of a vision outside

the static, ruling order. This, it could be argued, lies behind the failure of the final revolt by Fisheye's gang, their revolutionary act nullified by the system through co-option, not confrontation. Significantly, the chapter on the uprising is entitled "The Dragon Dance," underlining its connection to Aldrick's position as an artist and to the impotency of a dragon that can't dance, that is, to the inadequacy of established creative forms to awaken society to its problems and to provide a missing vision. The novel teases out these associations via Aldrick's experiences. His father, Sam Prospect, upheld a tacit resistance to the imposed economic system through a stubborn irresponsibility. As with the rebels, this defiance is an initial and effective rebuff to the dominant order but is subsequently unable to provide a model for collective action, its impotence reflected in the image of Sam dying ### still stuck in the same unsatisfying jobs – with his "hands in his pockets" (165). His son repeats this gesture during the rebellion, indicating the entrenched postures into which resistance has sunk, the sense of inertia intensified when, circling with the others in the hijacked police jeep, Aldrick has a "feeling of being imprisoned in a dragon costume on Carnival Tuesday" (169). The powerlessness of the rebels is confirmed by what at first appears to be their victory. The police desist from attempting to stop them; yet far from a capitulation to the gang, such inaction is designed to allow the latter to condemn themselves. "The authorities trusted these men to fail [. . .]," says the defence lawyer at the rebels' trial. "They trusted that they would be unable to make of their frustration anything better than a dragon dance, a threatening gesture" (175). The rebellion falls apart because the rebels cannot see beyond a reactive affirmation of victimhood.

Later, Aldrick will come to recognise this. "We couldn'ta enter where

we had no vision to go,’” he explains; and without a revolution in perception, the tendency to seek validation in an imposed structure will continue: “‘How come everything we do we have to be appealing to somebody else. [. . .] Is like we ain’t have no self. I mean, we have a self, but the self we have is for somebody else. Is like even when we acting we ain’t the actor’” (179-80). Again, these concerns reflect back on the role of the artist, or the artist as revolutionary, and his or her relationship to the community. During the uprising, Aldrick takes over the megaphone used by the others to broadcast the message of the so-called “People’s Liberation Army” and begins to speak to the gathering crowds. It seems that, freed from the increasingly stifling carapace of the dragon mask, he has found his voice (as Sylvia informs him later: “‘Everybody was surprised you coulda talk so’” [188]). Yet his cries do not provide a transformative or redemptive vision; as David Williams observes, all he “can offer the waiting audience as a revolutionary message is a deterministic statement of the powerlessness that he shares with them” (145). Indeed, to the questions Aldrick poses them – “‘How can you rise with rent to pay and children to school, and watch hunger march [. . .] inside your house? How can you not make peace?’” (171) – he too has no answers. Aldrick the ‘revolutionary’ artist, then, like Aldrick the Carnival artist, is unable to break out of the socio-linguistic and political framework governing society, his words in danger of becoming yet more empty rhetoric.

His failure in this regard results in Aldrick consolidating the problematic trope of the heroic saviour: by “stirring the feelings” of the crowd, without awakening them to a critical or re-visionary awareness of their situation, he simply leaves them waiting “for something else, some kind of redemption, some

saving” (172). Hence, Aldrick becomes enmeshed in the same network of postures and responses that prevent Bolo’s rebellion from truly challenging the dominant order. The artist assumes the role of the Christ-like figure come to redeem the people, and in so doing reinforces the political structures that have both encouraged an abdication of responsibility among the masses and offered only the ‘comfort’ of victim status (stasis). Like the artist as ethnographer, the artist as revolutionary must question his or her relationship to the community; the writer must be disinvested of certain authorial masks just as language must be freed from particular tropological frameworks.

V.S. Naipaul’s novel Guerrillas provides an instructive comparison here. Like Dragon it is inspired partly by the 1970 Black Power revolt in Trinidad. Emphasizing the point raised earlier concerning the metadiscourse of race in Trinidadian politics, Naipaul asserts that Black Power on the island, because it is denied the visible target of white hegemony, is a “sentimental hoax” that “obscures the problems of a small independent country with a lopsided economy” (“Michael X” 189). For Naipaul, the imported nature of the revolutionary ideology renders all such rebellions parodies, their ‘actors’ locked in caricatured poses. In Guerrillas this posturing is linked to imposture in writing. The protagonist Jimmy Ahmed is a self-styled revolutionary and would-be author whose work constructs a fantasy world in which he is “a prince helping these poor and indigent black people,” a leader whom “they will parade in the streets” (57). The fraudulency of Jimmy’s politics is matched by the ersatz quality of his prose: his disquisitions slip from simple sloganeering – “All revolutions begin with the land” – to immature “fairy story” (9), while his obsessive use of Wuthering Heights to frame his writing suggests both a delusory romanticism

and an addiction to European forms.¹⁰ Just as Lovelace's rebels do not know their own self, so Jimmy is bereft of a voice that is not tied to powerless parody, his literary pretensions (which recall Ménil's Martinican petit bourgeois, failing to produce a novel because already a "character" in one) thus incapable, like his rebellion, of penetrating the reified shell of society.

Towards the end of Guerrillas, the text exposes such shortcomings via its own formal structure, revealing the failure of language, when predicated on the principle of persuasion, to offer an alternative to the stagnant conceits of History. When rioting breaks out in the city, the narrative remains detached, concentrating on the bourgeois characters at home high up on the outskirts; it does not descend into the possibilities that are perhaps being opened up below; it cannot provide a sense of anything beyond the characters' own biases:

Jane said, 'I'm glad to know what it's all about.'

Harry said, 'You mean about the "foreign domination." But in the end, you know, that is what those guys down there would believe they were doing. Because what they're doing is too crazy.'

'That's how it'll go down in the books,' Roche said. 'That's how it will be discussed. That's what you can start believing yourself.' (193-94)

The text only confirms the official history (that recorded in "books") of victimisation followed by protest; and while the characters recognise that beyond this something "crazy" is developing, their complicity with the dominant order prevents them from regarding it as anything other than chaos. In this way, the novel reflects the limitations of a narrative of consolidation, which, inextricable

from the affirmation of the bourgeois sovereign subject, cannot move beyond the ‘commonsensical’ surface of reality to voice the ‘craziness’ of the alternative history beneath.

Dragon too highlights such concerns, but goes further, pointing towards the transformation of conventional form. The disjunction between lived experience and the social framework is reproduced structurally. In the first five chapters, the novel introduces the major protagonists by dedicating a chapter to each, designating their role via headings such as “The Princess,” “The Dragon,” and “The Bad John.” The book thus gestures towards the novel of persuasion, establishing the presupposed traits of the individual at the outset and using the subsequent story to consolidate this conception. In each instance, however, the allotted persona does not fully coincide with the behaviour of the person. Indeed, it is incapable of accounting for the complexity of their situation: Aldrick is dedicated to the custom of the dragon mask but recognises that he must move beyond it and accept the responsibilities a relationship with Sylvia entails; Fisheye wants to be a Bad John but is uncomfortable with his own tough attitude. The alienation or madness produced as a result of the limited scope of such tropes is hence a comment on the shoehorning of individuals not just into imposed social moulds but literary ones too. A new form is required, then, one able to offer a vision-in-depth that scrapes away a calloused surface to reveal the entanglement of histories below. In turn, it must be capable of structuring these experiences in such a way as to enable their full expression. In its deformation of the conventions of character and narrative, alongside the dissolution of the trope of the author, Harris’s The Far Journey of Oudin dramatises the search for, and crafting of, this form.

The Writer and the Written: Delirium in the Tropes

Tell Desperadoes when you reach the hill,
I decompose, but I composing still

Derek Walcott, "The Spoiler's Return"

The relations of power established through the imposition of the legitimate linguistic habitus are central to The Far Journey. Again, writing occupies a privileged position in this nexus. The economic control exerted over the East Indian peasant community by the moneylender Ram, for example, is inextricable from his mastery of the written word. Through the contracts he has pressured them into signing, his debtors have "mortgaged their labour and their world to him" (127). "I only know to mek me mark on paper," explains Beti, forced to conceal her disposal of a covenant signed by her husband Oudin, "I never learn to read and write clever like you, Mr Ram" (130). The covenant would have secured the ageing moneylender's empire – it granted him control over Beti's unborn child – yet Beti has swallowed it, as she would do with "any kind of mysterious paper and appearance":

It was the oldest crumb of fear and habit binding the illiterate world of reflection around her. Pro-notes, transports on property, invaluable documents and contracts had been concealed in the belly from time immemorial, and fortunes were thus overthrown or mysteriously razed to the ground, cruel promises broken and repudiated. (136)

If the past of the plantation regime is evoked by the claim to ownership Ram extends over Beti, then her intuitive reaction is a reminder of the body's significance as a site of resistance for the enslaved. The passage highlights the imposed colonial division (which serves to justify the domination of the

unlettered) between the abstract world of the written (the civilized) and the material world of the flesh (the savage). That Ram's power still rests on this split indicates its entrenchment in society. Equally, in spite of her compulsive rejection of the authority of the word, Beti's body lacks that multiply-inscribed quality which was key to the articulation of an alternative history by the slaves; upon her, the "stamp of timeless slavery" alone is visible (125). When she consumes the covenant out of "habit," her body reiterates only the postures of the slave; the ideologies she confronts have riveted her memory into a one-sided comprehension of experience. Like Aldrick or Fisheye, Beti is locked in an assigned trope: she is "the representation of a slave despite her secret longing and notion to be free" (125).

The inculcation of a particular habitus has thereby once more tacitly set the limits on the thinkable. Indeed, the condition of the peasants in the novel recalls Harris's notion of the block function, which eclipses multiple traditions in favour of a uniform social or psychological framework and the "false clarities" of officialdom ("Literacy" 78). In *The Far Journey* a sterile materialism has gripped the community. The "empire" built by Ram, who exploits "every weak or submissive spirit [. . .] and plaster[s] all with a cheap sameness and inferior material façade," has left "only one staff of premature science and religion to lean upon, and that was the accumulation of other people's grotesque lives and insecurities and fears" (199, 234). This uniformity acts as a blinding carapace, stifling expression. "But is who fault if the only language we got is a breaking-up or a making-up language?" rails Kaiser. "At least nobody pretending they is anybody high-schooled and polite 'cept they got hard cash to rule'" (155). There exists both a semantic inarticulacy and an illiteracy of the imagination as

economic imperatives shackle language to an imposed framework. Thus flattened and impoverished it is unable to envision a world beyond the dominant order.

Such is the linguistic field here, one polarised between victors – those whose symbolic capital (in this instance, objectified economic capital) enables them both to control and to find their position reflected in the dominant discourse – and victims – those whose lack of such capital denies them purchase on the legitimate language to the extent that to use this discourse is to disenfranchise themselves. This is highlighted by Mohammed, whose speech reinforces his status as an “ideal victim” (199) in relation to the victor Ram, to whom he is in debt. His talk of the “curse” that haunts his family indicates how he blinds himself to the exploitative power relations that underpin his problems. Added to the “freakish inconsistency and break in his remarks” (199), he can express only a “pitiful resignation” (203) to his plight and so unwittingly contributes to the petrification of restrictive social forms.

Harris emphasizes how such perceptual frames are imposed by lacing his text with a series of images related to consumption, each of which connects to other repeated images. The economic connotations of consumption are highlighted through tropes of ingestion – profits, for example, are “eaten and swallowed” (168) – which recall the literal digestion of the covenant. In turn, this language infiltrates that used to describe the sun – it “shone and devoured the blinding heavens” (134) – so it too is associated with the blindness wrought by the uniform frame of materialism. These threads are then woven together in the portrayal of Mohammed’s cousin Rajah, who “believed in nothing save filling his belly” (187). As a child he suffered “from hookworm; and his empty devouring

insides drove him to steal from his father to eat” (187). Rajah’s greed fuels his later quest for money, but like his “devouring insides” this drive is self-destructive: it blinkers his outlook and leaves him in debt to Ram. At one point, while farming, he is described as “blind with the sun” (189), an image then merged with the figure of Ram; the latter, who has been “for some months now in his life, veiling and encircling the world” (189), comes and stands over Rajah, blocking his sight just as the materialistic worldview Ram symbolizes clouds his vision. By weaving this tapestry of images, Harris makes tangible how people become entangled in conceptual schemas; the layered deposits of meaning reflect the pressure exerted by the ideologies pasted over cultural formations. Indeed, the weight of Rajah’s belief in profit-making leaves him “chained to his daily task” (190). It has fixed his body within a one-sided, hollow ritual so that although he and his cousins can “afford to fill their paper bellies [. . .] the profits written there had less material weight than they appeared to signify and carry” (188).

However, at the same time as it emphasizes the straitjacketing of perception as well as the solidification of postures, the fervid quality of this language – its obsessive repetition of images – recalls the verbal delirium discussed earlier. As such, it can also be seen to dramatise the torment of history that afflicts the community and, in its very madness, offer a way through these problems. Indeed, it is by pushing this obsessive compulsive linguistic performance to an extreme that Harris not only points to the unlocking of ossified social moulds; he is also able to enact the breakdown of the ideologies of the sovereign Word – of writing as a transcendent practice bound to the self-sufficient storyline – and of the trope of the omnipotent author. In the novel,

these ideologies are symbolised by the covenant, which, as well as alluding to the Law of God, represents the one-sided, materialistic frame imposed on reality by Ram.

The flight of Oudin and Beti into the forest towards the end of the text signals the dissolution of this frame, its re-vision inextricable from a crumbling of uniform narrative and the release of suppressed tradition. Prior to this, however, the linguistic meshwork that has encased society is shown to be already in a state of decay:

Every word and meaning within [Mohammed and his family] was rotting. [. . .] Their partial neglect of the land was contained in the seed. Their disfiguring and vulgar quest for new ways of making money, the new dreaming architecture and house, the acquisition of sordid power, were all a beginning and a rot in the womb of subversion [. . .]. (162)

Just as an obsessive materialism has caused the “neglect of the land,” so the absolute frames plastered over society begin to wither since their one-sidedness has left them sterile, split off from the richer soils of heterogeneous tradition. This “rot” is stressed by the events surrounding the will Mohammed’s dying father has made, bequeathing the family estate to the idiot half-brother of Mohammed and his siblings. To protect their inheritance the latter replace the will with a blank sheet of paper – suggestive of the dissolution of (written) meaning that can occur when the mind is blinkered by a partial imperative. The subsequent murder of the half-brother, his uncertain parentage emblematic of the tangled history of the region (his mother was the “outside woman” of Mohammed’s father, but a “black-skinned coolie man” [159-60] also claimed

him as his son), hence symbolizes the suppression of this mixed tradition beneath the crust of materialistic bias. The upshot is only further rot, this time in the form of the psychological fissures that afflict the brothers. Each starts to question or to obsess over his position (significantly, Mohammed's rambling talk of curses sees Kaiser tell him to "Stop your rot" [174]). However, just as the "rot in the womb of subversion" is also "a beginning" since new seeds can grow from the mulch left by decomposed frameworks, so the drift into madness, which disturbs fixed perceptions, opens up the possibility of change and renewal.

Madness as a prelude to rebirth is a repeated theme in Harris's early novels. The "murderous rape and fury" that seizes the crew in Palace as they pilot the "straits of memory" (63), for example, is provoked by their encounter with repressed history (the Arawak woman) and serves to dash "the cloudy scale of incestuous cruelty and self-oppression [. . .] from their eye" (64). Such madness can be read in connection with the verbal delirium of dramatisation, therefore: it is bound to the revelation of a buried past, of an alternative perception of reality; it recalls the way in which Solibo's schizophrenia – his doubling of identity – made manifest that which was out of phase with the dominant order, his silences and his ramblings evoking the absent presence of another cultural body. Harris writes this same deliriousness into the narrative of The Far Journey. The language of the text plays out the moment when the shell of habit cracks open and reality crumbles to be re-imagined through eclipsed tradition: "The world sometimes went mad to restore what had been amputated and stricken" (213). Already we have seen how Mohammed's "over-burdened psychic mechanism," which "wanted to disgorge itself of everything at once" (199), leads him to talk incoherently. Similar pressures afflict Kaiser. The

absolute imperatives that drove him to murder fracture under their own weight and fissure his selfhood. He meets with Mohammed and experiences an “unexpected wave of hate” for his brother, contradicting “the harmonious rooted memories of the past” (170). This deviation from ‘commonsense’ is tied to his interpretation of “an expression he had picked up in the newspapers that day [. . .]. Nothing he harvested and gained was the reporter’s intention or fault. It was the miracle of a raw schooling and where the blame or praise truly lay was beyond a critical comprehension” (170). Dislodged from the stasis instilled by the social mould he had been shoehorned into, Kaiser is able to interpret the written in a new, open fashion. As the bonds that attached him to the dominant values begin to fray, he can see beyond “the economic writing and reason” so that the newspaper’s phrase – “a cancer in the body politic” – is taken as a sign not only of Mohammed’s financial troubles, but also of the need to rethink his place in a decomposing world.

In fact, Kaiser discovers that he is “losing his fixed unreflective submersion and participation in all” (173). Thus sundered from the dominant plane of existence he can envision reality anew: ranting at Mohammed in a “voice unlike his own” he foresees his brother’s death and the flight of Beti; he lives “no longer in the loyal conspiratorial past but in the ubiquitous shoe and trespass of the future” (175). As the ruling space-time conventions crumble and other realities are released, the shell of sovereign identity that moored Kaiser to such conventions peels away to leave him strung out through parallel histories. It is a recurrent motif in Harris’s work, the trope of the self-sufficient individual collapsing to produce a self extended concertina-like through other selves or masks, each connected to different (partial) realities. Like Solibo, Kaiser

doubles. At the time of his death in the rum shop fire he is met by two beggars: one bears a “ghostly resemblance” to his brother Hassan; the other is himself, “transformed and finished beyond all recognition” in the “cloudy mirror” of a blackened and charred “negro” (179). The twin outlines an alternative reality: “I can pass as a negro pork-knocker and I shall take a passage to the goldfields of Cuyuni and Mazaruni” (181); yet this only perpetuates a one-sided materialism. Moreover, Kaiser still associates the written with the power to dominate others: “I have heard of black emperors whose signature alone will rule the world” (182). But the ‘delirious’ text, having broken with uniform narrative, can provide still more alternatives; and it does so with the ghost of Hassan, who now embodies a limited (because absolute) spiritual escapism.

Earlier we saw how a latticework of interconnected tropes was used to suggest the way in which perception was encased by a calcified web of ideology. As Kaiser dies this constellation is again invoked: images of the sun (the blinding power of materialism) and of ink (the fixity of the written) return in train with other associated symbols. Here, however, the interweaving of tropes, having become increasingly delirious, is such that meaning is no longer reinforced but exploded. The repetitions and rhythm of the text imbue its language with a ritualistic quality, each symbol now not so much a marker of the denotation of the sentence, but a node that connects to a series of other nodes to produce an open network of sliding significations. As it did for the sovereign individual, the carapace of self-sufficiency surrounding the sign falls away to reveal its “convolutions,” as Harris put it. Images are no longer ‘prised apart’ by writing; instead, they rediscover the “dialectical field in which they stand or move.” Thus, rather than being the passive reflection of a pre-constituted real, the symbol

becomes active, enacting the yoking together of meaning or realities into a new vision or architecture. The ritualistic repetitions of the text are hence what enable it to shed the bonds of a 'persuasive' form and so enter into that 'craziness' below in a way that Naipaul's text could not.

Discussing ritual practice, Bourdieu notes that it "brings the same symbol into different relationships by apprehending it through different aspects"; and while "one of the different aspects [. . .] necessarily comes to the forefront, it does not cease to be attached, like the keynote to the other sounds in a chord, to the other aspects which persist as undertones" (LP 88-89).¹¹ Ritual sequences can be seen as "modulations," therefore, which play on the "harmonic properties" of ritual symbols (LP 89). Harris's image clusters work in the same way.¹² The fire that engulfs Kaiser is connected to the "devouring" sun. Yet the former now also connects the latter to Hassan's funeral pyre, and hence to spiritualism and resurrection; indeed, Kaiser's double is "burnt black by the mystery of the sun" (179). These images chime with those of ash, charcoal, and smoke that suffuse this section, and which modulate into images of trees and ink. At his death Kaiser

drew his fabulous corollary and signature in branches and fingers of charcoal, and feet of cloud and ink. [. . .] [H]e saw his feet were all black with ink, and he had sketched two curious faces on the ground, whom he addressed like a child playing a foreign ethnological game. (179)

Here the succession of tropes creates a ritualistic sequence in which each aspect draws to itself traces of other meanings and chains of images. The self-sufficient unity of the signs is dissolved as they are combined to release a series of -- at

times contradictory – connotations. For instance, the phrase “branches and fingers of charcoal” snares the tree, fire, and writing image clusters. Within this network, the branches / fingers comparison could be a simple simile; yet the “and” yokes the two together as both the same and different. Hence, each has their meaning displaced: the fingers could be charcoal sticks to write the signature, or body parts burnt in the fire; but they might also be descriptive of the charcoaled branches, which cannot become charcoal without ceasing to be branches. As interpretation shifts, all and none of these are correct. The syntagmatic unity of the sentence is broken; it does not consolidate a self-evident signification. However, this apparent void in meaning opens up a space or paradigmatic depth that unblocks a reservoir of tradition. A more complex vision can thus emerge. In this instance, the blurred boundary between body and tree suggests the transformation of matter: the conversion of wood into ashes becomes the cremation and rebirth of the individual, an association strengthened by the image of ash in the context of Hindu tradition where it is tied to the recreation of the world.¹³ The body / tree union – fingers superimposed on a spread of branches – also evokes the crucifixion, and hence resurrection.

The rhythm of the text, moreover, intensifies the doubling and dismemberment of monolithic tropes. The first sentence of the passage contains three sets of paired words: “corollary and signature”; “branches and fingers”; “cloud and ink.” The tumbling cadence of this chain – the language is slowly pared down from the multi-syllabic “corollary” to the compact “ink” – indicates how Harris slices away at the Word. He erodes its crust of fixed bias by way of repetitions and associations, which then re-member imageries in relation to the manifold new meanings that have been released.

The written is thus invested with a new fluidity, something underlined in the above passage by the emphasis on ink, that is, on the liquid resource that facilitates writing rather than the congealed printed word. Just as the initiation ritual in vodun induces rebirth after a period of sensory deprivation, so here language is ‘resurrected’ after the making delirious of its static tropes, the flowing ink on Kaiser’s feet a sign of its subsequent capacity to re-imagine identity.¹⁴ The faces sketched on the floor (which recall the *vèvès* drawn during vodun ceremonies¹⁵) are the beggarly doubles who raise the prospect of other realities. To write has hence become to rehearse, to revise rather than to consolidate. Thus later in the novel Kaiser is rewritten (reborn) as a woodcutter, while Hassan returns as a fisherman. As Maes-Jelinek notes, when the latter merges with the “fluid life of the river” it is an indication “that he himself has at last begun to move and change” (22). The double holds out the possibility of fulfilling an alternative history, therefore. Commenting on *The Far Journey*, Harris observes that in “European literature doubles tend to be sinister, but the double, as I found myself moving into it, had to do with this theme of rehearsal” (“Literacy” 81). As the double of the murdered heir (the symbol of mixed tradition), Oudin rehearses the fate of his doppelganger. In so doing, he is able to understand – in a way that the rebels in *Dragon* failed to do – his connection to those “against whom he is rebelling”; in other words, “his rebellion is not merely a rebellion” but goes “much deeper into the soil” to “break a certain kind of mould” and open him to a re-visionary perception (“Literacy” 81). As reality is fractured by socio-economic and imaginative pressures (the cross-cultural convolutions of the latter chafing against the ‘clarity’ of the dominant order), what the novel describes as the “crucial rehearsal” of the journey into the forest

introduces the possibility of restoring the reservoir of tradition amputated by History. And since this journey is inseparable from the flight of Beti, it is inseparable from the renewal of the Word; for it is Beti who eats the covenant – who consumes the written as (divine) Law – and so breaks the contract not only with Ram, but also with an authoritarian (author-as-God) model.

When she vomits the “torn scraps of paper,” which are all that remain of the digested covenant (135), Beti throws up a new time, one different to that defined by the economic imperatives associated with Ram.¹⁶ The dissolution of this latter frame is inextricable from the appearance of Oudin. “But time itself change since he come,” complains Mohammed. “Is like I starting to grow conscious after a long time” (198). Oudin resuscitates the past to reintegrate lost perspectives. His arrival at Mohammed’s house collapses temporal distinctions. Past and future merge so that Mohammed (in the future present) is recalled to a time prior to Oudin’s arrival, yet once in this past present he is haunted by memories of the future: “He shivered a little. Certainly this was *not* Oudin. Who was *Oudin*? Where had the name sprung from? The man he beheld on the road – who looked like the spirit of Oudin – was his half-brother” (149). The release of time from the prison of History is connected explicitly to the fate of the covenant. Oudin’s presence lights

the tall reflective fire [. . .], which was to illumine the constructive and relative meaning of time, as if the seed-water in the flood of the river, where Beti had beaten her soapsuds and vomited, now rose into a dreaming spirit-fire at Ram’s feet. Oudin had risen early and collected [. . .] damp chips of wood like the masks and bones of death Mohammed plotted with [. . .]. (165)

Through this constellation of images it is suggested that time – the conspiratorial time or mask that shaped Mohammed’s money-driven plot – has been consumed, its wood-like fixity burnt away in a fire spawned from water. But just as language consumed by paradox returns renewed, so here time is voided to be filled (fulfilled) by a fluid torrent of tradition. It is devoured by the flood (fire), which recalls both Ram’s past (the “great flood [. . .] of his childhood recollection” [139]) and Beti and Oudin’s future (they marry during a second flood), while also alluding to the postdiluvian time of Christian tradition. Moreover, the images of seed-water and spirit-fire are taken from The Secret of the Golden Flower (the treatise of Chinese philosophy that informs much of The Far Journey) where they refer to the way to the Elixir of Life or the spiritual rebirth attained through the union of the spirit and the flesh.¹⁷ As the connection established by the vomited paper indicates, the breakdown of uniform time is inextricable from the breakdown of the uniform text; and it is the subsequent reanimation of both via a multiplicity of traditions that the forest sequence enacts.

Harris has suggested that when Oudin abducts Beti “other texts come into play which have been hidden away, lost away [. . .] and as these come into play, suddenly Beti realizes that she is now in a position for the first time to *read* the world, to *write* something within herself, *through* herself” (“Literacy” 82). The arteries of imagistic language that run through the novel sustain these other texts or traditions until their later suffusion of the narrative. The ambivalent symbol of fire, for example, is tied to both the Hindu funeral pyre and the spirit-fire of Chinese philosophy. It can also be linked to the images of matchsticks that recur throughout the text. Their burst of flame signifies a moment of “blinding enlightenment and discernment” (207); one can see “everything miraculous and

new in the scratch of a match” (202). On the one hand, this alludes to *Li*, which, as one of the eight trigrams that underpin The Secret of the Golden Flower, represents the sun and fire; it dwells in the eyes and initiates rebirth.¹⁸ On the other hand, a connection is made to the “bundle of light firewood” *Beti* is carrying “on her head” when she first meets Oudin (145). This vein of imagery finally overflows in the forest via the figure of the fisherman. Already we have seen that he is the rewritten version of Hassan; yet the description of his face as like an agitated pool “when water outs fire, and then waits for the spirit-fire to return again and baptize every ripple” (210) also links him to *Li*. However, the Christian tradition animates him too: his speech and his submersion in the river connect him to John the Baptist (“I baptize you with water; but there is one to come who is mightier than I. [. . .] He will baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire” [Matt. 3:16]). The comparison of his fishing basket to a “live decapitated head” (208) strengthens this allusion, but also recalls, via the batch of fish, the bundle of firewood *Beti* carried.

The reference back to *Beti* here is crucial. Oudin notes that the “basket-head on the ground was his own decapitated one”; fished from the sea by the “first of his ghostly executioners,” it is the “offering of repentance and sacrifice he must accept in himself and overcome, to be the forerunner of a new brilliancy and freedom” (210). He is, then, the saviour of the community who relives the murder of his double as a self-sacrificial act that replays the suppression of tradition. However, rather than consolidating the tragedy of the past, his rehearsal of the voiding of death transforms this void into a creative, redemptive space. His character does not coagulate around a new set of biases; instead, as he becomes “empty of all thought and feeling” (218), Oudin acts as a lightning rod

for the traditions that now emerge with the fall of block society / the uniform text. Nonetheless, this redemption is unobtainable without Beti for it is she who re-members him.

Beti's break with the trope of slave, via the crumbling of her habitus, allows her to 'read' the world on her own terms. Thus it is she, not the 'author,' who rewrites Oudin:

What she had to do was to make her kind of secret mark on him – the obvious mark an illiterate person must make in lieu of a signature and name. With her toes she drew in the sand an incomprehensible fertile figure within a hollow cage at Oudin's feet. (218)

Such writing thereby takes place through the body, and is informed by the newly freed memories the latter sustains; it contradicts that ideology encapsulated in the belief that a "signature alone will rule the world" (182). If Oudin symbolises that "new art of fiction" Harris desires, where the hero "is a 'vacancy' in nature within which agents appear who are translated one by the other" (ES 17), then it is crucial that it should be Beti who 'translates' him. On the one hand, it ensures that the narrative does not consolidate the problematic trope of the heroic male sacrifice. On the other, the fact Beti 'translates' Oudin via the body ensures that to write here is not to transcend the material storehouse of memory. Evoking the ritual practices of those historically denied access to 'legitimate' forms of expression (the figure through which she writes Oudin is a ritualistic mandala), Beti's actions sketch the lineaments of a new artistic form. They indicate how writing must transgress the limits set by a 'civil' or 'sacred' Word to incorporate elements of those 'profane' crafts that provide a link to a specific cultural history.

Just as her consumption of the covenant digests and dissolves the authoritarian Word, so Beti's actions reveal how writing can no longer be based on the selection of self-evident materials performed by an author-as-God. The text enacts the breakdown of the trope of the sovereign writer, therefore. The latter becomes just another 'agent' in the novel, a "fiction created by his own characters" ("Literacy" 82). But Harris is not suggesting that all meaning is fragmented with the 'death of the author' (God). He argues that "the death of God may in fact bring about, paradoxically, a replay of forces that revive the drive and dynamism of creation so that the Creator is there within some complex, thrusting, marvellous tradition" ("Literacy" 83). Signal here is the phrase "marvellous tradition," which makes clear that what is at stake is not a form of postmodern play, but a concern specific to the Caribbean's need to reintegrate a multiplicity of perspectives. The sloughing off of sovereign carapaces is necessary to open up the text to the "subtle and nebulous links" – the morass of cultural influences – that define the Caribbean, which in turn permits a multitude of interpretations to accrue to the narrative. Traversed by the flows of uncovered histories, each 'agent' in the novel is constantly recreated through the layers of meaning these deposit, with every new interaction revealing new possibilities.

Indeed, when The Far Journey is read from this open perspective a tradition becomes visible that illuminates the novel's themes of disintegration and reassembly. The 'dismembered' Oudin, re-membered by Beti, can be understood as resonating with the Egyptian god Osiris. The offspring of an adulterous intrigue between the earth and sky gods, Osiris was murdered by his brother Set and rent into fourteen pieces. However, his wife Isis reassembled the body parts, reviving Osiris, who then ruled as king over the dead.¹⁹ The motif of

decay and rebirth, coupled to the 'reaping' of his limbs, established Osiris as a corn-god, his body the personification of the crops that grew from the fields fertilized by the flood of the Nile. Just as the birth and murder of Oudin's double is mirrored in the myth of Osiris, so the restorative role of Isis echoes the 'resurrection' induced by Beti. Moreover, the novel introduces Oudin with an account of how, having awoken with "a drowning sensation in his mouth," he sees in "the image of his limbs the dry brown stalks of harvest. He had been reaped and he lay staring and dead" (123). Like Osiris, Oudin personifies the cut corn; and just as the crops will revive once 'drowned' by the river's waters, so Oudin's death is the prelude to "a new freedom" (123) since it represents the birth of an original vision released from the confines of Ram's covenant (the repressive Word).²⁰

The parallels between the novel and the Osiris myth suggest the archetypal resonance the open text achieves, its ability to be ceaselessly rewritten in the light of recovered tradition. A final point on Osiris: as king of the underworld he was aided by his brother Thoth, god of scribes and the moon, who recorded the weight of souls. As Derrida notes, Thoth is a "substitute capable of doubling for the king, the father, the sun, and the word" (90). A god of the passage between opposites, he is reminiscent of Oudin as the trickster double (brother) who substitutes for his master Ram (the "devouring" sun) and is inextricable from the change in the Word. Just as Thoth must note down the soul's weight before it can pass into the divine kingdom to exist anew, so Oudin is the conduit for the 'dead' tradition reanimated by the flight into the forest. The image of a 'scribe' who breathes life into the traces of tradition returns us to Chamoiseau's *marqueur de paroles* who, in Chancé's words, "does not invent the

text, nor ‘elaborate’ an oeuvre. He contents himself with humbly noting down, repeating, transcribing, or ‘translating’ [. . .] a fragile word” (63).

Thus the *marqueur* is a critical stage in the transformation of writing and of the author. In light of The Far Journey’s dismemberment of both, one can see now how the *marqueur* must occupy an in-between – or, more appositely, limbo – stance vis-à-vis sovereign creativity or dissolution in the group. Just as Harris replays and reiterates tropes, so the *marqueur* assumes a variety of subject positions that are to be worn like masks – played out, critiqued, and thrust into new relationships. Here, we do not have the writer as director, arranging ‘actors’ in accordance with a preformed plan, for the writer is an actor too. But equally we do not have a documentary-style reproduction of the real, since the imaginative appropriation of masks – the creativity born from role-playing – is necessary to penetrate and express the depths of reality (a point I will return to in the next chapter). Likewise, it is vital that such masquerading remains a self-critical practice, the author interrogating his or her relationship to the masks adopted so as not to become trapped in an unthinking, unrepresentative frame. Writing’s “distance” from the real, as Solibo put it, is not necessarily reductive so long as when one “touch[es] the distance” it is in order to take into consideration its effects. This distance too must be dramatised, just as Aldrick recognises he must re-imagine both his role and his place in the community.

The transformative capacity of the artist is itself transformed then; but it is not renounced. ‘Patrick Chamoiseau’ in Solibo may worry over his ability to represent the community; but, reflecting the *marqueur*’s in-between position, the ‘in-between’ section of the novel – that ‘delirious’ narrative between the opening police report and the final ersatz recreation of Solibo’s speech – approaches, via

its constant play on a multiplicity of linguistic registers, the entanglement of realities in Martinique. (It is not until Texaco, however, that this writing is married to a form capable of narrating and redeeming the full history of the community.) Similarly, in Dragon, when Aldrick returns from prison his emotional growth is tied to the prospect of an aesthetic that can circumvent the impasse evident in Guerrillas. Harney views Aldrick's declaration towards the end of the text that each man "had responsibility for his own living" (196) as an assertion of individualism over group identity, and so as a "leaving behind [of] past imagined communities like the yard or carnival" (Harney 44). Yet it should rather be viewed as a recognition of the need for a more self-reflexive understanding of identity and society, one that would preclude the abdication of responsibility at the foot of a heroic saviour. The community can be re-formed from this reappraisal of its constituents; it is not the past or the group that is ceded, only a static or preconceived approach to both.

Likewise, Aldrick's abandonment of the dragon costume is not the end of the artist's role in voicing the community's resistance; it just emphasizes the need for a new form of practice. On his return, Aldrick considers becoming a sign painter:

He thought of some signs he could paint: Beware the dog! No spitting! Trespassers will be prosecuted according to the Law! [. . .] He had to laugh. Maybe he could paint some new signs of life, of hope, of love, of affirming, and let his own living match and mirror them. (179)

The prospect of renewal implied by the creation of these new signs is suggestive also of a shift towards a new narrative form. Just as Aldrick (surname: Prospect)

will not paint prescriptive slogans that confirm “the Law,” so the text must move beyond the rhetoric of persuasion and consolidation. Any representative framework, moreover, must be coincident with the experience of the people: it should “match and mirror” their “own living.” Significantly, the Indian Pariag also gestures towards this as he contemplates his search for acceptance in a community that has ostracised him. Reflecting on a people “making new drums, new sounds, a new music from rubbish tins and bits of steel and oil drums, bending the iron over fire, chiselling out new notes,” he wishes he “woulda go in there where they was making their life anew in fire, with chisel and hammer, and sit down with my sitar [. . .] and say: Fellars, this is me, Pariag” (202). Here we have the lineaments of that original artistic form able – as Pariag’s hopes of inclusion suggest – to articulate all strands of the community. Tied to the rituals and crafts of the people, it refuses to limit expression to the ‘propriety’ of the sovereign Word; like the instruments Pariag admires, it is a complex bricolage of materials. In the next chapter, we will see how this form offers a way to structure and (re)write the epic of the community, its narrative vessel extruded from lived experience and attentive to the movement of that body “chiselling out new notes.”

Chapter 3: Ritual and the Rebirth of Epic

Martinican poetry will be cannibal. Or it will not be.

René Ménil, *Antilles déjà jadis*

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory?

Derek Walcott, *The Sea is History*

“The crystallisation of the national consciousness,” writes Fanon in his discussion of the impact of the decolonization movement on national culture, “will both disrupt literary styles and themes, and also create a completely new public” (WE 193). With the changed socio-political situation comes the demand for an original narrative form able to express the collective memory of the emerging community. Traditionally, the epic has fulfilled this role: works such as the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* are the “poetic cry” of the blossoming consciousness of a people; they consolidate a lineal continuity between the contemporary socius and its origin, invoking “the principle of a Genesis and of a filiation so as to establish a legitimate right to a land which from that moment becomes a territory” (Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* 59-60). But this epic formula breaks down when applied to the overlapping and disjunctive histories that define the Caribbean. Here the body of memory itself, scarred by the wounds and amnesias of the past, poses a dual problem: how to bear witness to colonial deprivation, yet also reclaim a legacy from which to construct a redemptive vision of the future. History as a record of brutality may become a Medusa, as Walcott puts it in “The Muse of History” (36), fixing one in the monolith of victim. This sense of the past as characterised by lack is made manifest (at least to those conditioned to accept such an idea) by the absence of monuments in the Caribbean, of the imprint of an epic legacy grounded in a

classical order. Unsurprisingly, that archetypal colonial imitator Ralph Singh of Naipaul's The Mimic Men is consumed by this anxiety, contrasting the 'disordered' vegetation of his island home with fantasies of ancient empires and Aryan horsemen adventuring across snowy landscapes.

But as Walcott will make clear in reply to the questions with which he begins "The Sea is History," cited as the second epigraph above, such 'monumental' visions are inapplicable to the Caribbean. The point however is not that the latter is devoid of a creative past, but that a different form of remembrance is required in a region where history is fluid and polyvalent. In previous chapters we have seen how the integument of the sovereign subject is unsuited to the articulation of the density of traditions that traverse the West Indian. Indeed, block sensibility imprisons the consciousness of the community; the rebirth of its members will occur only with the shedding of the carapaces of self-sufficient identity. The unshackling of Beti in The Far Journey from the posture of slave, for example, is driven by socio-economic crises and her own "secret longing and notion to be free" (125); yet at work too is the pressure exerted by a network of cultural legacies straining against the uniform framework imposed on society and embodied in individual habitus. As this one-sided mould cracks open, the subsequent expansion of Beti's consciousness becomes integral to the actions she pursues: the flight into the forest and her bodily 're-writing' of Oudin, both of which point to the emergence of a new apprehension of community.

In this chapter, I will explore more closely the gestation of an expanded, cross-cultural consciousness and its role as the key to an understanding of Caribbean history from an alter/native, re-visionary perspective. In light of

Fanon's comment, I want to examine what happens to literary form, particularly epic form, when received ideas of space and time (and with them identity – that “completely new public” of which Fanon speaks) are re-imagined in order to penetrate an apparently uniform history of victimisation. The novels studied in this section seek to return to the erosions suffered by the community in such a way that, as Harris puts it, “as one looks *through* each detail of the past a depth of possibilities exposes itself: the man-made ruin and ‘fault’ of landscape enter into a new, sometimes extreme original unity or wholeness of being” (ES 45). In short, what has been perceived as absence or dereliction is reclaimed as the open ground upon which new cultural architectures can be erected. If Chamoiseau's Chronique diagnosed the tragedy of Martinican creole culture, and Solibo pointed to that which must be transformed, then Texaco provides a framework and a language in which to imagine the community beyond deprivation. As the protagonist Marie-Sophie recounts what she calls her “poor epic” (495), Chamoiseau not only reanimates the frozen traces of a submerged past, but also shows how the practice of culture underlying these traces can be utilised in the present to structure a social order able to confront the challenges of late capitalism.

Equally, Harris's The Four Banks of the River of Space, while less concerned in a realist sense with the emergence of national community, nevertheless enacts the re-imagining of collective identity via its concern for the recuperation of personal memory through the cross-fertilisation of cultural tradition. Moreover, the text draws directly from the Odyssey, with Odysseus's quest for home re-written in relation to the protagonist Anselm's quest back into a repressed, traumatic past. The revision of the Homeric vessel of cultural

memory – the disinterment of hidden possibilities that reverse epic fate – parallels the dissolution of the frames that circumscribe Anselm’s consciousness. Just as the novel transforms the tragic equation between justice and vengeance, which in the Odyssey appears to make inevitable Odysseus’s slaying of the servant women on his return to Ithaca, so Anselm must rethink his disavowed relationship to the murderer Canaima. To break the cycle of terror, he is required to acknowledge his complicity with violence; in this way, the “mould of revenge gives way to profoundest self-confessional imagination,” through which one can envisage previously inconceivable connections (Harris, “Unfinished Genesis” 258). Anselm’s own return home after a dream voyage becomes, thus, a return to a new density of memory.

As Four Banks rehearses this re-visionary expansion of consciousness, epic as a means to root the community in an exclusive territory is appropriated, only to be transfigured by its repetition. The novel seeks to locate memory in both senses of the word: to recover that which has been lost and to situate something in a particular place. Unlike in traditional epic, however, this place is not legitimised in relation to an absolute History. The site of memory in the text is the “Imaginary City of God” Anselm dreams of building (285). On a ‘realistic’ plane this city is to be constructed near the Potaro river in Guyana to house refugees from World War II. But the space is also conceived as a theatre in which other histories can be replayed. Significantly, the city is located “within the fabulous ruins of El Dorado” (279), the mythical City of Gold sought by European colonizers. This contested geographical and discursive space – its legend a corruption of the memory recounted by Amerindians of a chief who coated his body in gold dust – is a reminder not only of the physical conquest of

the ‘New World,’ but also of how the land was codified in terms of European needs and fantasies through the imposition of epic narratives.¹ For Harris, though, it is precisely the delirious profusion of these narratives and the overdetermined nature of this space that fosters the seeds of revision. “Odysseus has been drowning in the Caribbean sea [. . .] for centuries,” he writes, “drowning yet resuscitating in rehearsals of Troy to fight wars of colonial expansion and conquest. It is no longer possible for him to arrive in New World El Dorados that are in equation with ancient Ithacas as a single man” (RI 91). Consequently, the root-like singularity of epic memory is fractured. The energy released from the violent collision of peoples that attended the European drive to enforce a uniform History rebounds in a new dynamic that renders plural Odysseus himself. The archetypal European adventurer is now “borne upon the shoulders – reborn within the flesh – of many cultures” (RI 92). The implications for Harris’s philosophy of history can be elucidated through a comparison with Naipaul’s The Loss of El Dorado.

As the title of his study suggests, Naipaul evokes the expeditions mounted in search of the fabled City of Gold as symbolic of the privation that marks the region. The quest, he writes, had “begun as a dream as large as the New World itself; it had ended in this search for a mine no one had seen, in an action of amateurs, in which all the great ones, and few of the lesser, perished” (90). The pursuit of Arcadia by men who “saw themselves as actors in great events” (91) was in fact a debased imitation of chivalric epic. For Naipaul, it heralds the start of the fraudulence and degradation that will shape all subsequent ‘New World’ experience: El Dorado signifies a sense of potential – a “swiftly passing moment when romance could be apprehended” (91) –that was lost and cannot be

regained; and this loss conditions and taints all future experience.² Nana Wilson-Tagoe contends that such determinism reflects Naipaul's wider vision of history as a "continuous story of movement," in which past time is "a single unit separated from the present yet defining its quality" (70). The wounds of history are inescapable, at least in the sense that one must acknowledge their impact in order to avoid slipping into delusion or mimicry through an attachment to a lost or non-existent ideal. This is not, therefore, to dismiss Naipaul with the usual cry of pessimist. He articulates a paradox in which continuity resides in a recognition of the irretrievable losses that define the past. Insight comes to those who connect present action to the "historical necessity that conditions or restrains it" (Wilson-Tagoe 67).

The problem, however, is that based upon such premises history will remain circumscribed by the fact of deprivation, interred as a broken relic. And while a recognition of past losses is crucial, to construe them as irretrievable is to consign to the void the live traces they contain which subsist precisely in erosion and ruin, and which could provide the key to a new epic or vision of history freed from sclerotic tragedy. For Naipaul, loss is always loss; he may offer a redemption *from* history, but he cannot offer a redemption *of* history. Here Harris provides an alternative, best exemplified by his approach to El Dorado. Precisely because it has been the focus of so many projected desires, he considers El Dorado an 'open' myth. As such, he does not regard it as fixed in space and time:

The ruins of El Dorado – whose location tended to shift from region to region, continent to continent, from the present into the remote past, even as it hovered over the future – encompassed

[. . .] the proportions of formidable live fossil (cross-cultural) theatre: ancient Ithaca [. . .] and modern doors, the door of the modern unconscious uplifted into consciousness [. . .].

(Four Banks 283)

This past, then, is not a single, finished unit that exerts a predetermined influence on a discrete present; rather it remains active in the now. In the apparently dead space of the tomb reside fossil spaces, kernels of potential sprung from other histories that did not come to fruition within a historical matrix of brutality, but which persist as an unconscious legacy that can be “uplifted” into consciousness to shed new light on the past, present, and future.

With this in mind we can broach Harris’s key concern: how to let the variable parts of a cross-cultural past “act on each other in a manner that fulfils *in the person* the most nebulous instinct for a vocation of being” (TWS 31). His solution requires that “the monument of consolidation breaks down and becomes the need for a vision of consciousness”: the legacy of El Dorado as a monument to folly and loss must be viewed as embedded also with unconsummated possibilities (TWS 32). For Harris, one cannot dismiss the “instinctive idealism” that ran parallel to, but was quashed by, the exploitation and greed that defined the quest for the City of Gold:

[T]he substance of this adventure, involving men of all races, past and present conditions, has begun to acquire a residual pattern of illuminating correspondences. El Dorado, City of Gold, City of God [. . .]; in terms of the novel the distribution of a frail moment of illuminating adjustments within a long succession and grotesque series of adventures [. . .] capable *now* of discovering

themselves and continuing to discover themselves so that in one sense one relives and reverses the 'given' conditions of the past, freeing oneself from catastrophic idolatry and blindness to one's own historical and philosophical conceptions and misconceptions which may bind one within a statuesque present or a false future.

(TWS 35-36)

At stake here is the need to return to the past via an imaginative rehearsal that through the images it resuscitates opens this past to an interpretation beyond its historical limits. Original correspondences can be uncovered when history is fictively replayed in this way: imagery provides a means to link otherwise opposed events and hence to illuminate an unseen connection or relationship that evolves beneath the surface of reality. Within the ruins of a quest "involving men of all races" may lie not only the historically self-evident cleavages between these races, but also, paradoxically, the seeds of a new architecture of cultures harboured in an unconsciousness at pains to reconcile and apprehend the shocking collision of peoples.

To penetrate this potential, however, requires that history be read in relation to a specific vision of reality and consciousness. I will expand on this point later. Of immediate concern is the stasis that results when one remains addicted to the conventions and polarities of History. The danger that habituation to such biases may "bind one within a statuesque present" is highlighted in Four Banks. Time in the novel has been reduced to a block function: characters move within the "long Day of the twentieth century, a long day composed of years that are like elongated minutes" (269). When Anselm re-encounters Canaima, whose murder of a Macusi Indian forty years previously he failed to report, he finds

himself “Nailed to the ground” (269). Not only does this suggest the paralysis wrought by his reluctance to confront the past; it also indicates, via its allusion to the crucifixion, the dangers inherent in absolute constructs of good and evil. Anselm’s reputation in the Potaro region as a “saint,” recalls Canaima, was in contrast to his own as “devil” (271). These polarities were dislodged when Anselm ‘saved’ Canaima; yet if the former refuses to accept his complicity with, and constitutive connection to, the devil, both will remain locked in their one-sided tropes. And if crime is ““forever crime, if tautology rules in our dogmas and poetries and statecraft”” (276), then society will be unable to escape a cycle of violence.

The harm inflicted by biased conceptions of History and the consolidation of limited social moulds is approached from a different angle through the character of the king of thieves. The latter appears to Anselm in 1948 as a pork-knocker; yet his relentless quest for gold means that he is but one incarnation of an obsession with wealth forever apparent in humanity. His nickname – “Black Pizarro” – alludes to the Spanish conquistador, while Anselm equates him with the thief on the cross to the left of Christ who rejected paradise – a thief who “sought to steal in every century on earth the heaven he had lost on Calvary’s hill” (283). Hence, he too is locked within an absolute role that threatens paralysis: his eternal banishment from paradise chains him to the crippling “burden” – both physical and spiritual – of the “gold he had stolen across the centuries, the heavy obsession that tormented him” (306). This obsession, notes Anselm, “glimmered in the seed of many an epic” (283). Indeed, the thief is also equated with the suitors or “millionaire-thieves” in Odysseus’s court who thirst after Penelope (283). The emphasis here on epic in the context of the risks posed

by block mentalities is a twofold caution against political narratives that articulate an absolute vision of society: on the one hand, of course, the colonial epic of conquest cannot be repeated; but on the other, Harris suggests that the consolidation of loss – the thief whose greed is only ever a confirmation of the heaven he has forfeited – is equally inimical. Just as Black Pizarro’s fellow miners beat him yet embrace him when he steals their gold because they are “wed to him, [. . .] wed to an obsession imprinted on the door of the unconscious” (285), so a society might enshrine its degradations as definitive (as we saw the rebels in Dragon were in danger of doing). In turn, any epic narrative of the community would be imprisoned in the tropes of victimhood.

To avoid such stagnation “reserves, connections, links that run much deeper than the political situation as it appears” must be found, maintains Harris (RI 91). In contrast to Naipaul, he locates these resources in and through History. What he calls the native “arts of the imagination” – the folk rituals, crafts, and practices such as vodun, limbo, and shamanism, which were transformed by, or forged out of, colonial contact – provide the “epic stratagems” through which to confront the “dilemmas” of Caribbean history (“History, Fable, Myth” 156). Indeed, they embody a philosophy able to reassess the losses of the past, precisely because they suffered the erosions of History. Thus, whereas Naipaul fixes the Amerindian as an anthropological testament to ruin, Harris sees this collapse as also imbued with a potential that would require for its fulfilment “a new anthropology capable of investigating the subconscious and unconscious mind of an age” (“The Amerindian Legacy” 170).³ The concept of a new anthropology is one to which Harris returns frequently. To understand it we must revisit some of the ideas outlined in the Introduction. Here it was suggested that

in addition to conceiving individual and socio-historical shifts in the Caribbean in terms of a conventional historical dialectic, the influence of African and Indian philosophies should also be taken into account. Applied to the 'New World,' the traditional African religious concern with the periodic displacement of a sovereign ego in order to effect a reconciliation with the spirit ground is transformed into the need to reconcile identity with a multiplicity of cross-cultural links. In the process, it becomes a key component in a Caribbean philosophy that is itself a 'marvellous' assemblage of intellectual traditions.

Harris brings this perspective to bear on Amerindian history. He suggests that the terrifying erosion suffered by the population was also "a *unique erosion of expectations of conquest*"; and "[t]hat unique erosion is mutation" (ES 90). The ruin of the Amerindian population entails a devastating ego-collapse that nevertheless, in its abrasion of sovereign biases, points towards a new, mutative ontology: as the self-sufficient boundaries of identity are voided or become porous, an overlap occurs that fosters original relationships which feedback to, and may transform, the assumptions of the ruling social investiture. Though such overlaps did not fulfil their potential historically, Harris maintains that the original cultural body they promised gestated in depth and can be glimpsed in consciousness and the imagination as these manifest themselves in ritual. "For this aboriginal conquest," he writes, "exists like a ruin of psychological premises and biases in our midst that we are yet to see as the gateway to a new anthropology, and to a more profound understanding of human nature" (ES 44-45). Chamoiseau and Confiant posit similar arguments in Lettres créoles. Discussing the collision of cultures in the Caribbean, they suggest that

[n]o synthesis takes place; rather, there is a kind of uncertain

métissage, always conflictual, always chaotic, bearing anthropological densities to hazy frontiers, bathing in a quasi-amniotic creole space. In the creole culture each Self contains a part open to Others, and at the edge of each Self there persists, quivering, that part which is the irreducible opacity of Others. (51)

The contention that in the crucible of creolization “anthropological densities” expand outwards until their frontiers become hazy recalls Harris’s stress on ruin as not only loss but also a productive crumbling of sovereign borders that augurs the birth of new connections. The fragmentation that inheres in the ‘New World’ experience is, too, a breaking free from fixity that opens each component to others. The void into which the individual is plunged when torn from an absolute cultural framework may be a tomb; yet it can also become a womb, or the “quasi-amniotic” space of *créolité*. The “bathing” in the latter, moreover, is the Caribbean equivalent of those “baptisms in the waters of the spirit,” as Henry puts it, which in traditional African religions ‘correct’ the ego’s biases and open it to manifold influences (63).

It is against this background that one must conceive the new anthropology. It requires that ritual and other cultural vestiges be understood not as broken relics, nor only as fixed or past testaments to the collision of diverse cultural legacies. They embody rather a practice of culture – adaptable therefore across time – connected to a vision consciousness. Take the vodun ritual, for example. It reflects, of course, the creative reassembly of African and Catholic religious heritages. But Harris contends also that underlying this reassembly is an approach to reality whereby the historical limits that circumscribe consciousness are broken down to open a gateway to expanded perception.

Vodun in the Caribbean retains the ego-critical element that defines its African counterpart. As Maya Deren explains, it is towards the

forcing open of the door to the source [. . .] that the entire structure of Voudoun is directed. The serviteur must be induced to surrender his ego, that the archetype become manifest. [. . .] [I]n the protective vigilance of houngan and *société*, he is reassured that the personal price need not be unpredictable or excessive. In the principle of collective participation is the guarantee that the burden shall, in turn, be distributed and shared. (249-50)

The ritual of vodun – the drums and dances – places the devotee in a trance state that re-enacts death as a voiding of the self, but makes of this a release from a limited sovereignty that reconciles one with, and enables a new spiritual knowledge of, the community. It is this idea that Harris picks up on: in the vodun dance, he states, all “conventional memory is erased and yet in this trance of overlapping spheres of reflection a primordial or deeper function of memory begins to exercise itself within the bloodstream of space” (TWS 51). The dance, by its movement in space, initiates a rapport between different elements; the body of the dancer becomes, says Harris, a sculpture – in the sense that sculpture is expression in and through space and so is always incomplete since it ‘mutates’ in relation to its environment – that connects earth to sky or person to person. Thus, sovereign outlines are dissolved and contrary forms yoked together; and herein “lies the essential humility of a certain kind of self-consciousness within which occurs the partial erasure [. . .] of the habitual boundaries of prejudice” (TWS 52).⁴ When reality is perceived in relation to this ritual-induced vision of consciousness, fresh connections reveal themselves. Access to a new density (or

“primordial”) memory enables the “burden” of history – here, that tumultuous past of upheaval and fragmentation – to be “distributed and shared” across the collectivity in order to ensure its pressures do not become all-consuming; simultaneously, new relationships are established. Thus, the ritual prefigures a healing of the community that at the same time entails its transfiguration.

From a similar perspective, Chamoiseau and Confiant stress the importance of the *conteur* and the ritual of storytelling on the plantation as a way to console, sustain, but also transform the collective. Through the “mystery of the word and the hypnosis of the voice,” the listener enters a trance-like state that lifts him or her out of the consolidated bounds of quotidian reality; to hear a *conteur* is to “topple over into the incomprehensible. A kind of litany that the audience listens to open-mouthed. A quasi-magical aria that eludes the blockages of consciousness to spread opposition to slavery, to colonial ideology, to dehumanisation, in the opaque zones where the unconscious nourishes Being” (LC 61). Again, therefore, ritual voids the monolith of sovereignty (here a faceless block sovereignty into which the slaves as a group were shoehorned) to expand consciousness; it makes manifest an unconscious – outside the limits of a strictly historical vision defined by loss and division – that points towards a reassembly of selfhood. Crucially, however, the repetition this ritual performs of a voiding of a consolidated ego means it is not an attempt to affirm an absolute tribal past from which the group has been torn. Rather, it uses those “hazy frontiers” that characterise transplanted customs as an opportunity to yoke together diverse elements, thereby easing the process of coming to terms with the ‘New World.’ The ritual of the story, stress Chamoiseau and Confiant, which can draw together all on the plantation (even the curious master whose authority

it subverts), allows “the Africans to remain men, the Békés to not find themselves alone in the devastating genocide, and for later cultural contributions to locate themselves in the heart of a new identity” (LC 62).

Thus do such folk arts and practices provide an approach to Caribbean history that moves beyond a frame of conquest and victimisation. But this potential lies deeper than the self-evident plane of existence; hence the new anthropology must not only attend to the imaginative life of the community, but also rely itself in part on imagination. The subject “being approached exists in a void and therefore one needs to participate in it [. . .] with an art of fiction [. . .]. It is here that one starts to concede, and enter upon those alternative realities (‘phenomenal legacy’) which may lead to a new scale or illumination of the meaning of ‘community’” (Harris, ES 45). Such ideas thus imply “the necessity of a new kind of drama, novel, and poem” (Harris, “History, Fable, Myth” 159). To uncover a multiplicity of legacies, literary form too cannot be content with consolidating the *de facto* situation; it must seek to enter an expanded consciousness beyond the historical plane delimited by sovereign subjectivity. Consequently, those ritual elements that perform a ‘corrective’ breakdown of self will be integral to its construction. Likewise, consideration must be given to the body in terms not just of the memories deposited in physical practices like dance, but also of what corporeality reveals of the vision behind such rituals. For the ritualised body, argues Harris, sheds the shell of the self-sufficient subject divorced from a passive object-world and becomes “a dramatic agent of subconsciousness”: the “life from within and the life from without now truly overlap” (TWS 51). The yoking together of elements by the body in space – its becoming a sculpture or image in space – materialises a drama of consciousness

prophetic of a new cultural architecture.

To return to Harris's stress on the need for an imaginative rehearsal of history, it is clear, in light of the above, that this re-visitation of the past entails not merely the excavation of the alternative tradition embodied in folk practices. To fully mine their potential it is vital that a creative lens be applied to them. Just as the body, freed from sovereignty, offers through ritual a figurative expression of a nebulous community, so the fossil bodies of other cultures buried within History become discernible only by a figurative reading, that is, only via the application in space (the void of 'History-less-ness') of an image that makes manifest otherwise unseen connections. This is what Harris means when he speaks of 'marvellous' or 'magical' realism: a form that can endow the *de facto* situation with a figurative meaning beyond its present stasis so as to flesh out alternative, skeletal histories. His reading of the limbo ritual exemplifies this approach. Seen from the plane of self-evident existence, the dance evokes the cramped space of the slave ship. But if the movement of the dancer's body is read figuratively, then the change in shape induced by the limbo pole becomes a "gateway" that reveals how the Atlantic crossing involved the slaves in "a new kind of space [. . .] and not simply an unbroken schedule of miles in a logbook"; the dance replays the collapse of tribal sovereignty and the necessarily creolised "re-assembly which issued from a state of cramp to articulate a new growth" ("History, Fable, Myth" 159). An interior space is thereby opened up within the monolith of History to sustain an inner time, one recovered less by simple recollection than creative re-membering.

Four Banks provides an epic rehearsal of such ideas: Anselm as architect must (re)construct the spaces of (and in) his memory. His dream voyage back

into 1948 (on the first 'bank' of the novel) is a return to past vestiges that have not penetrated consciousness and remain cloaked within the "long Day" of the twentieth-century. To recover and reanimate these traces, the static, uniform space of reality is imaginatively re-appropriated. Strengthening his association with Christ, Anselm 'resurrects' past memories by embodying them in characters, "live absences" who also allude to the absences caused by colonial conquest. He sculpts in his dream a Macusi woodman, a memorial relic of both his own time in the rainforest and its decimated indigenous population. Anselm regards the woodman's axe as "a lightning extension of my own hand" (282); and when the stump of a tree, felled by the Macusi and labelled the "roots of the cross," spawns the king of thieves, it is Anselm who endows him with features: "I chiselled his head into magnificence and plastered the bone and the flesh with ageing leaves (a man in his forties), grey leafy mane or the fleece of cloud or animal hair" (283). The images of "mane" and "fleece" connect the thief to the Trojan horse, which, like Black Pizarro's gold, had the potential to be a bountiful gift yet was in fact the harbinger of violence. In addition, horses in Harris's work frequently signify unconscious desires.⁵ The thief therefore fleshes out memories of deception and greed, of repressed lusts and wants.

Significantly, to 'create' this memory entails prising it from a static block. The thief is cut from History as symbolised by the tree as cross as sign of colonization by conversion. Moreover, a reassembly of legacies is involved. The axe of the (Pagan) Amerindian is an extension of the (Christian) Anselm's hand, while the image of a sculpture coming to life recalls both the Pygmalion story and Amerindian creation myths. Indeed, the thief's inception echoes the legend of El Dorado as a golden man sculpted from a cherry tree, as well as the attempt

by the spirits, in the Mayan epic of the Popol Vuh, to fashion humanity out of wood, resulting in people who “looked and acted like humans” yet had “nothing in their minds” (Bierhorst 178). These wooden beings correspond to the sculpted thief, likewise left hollow by his quest for material gratification. As embodied memory he is, then, derived from Christian, Greek, and Amerindian epic fragments, suggesting that the genesis of remembrance is set in motion by cross-cultural interaction. Only when assembled into a new architecture do these spaces or absences – given shape precisely by the outline provided by the conjunction of spaces – enable eclipsed memories to be reborn or re-created.

The theme of creative absences is further stressed in the novel by the motif of the productive wound. Anselm’s dream voyage is facilitated by the knife Canaima lodges in his ribs: it “metaphorically killed me yet [. . .] so pierced me that I became an heir of civilizations (carnival heir) and was imbued with living dream or inner space to pass through the door of the unconscious” (281-82). Suggestive of Christ’s punctured side, yet administered by a version of the Amerindian revenge god Kanaima, the wound is converted into a site of active remembrance, just as Christ’s wound – when actively penetrated by Thomas – becomes a mark of recognition and proof of resurrection. Moreover, in light of the Anselm / Odysseus connection, it is possible to connect the wound to the scar on Odysseus’ thigh, which enables the maid Eurycleia to recognize him on his return home (his ‘resurrection’ from the sea). In analysing this scene, Erich Auerbach draws attention to the way Homer interrupts the maid’s reaction with a description of the origins of the scar. This interlude, however, is not a simple reminiscence from the perspective of the present. Rather the narrative re-enacts the past as if it is “for the time being the only present”: placed absolutely in the

foreground, it “fills both the stage and the reader’s mind” (Auerbach 4-5). The act of memory performed in the first section of Four Banks follows this formula. Anselm does not merely recall his past but returns to inhabit and replay this block of time. By extension, on a textual level, Harris inhabits and replays the epic style. His use of language here engages with Homeric conventions: the action is narrated with a swift simplicity and incorporates various epic props (cloaks of invisibility and “furies” who manipulate events), while frequent repetitions help link characters to particular symbolic objects (Robot’s glasses, for instance).⁶ By replaying the epic form, though, Harris gestures towards its necessary transformation, to the unfixing of the past from the linear frame of epic time in order to unearth re-visionary potentials.⁷

At this stage in Four Banks, however, the transformation of epic is unfulfilled. Anselm returns to 1948 carrying in his body the memory of the future; yet the latter, manifested in Canaima’s knife, is not yet able to cut the past free from its biases. Provoked by Inspector Robot at the foot of the waterfall, Anselm pulls the knife from his side and throws it into the air. The blade “shot like lightning into the body of a flying creature. [. . .] The angelic dancer fell with open, outstretched wings” (302-03). Thus Canaima’s murder of the Macusi bird-dancer is simply repeated; it is not until he returns to the waterfall in the final bank that Anselm re-discovers the knife and can re-imagine his life.

The first section of the novel concludes with the burial of the murdered bird-dancer. In a procession led by the king of thieves the corpse is carried up the hill by “sculptures who had arisen or been plucked from the rocks to make their way along the riverbank” (305). These “processional rocks” are the blocks of stone from within the waterfall that conserve the river by regulating its flow

(301). Such stone is “an active tide however stationary it seems” (301). The image of its coming alive to carry the dancer is thus another example of how endowing the *de facto* plane of reality with a figurative meaning can reveal unseen traits. Moreover, as living “sculptures” rather than monumental blocks, the rocks – like the dancing body as sculpture – also embody nebulous traces of (unborn) potential community. They are sites of inner or fossil space; imbued with Amerindian vestiges of memory they disrupt a monolithic colonial narrative imposed on a land assumed to be virgin territory:

‘The Macusis see [the rocks] as the work of the God of all weathers; they also see them as clothing inner bodies that wait to come alive, a living procession, when the tribe is approaching extinction. So though rock procession may become their epitaph [. . .] something else will step forth into the world, a magical art born of “live absences” [. . .]. (300)

The beliefs of the threatened Macusis are thus inscribed in the landscape. The rocks evoke an absent presence: their effect on river discharge replicates the moving tide’s similar hydrological function on the coast; and these images act as the objective correlative of the Macusis themselves, their absence made present when the land is read from an alternative standpoint.

In this connection, the sovereign form of the colonial epic and its corollary, an exclusive ‘root’ identity imposed via the material organization of ‘New World’ space, is liable to having its absolute edges blurred. The limited perception of the real it instilled becomes susceptible to revision as suppressed legacies come to the fore. An alternative feedback, linked to the material marks left by the Macusis on the landscape (which point to another organization of

space-time and so to a different vision of reality), starts to exert an influence on consciousness; in other words, pressure comes from an unrealised cross-cultural body, straining against the uniform monument of society to posit an inclusive vision based on an architecture of diverse traditions. The text manifests this through the series of allusions that coalesce around the dead bird-dancer. An Amerindian legacy, he also recalls the vodun dancer, whose materialisation of ego-collapse pointed to an African religious heritage. Equally, the dancer's burial on the hill evokes the European tradition in the form of T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets (a key reference point for Harris's similarly divided Four Banks).⁸ As regards the novel's re-vision of epic, however, this interment is problematic. The first bank identifies the need for an expanded consciousness and a reorganization of space in order to facilitate this. But as the repeated death and burial of the bird-dancer shows, a form has not yet been found to express and sustain such revision. The live absences able to catalyse change have been uncovered; how these memories are to be incorporated to produce transfigured vessels of epic and identity remains to be seen.

Memorial Relics and the Monuments of History

The créole city, which has so few monuments, becomes a monument through the care given its places of memory. The monument, there as in all the Americas, does not erect itself as monumental: it radiates.

Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*

In his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" Walter Benjamin explores how the poet confronted the impact on memory of the socio-economic changes occurring in nineteenth-century Europe. Taking up Proust's distinction between *mémoire volontaire* (a recollection that contains only historical information) and *mémoire involontaire* (an experiential return to the past triggered by an emotional or

sensual response to a material trace), he draws a comparison with Freud's work on memory and consciousness. Freud, he argues, saw becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace as incompatible processes. What is "experienced explicitly and consciously" is immediately assimilated as information (157). Conversely, outside consciousness reside memory traces (the *mémoire involuntaire*) derived from the reaction to an event. These traces have not been assimilated into the subject's history since their effect – their emotional energy – would have overwhelmed the means by which such stimuli are incorporated. The function of consciousness is thus to protect against the "shocks" of stimuli, parrying them so as to create time for their gradual reception once organized into an acceptable form. Such organization may involve the kind of repetition enabled by ritual. Here time is suspended to create a space in which events can be replayed and absorbed. (This is why, for example, festival days, which serve as "places of recollection," are rendered as blank spaces on the calendar [181].) "That the shock is thus cushioned," writes Benjamin, "[. . .] would lend the incident that occasions it the character of having been lived in the strict sense" (158). With respect to Anselm, his memory of Canaima – the shock he experienced over the events in 1948 – has not been incorporated into his consciousness (his own history) where it would, as Benjamin puts it, "remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life" (159). Instead, the memory has become a spectre that haunts the unconscious, erupting into Anselm's present as a return of the repressed.

The difficulty posed by such spectres is further complicated by the process by which they are assimilated. Benjamin argues that if a "shock" event is "incorporated directly in the registry of conscious memory, it would sterilize this

incident for poetic experience” (154). Seeking to fix this event as information, consciousness divests memory of the experiential residues it contains. In the nineteenth century, increased industrialisation and, in particular, the growth of the city and its crowds so intensified the frequency with which shocks were encountered that the distance required for their gradual reception disappeared. Meanwhile, “mechanical devices extend[ed] the range of the *mémoire volontaire*” (182). The camera, for instance, allowed an event to be immediately recorded as information; but it could not reflect back a density of past sensations in the way that for Benjamin painting could. Thus, there occurred a decline in sense experience, a disintegration of “aura” – the “associations which, at home in the *mémoire involuntaire*, tend to cluster around the object of a perception” (182). Indeed, the “readiness of volitional, discursive memory, encouraged by the technique of mechanical reproduction, reduces the scope for the play of the imagination” (183).

What for Benjamin is a worrying depletion of human experience assumes for the Caribbean further significance. Here “shock” events define not only the region’s experience of urbanization, but also its colonial past; and it is the imagination that is required to transform and redeem this History through the ‘re-creation’ of eclipsed memory. Should the Caribbean’s legacy of shocks enter consciousness simply as assimilated memory – superficial information fixed in space and time – due to its otherwise overwhelming nature, then certain features (sensual experience, and so the memory of the body; past traces as open and unfinished influences) will be suppressed; and with them will disappear the potential for an alternative history. The key is to enable *mémoire involuntaire* – here those residues of other traditions (outside assimilated History) suggestive of

an unborn cross-cultural community – to feedback into a subsequently expanded consciousness. To not do so is to flatten experience into one-sided casts that, like the sovereign tropes in narratives of consolidation, fail to register a complex inheritance of entanglement and disjunction, thereby increasing the possibility of a schizophrenic eruption of the repressed.

Such ideas can be applied to the ‘New World’ landscape, which was imposed upon by colonialism in terms of the kind of assimilative memory outlined above. Because conquest – structured by what Harris calls “progressive realism” – attains its “cultural and material ends at the expense of all other perspectives,” it aims to reduce the world “to convenient passivities and to enshrine a deprivation of the senses into tools of communication” (RI 72). Just as for Benjamin modernisation depleted experience, so the ‘progressive’ thrust of the colonial enterprise, driven by increased mechanization, assimilated the land into flattened tropes of information conditioned solely by socio-economic demands. Progressive realism hence reflects a “linear bias” in which “everything is directed straight to a specific target” (RI 71). In Four Banks Inspector Robot embodies this ideology: a “technician of artificial intelligence” (296), he can “utter genuine truths at times but falsify them into instruments of exploitation because they were void of spiritual ancestry” (298). His one-sided, statistical reading of the waterfall blinds him to the movement of the rocks, and so to the other memories they reveal when perceived otherwise. The ‘progressive’ narrative he subscribes to subsumes the landscape within monumental tropes; it “erases the past [. . .], consumes the present and it may very well abort the future with its linear bias” (Harris, RI 72).

Similarly, characters in Four Banks seek to lock traumatic memories

within their own flesh, an attempted consumption or assimilation of experience that results only in repression. The ingested memories become spectres that plague the assumed unity of the sovereign individual. The guilt Penelope feels over the death of her first husband, Simon, for example, imbues her with the sense that she is haunted by his “Shadow” (292). Unable to come to terms with her memories, she explains how she and her second husband Ross “hid Simon in ourselves” (319). He continues to bruise and possess Penelope from within, however. Only at the end of the novel, with moulds of self-sufficient identity crumbling, are these spectres ‘given birth to’ – they are embodied in the dead children Anselm, Ross, and Penelope carry up the Waterfall –, enabling repressed experience to be recognised fully. The ‘consumed’ memories must be re-read, once manifested in the dead infants, in order that the characters can be released from a burden that would otherwise continue to “abort the future.”

Crucially, this unlocking of past events from the confines of a static imaginary occurs at the same place the rocks were first seen to move. The promise of the latter vision is fulfilled as the ascent of the Waterfall is repeated on the fourth bank: the whole landscape becomes fluid as the sovereignty of its elements dissolves:

The fantastic, planetary greenheart trees rose into marvellous silvery columns on every hand. Clothed in water-music. [. . .]
The cracked silvery veil of greenheart possessed the texture of slow-motion rain falling within the huge Bell of a still Waterfall in which whispering leaves of fluid sound ran up into veil within veil of Shadow-organ gloom [. . .]. (398-99)

The dominant plane of (progressive) reality is transformed. So too are the flat

tropes of empirical information through which the colonizers codified the land, symbolized here by the burning of Ross's volumes of anthropological and botanical studies of South America. Written by "nineteenth-century super-power map-makers" (402), the ashen remains of these tomes, freed from their absolute frame, are re-read by Anselm in relation to "multiple voices – familiar, unfamiliar, native, alien – that run in one's mixed inheritance": "I may have tapped the rhythm of Im Thurm's sensuous English dialogue with the rivers of Guyana and found it native to fire, my fire, my blood" (403). The yoking together of cultural traces enabled by the collapse of sovereign boundaries is thus inextricable from the perception of the landscape in terms of a new quantum depth, with each feature now an absent presence in the other (transpiration from greenheart leaves, for example, as a flow of water that transforms the tree into a paradoxical "still Waterfall"). Such a mode of vision – the penetration and figurative re-embodiment of space – permits a History of absences to be converted into a new architecture of cultures. Taking up this emphasis on the rethinking of space as crucial to the liberation of memory and consciousness, Texaco traces such transformations in a more materially grounded fashion.

Like Harris, Chamoiseau regards the land as a repository of an eclipsed history that traditional epic is unable to articulate; it is inscribed with "these broken, scattered, partial words that reassemble [*remontent*] the infinite marks of an absence of genesis: this silent literature" (LC 20). Texaco offers a glimpse of these topographical memories even as it reveals their gradual occultation:

From the Caribs I learned the roofing technique while taking
advantage of the landscape. Reeds. Mountain palm trees.

Palmettos. They taught us about the tiles made of plants and the

mibi vines that moored the canoes. Craft is good memory. (59)

The history ‘written’ by the Caribs is located within the material traces they have left behind. Excluded from official discourse, their “silent literature” is this craft that manifests a relationship to the landscape. However, such memories will be buried by the plantations, which consume the land in a rigid new order designed to concretise the ‘inevitability’ of colonial power. Indeed, immediately after the description cited above (which is presented as an extract from the notebooks Marie-Sophie has compiled of her father Esternome’s oral narratives), the text recounts how the house of the plantation owner

rose in the centre of the outhouses, buildings and straw huts.

From it radiated the fields, the gardens, the lands planted with coffee climbing the slope of trees [. . .]. It dominated the whole, seemed to inhale all. [. . .] The men, noticing it from everywhere they worked, acquired the furtive eye that we would have later in front of the Cities [. . .]. (61)

Engulfed within this spatial system, the land is shoehorned into the linear biases of economic return and social control. The position of the planter’s house both enables him to oversee the slaves and instils in the latter the sense that they are always under observation by, and hence subject to, the master. This in turn produces certain physical and psychological reactions: the insecurity of the “furtive eye,” for example.

Thus, we are returned to that process outlined in Chapter One: the colonial structuration of space and its imposition of an exclusive socio-historical frame. Texaco manifests this situation on a structural level: the description of the material traces left by the Caribs is only a diary fragment in the main body of the

text; it is buried by the account of plantation history that follows. However, the text also begins the recovery of such traces from within the spatial and discursive monuments of the colonial regime. Discussing the literature of the plantocracy in Lettres créoles, Chamoiseau and Confiant argue that such writing often comprised merely a dry *scription*, which inscribed reality within reductive signs that consolidated a prerequisite.⁹ They provide an example from the hand of a plantation manager in Haiti:

Out of 199 heads of negroes, there are only 70 who work. [. . .] I have been told that there 25 negroes infirm and incapable of going to the workplace (garden), as many women in the same condition, as many children. This makes 75 heads; in adding them to the 70 working, I have been able to find only 145 heads and I have been shown that there were 45 others in the hospital [. . .]. (25)¹⁰

The slave – indeed existence in general – is here abstracted into a flattened, statistical discourse. Like heads of cattle, the “negroes” constitute blocks of stock to be shunted around the plantation. Texaco not only exposes such callousness; in narrating life on the plantation, it also alludes to and parodies this *scription*, reversing its surface intent. The account of Esternome’s mother, for instance, displays a superficial neutrality; her tasks are listed with the same detached air as the slave numbers above:

Blankets, tablecloths, underpants, cloths from Holland were hers to launder in the river. The rest of the time she had to sew the blouses for the slaves, weed the garden with a cripple, [. . .] and take upon herself the etcetera of a weight of worry. This existence was nevertheless preferable to life in the fields. She had gotten

out of that because of a bad fall. The veterinarian (a little inexperienced) having been left speechless by her ravaged hip, my papa's mama had remained lame. (54)

There is no explicit comment made here on the brutality of the plantation, no direct attack on the discourse that justified such regimes from an external standpoint. Rather Chamoiseau adopts its style to subvert it from within. He reproduces the planter's casual, statistical treatment of human life (the blithe "etcetera" of hard labour forced upon Esternome's mother); yet the contrast between the commonsense tone of the narrative (of course someone should be treated by a veterinarian, the only problem was the latter's inexperience) and the horror it depicts underlines the grotesqueness of this regime and its invidious naturalisation.

I will return later to the importance of Chamoiseau's interior subversion of the dominant frame of reality. At present, I wish to expand on a theme first gestured to in Chapter One: the way in which the physical and discursive consumption of the land and its inhabitants is continued in the cities. For those leaving the plantation fields, the urban environment of Saint-Pierre represents a "place for new flights" (89). However, the latter is inextricable from the material and ideological foundations of the former. As Esternome understands it,

here the sorrows of the great plantations came to a head. All of that lonely blood, that godless pain, that work-like-an-ox against the floods of the wet season [. . .] ended up here in boucauts, in barrels, in parcels, to follow the sea routes inside a ship's hold after the magical unction of some fat account books. (100)

The city maintains the structures of the plantation in transfigured form: it

converts the raw material it receives from the countryside into exportable commodities via the “magical unction” of account books. Thus the discursive frame of *scription* reappears to consume reality within the linear bias of trade flows. Echoing Benjamin’s analysis of assimilated information, the presence of lists and accounts – like the cataloguing of slaves on the plantation – reduces the experiential memories that surround production into flat statistics mired in the colonial economic system. Therefore, the lived history of the black population is again excluded from the imposed construct of reality. Significantly, when Esternome describes the “floods of the wet season” a footnote is inserted, recounting Marie-Sophie’s opinion that this was in fact “a good season for my Esternome as for all plantation blacks. Time of rain: time of rest [. . .]. After a hurricane: time of freedom. For the city blacks it was another time. One must know that here, the times are not the same for all” (100). An insight is thus provided into the different meanings ascribed to such storms by the rural blacks (rest) vis-à-vis the planters (loss of profit), and into the specificity of the urban experience; yet its subordinate position in a footnote only stresses the city’s suppression of the material contours of this memory strand.

However, the continuation of these power relations results as well from a more profound overlap than just the mercantile link between plantation and city. Since the latter is structured upon the socio-economic order of the former, it is organised too on the same spatial model.¹¹ When Esternome arrives in Saint-Pierre he discovers a repetition of plantation geography. Just as the slave huts were clustered in an area separate from the central dwelling of the master, so the city’s salubrious central square is home to the whites and to civic institutions while the urban blacks are sequestered in poor quality shacks on the periphery.

This spatio-social hierarchy parallels Fanon's description of the Manichaean nature of the colonial city:

The settler's town is a strongly-built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly-lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage-cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. [. . .] The town belonging to the colonized people, [. . .] the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. [. . .] It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other.

(WE 30)

The division of black from white in this way entrenches an economic disparity while physically delimiting the social order. This in turn serves to inscribe people within polarized tropes: the material poverty suffered by the oppressed is presented by the oppressor as a sign of a concomitant moral poverty (as Fanon's deliberate use of the prejudiced vocabulary of the colonizer makes clear); inversely, the colonizers codify the order and cleanliness of their sector as the sign of an inherent civility.

Texaco also shows how the actions of the whites in those areas deemed civil are made excessively visible so as to reinforce this hierarchy. Esternome notes the ostentatious fashion in which "béké's and france-whites went around in carriages [. . .] [and] paraded on the steps of the theatre or the cathedral whose creamy white stones decomposed the shadows. [. . .] One saw them sample the melody of the orchestras around Agnes Fountain" (92). Recalling the planter's efforts to ensure his dominance was recognised, the whites flaunt their status in

institutional or public spaces redolent of power and culture, thereby concretising their ascendant social position. The centre of Saint-Pierre – a ‘civil’ site both as the location for the institutions of civic authority and as the symbol of a moral existence – is thus transformed into the locus of History and at the same moment codified as ‘white’ space. The apparently natural connection between whiteness and the right to hold power, established by the colonizer’s initial ‘colouration’ of ‘New World’ topography, is perpetuated therefore, only it is now the institutions of the bourgeois capitalist economy, rather than the plantation’s regulation of the land, that reifies the imposed order as order itself. Either way, the epic of the community – the memory inscribed on the land – remains accessible only through an identification with whiteness.

Moreover, in ‘making’ History, the colonizer “constantly refers to the history of his mother country”; hence, what he writes “is not the history of the country he plunders but the history of his own nation” (Fanon, WE 40). In Texaco this process manifests itself in the whites’ desire for “houses like the ones of their original province” (104). Such territorial inscriptions, dislocated from the lived experience of the blacks, make plain to Esternome that this is a city from whose “memory they were excluded”:

For them City remained impenetrable. Smooth. Waxed. What to read in these forged irons? These shutters of painted wood? These enormous cut stones? These parks, these gardens, all these people who seemed to know the secrets of them? [. . .] City was a Grand-hut. The Grand-hut of Grand-huts. Same mystery. Same power. (107)

The architecture of the city both signifies and reinforces an assimilated, frozen

trope of memory; the colonial discourse that consumed the land, that monumentalised its inhabitants and their history within static moulds, is here itself made ‘monumental’ in the form of solid edifices, civic structures that consolidate an exclusive History.

In Éloge de la créolité Chamoiseau and his co-authors stress the way in which the histories of their island are buried under colonial History:

Collective memory is our emergency. What we believe to be Antillean history is only the History of the colonization of the Antilles. Beneath the *shock* waves of the history of France, beneath the great dates of the arrival and departure of governors, [. . .] beneath the beautiful white pages of the Chronicle [. . .], there was the obstinate progress of ourselves. [. . .] Our Chronicle is beneath the dates, beneath the known facts. (my italics. 36-37)

I emphasize “shock” here since it recalls Benjamin’s analysis of experience. For him, consciousness seeks to guard against the destructive force of emotional shocks when to assimilate these immediately into memory is to fix them as sterile monuments to an unexamined trauma. Here French History has overwhelmed the Antillean historical consciousness; and because this all-consuming trauma cannot be comprehended in its fullness, it solidifies into a series of static tropes divested of experiential depth. Such tropes are in turn central to the occultation of that alter/native history, latent in the “obstinate progress of ourselves,” which nevertheless subsists within this catastrophic legacy. The overlap between the architectural interment of history in the colonial city and the psychological entombment of memory is best encapsulated by statues. As Fanon observes, the manichaeon world of colonialism is a “world of statues: the statue of the general

who carried out the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge” (WE 40). The monolith of the statue embodies the totalising root or block identity imposed by the colonizer as the legitimate social mould. It commemorates an absolute History defined by great victories (or tragic martyrdoms) and heroic men – in short, that self-evident legacy of official “dates” and “governors” which the Créolistes warn obscures the lived reality of the people. Unlike the sculpture in space, therefore, which Harris associates with the body of the vodun dancer, the statue symbolises an abstraction of experience into monumental presence. Like the ‘modern’ sovereign body, it occludes the contingencies and conflicts, as well as the frailties and absences, constitutive of Caribbean history in its fullest sense.

Understandably, such edifices have become a site of contestation for many of the region’s authors. Take for instance Brathwaite’s Sun Poem:

there is still no brass movement or monument
to those headmaster backyard schools [. . .]
there is still no memorial epigraph
to those thick-set quick-step groundsmen
who watered the crust of west indian cricket [. . .]
& yet there are these stammaments in stone
that smile
are fat or romanesque. (281-82)

As Nathaniel Mackey has suggested, the neologism “stammaments” – a combination of ‘monument’ and ‘stammer’ – alludes not only to that form of “material inscription whereby imperial authority sanctifies itself” but also to the inimical effect this has on the articulation of memory (“Wringing the Word”

135). The statue, argues Mackey, contrasting it with the pebble – another key image in Brathwaite’s work, and one that we can understand in relation to those frail or particle / particular histories of peoples open to original reconstructions –, is “representational”: it appropriates

the solidity and the durability of stone to give a look of permanence [. . .] to what is merely a regime. [. . .] [T]he scale of monumental statuary not only magnifies and bestows grandeur but also suggests a coherence, a totalization, of which the smallness and the dispersion of pebbles imply the opposite. The statue is integrative, the pebble particulate. The statue is symbolic, the pebble semiotic. (137)

Statuary’s abstraction of meaning into an absolute symbol thus recalls and reinforces the paradoxical silence imposed by the sovereign Word via its reductive fixing of the body.¹²

Given the values manifested in the statue it is clear why these monuments play a critical role in the striation of the cityscape. As noted in Chapter One, striation is the term used by Deleuze and Guattari to designate a geometrical division of space which enables it to be grasped as a totality, and which contributes physically to the regulation of the population. Inherent in the plantation’s organization of the land, striated space reappears in the urban environment due to that continuity of socio-economic demands outlined above. Indeed, even the move from Saint-Pierre to Fort-de-France, perceived as an opportunity for the black population to escape the rigidity of the béké-dominated former, fails to initiate a break with this past. The migrants instead discover a city that still resounds with the “echoes of barracks”: “The streets were all

straight and square-cut. Nothing evoked a city. Everything had been built with no concern for memory” (213). As in Saint-Pierre, the physical space of Fort-de-France has not been shaped in relation to the experiences of its occupants. In fact, the disjunction is even greater here: not only is the city constructed in opposition to the natural landscape (it sits atop a mangrove swamp that has been concreted over), but also, like many cities built (or rebuilt) in the Caribbean and Latin America from the sixteenth century onwards, it is erected upon a strict grid system.¹³ The use of an a priori plan in this way to impose a rigidly striated space is inseparable from that division of words from things, that splitting of reality from its representation, which had come to structure European epistemology. For the colonial city the plan functions as an immutable conceptual order that enables the reification of its spatial order as *the* order of reality since it appears as the logical fulfilment of the plan – although, as observed above, it is precisely the geometric division of space that enables it to be grasped as a planned totality. The result is a space whose meaning is ‘inevitably’ and ‘eternally’ defined by the sovereign or univocal edict of the class that organizes the environment.

Texaco shows Fort-de-France to have been constructed in accordance with the a priori plan laid down by the army of the colonial power:

They say: old swamp but good site. They put up the Fort there.
Then the army spoke its law. A checkerboard stretched out in
lines from the Fort. There, businesses. There, houses. There,
depots. (224)

Subject to the God-like decree (“Then the army spoke its law” [224]) of the colonizer, this land – parcelled out numerically (“Each battery, one house. Ten

houses, one Quarter” [224]) to be recomposed as a homogenous whole – is produced as sovereign ‘white’ space. Moreover, the way of life imposed on people via the physical division of the cityscape inculcates into them the values of the dominant order. As on the plantation, inhabitants are fixed within a methodical rhythm, a constraint underlined by the staccato phrases used to describe the city. Indeed, Fort-de-France’s civic policies reveal clearly how the striation of space contributes not just to the regulation but to the creation of the sovereign wage-labourer within the capitalist system. The migrant workers ‘set free’ from the rigid structures of the plantation and Saint-Pierre are organised in the new city to ensure their role as productive individuals: “Each had to choose his place [. . .] on the checkerboard. No one could step out of line or out of the plan” (225). Recalling the regulatory drive of seventeenth-century Europe, people suspected of being “vagabonds” are “arrested, condemned to another slavery said to be disciplinary. They were forced to labour for the public good, meaning the colonial one” (157). For lower and even middle class Martinicans, therefore, insertion into the abstract “checkerboard” of the cityscape entails the denial of their own practical memory and induction into the carapace of an imposed norm defined by the univocal (‘white’) plan. Just as the architecture of Fort-de-France displays mimetic traits – its “little balconies which imitated Saint-Pierre” (214); the Quarters it consumes and “clothe[s] in materials come from other lands” (220) – so its inhabitants are ‘clothed’ in (or at least induced to aspire to) the mask of whiteness.

The interconnectedness of architectural design and the psychological pressure of colonial mimicry is again emphasized by statues, perhaps nowhere more so than in Martinique where highly assimilationist policies are matched by

the series of iconic monuments which brand the Fort-de-France cityscape. Four in particular – the statues of Napoleon’s wife Joséphine de Beauharnais, the colonizer Desnambuc, and the abolitionist Schœlcher, as well as the monument to the war dead – have incited critical comment since they enshrine the island’s complex attachment to the ‘mother-country.’ Indeed, the integrative presence of the statue – its symbolic consumption of meaning – manifests the discourse of assimilation into the body (block) of the ‘maternal’ power. At the start of Cahier d’un retour au pays natal Césaire alludes to these edifices in his depiction of the overlap between the sterility and striated fixity of “this flat town – staked out” (73) and the impotency and stagnation enforced by colonial stereotypes:

In this inert town, this sorry crowd under the sun, taking part in nothing which expresses, asserts, frees itself in the broad daylight of its own land. Nor in Empress Joséphine of the French dreaming high, high above negridom. Nor in the liberator rigidified in its liberation of white stone. (75)

Similarly, when in Confiant’s L’Allée des soupirs Cicéron Nestorin decides to “stand at attention for three weeks in front of the war memorial,” his “right hand frozen in an impeccable military salute” (131), his statufication makes plain the psychological petrification engendered by assimilation. At one point, Cicéron removes “some papers covered in scribble from [a] bag crammed with French dictionaries” and proceeds to declaim: “I have suffered the presence of the White in my most intimate self. I felt as if I was inhabited by some interior spy, some Trojan horse that concealed from me what was most mine. It’s the truest truth: when their words are embedded within us, we are no longer alone with ourselves” (132). The cultural lacquer that weighs upon Cicéron is not just an

external shroud; like the Trojan horse, it is also an internal presence that wreaks destruction from within his own the belly. His bag “crammed” with French dictionaries symbolises his being crammed with an alien discourse that inwardly consumes him. Even as colonial ideology conquers or ‘eats’ the colonised space, then, so one is made to ‘eat’ the colonial ideology.

This image has become a pervasive trope in Caribbean literature. As Mireille Rosello shows, in Césaire’s work for example the obsessive motifs of “swallowing, force-feeding, ingestion [. . .] serve as the privileged metaphor to describe the process of cultural assimilation” (114). Thus underlined is the inextricability of an excavation of those histories buried under History from an internal excavation of the self buried by foreign victuals. What this entails, though, is central to the problem of memory as it has been set out here. Most pressingly, such excavation has been short-circuited by the psychological colonization that has occurred. The “interior spy,” as Cicéron puts it, fissures identity to alienate the individual from “what was most mine.” The result is that Manichaeic split identified by Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks: whiteness becomes a symbol of all that is good, moral, civil in contradistinction to blackness as “ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality” (192) – a split concretised by the Manichaeic spatial divisions of the colonial city. And just as the imposition of sovereign ‘white’ space entails a refusal of recognition to – and a guarding against the eruption of – the ‘black’ memories or shadows that haunt this ‘absolute’ as both its constitutive Other and its material condition (the labour of the colonised), so this dynamic repeats itself in the psyche. Indeed, Fanon borrows René Ménéil’s Hegelian but also ‘architectural’ account to describe this relationship: “In [Ménéil’s] view it was ‘the consequence of the replacement of

the repressed [African] spirit in the consciousness of the slave by an authority symbol representing the Master, a symbol implanted in the subsoil of the collective group and charged with maintaining order in it as a garrison controls a conquered city” (BS 145). Policed by this interior warden whose authority is mapped externally onto the city, the colonised pursues recognition through imitation. But of course, this can provoke no real recognition and is always destined to run up against the lived reality of blackness.

Not only does the limit of the colonizer’s pernicious ‘civilising’ mission – that refusal to ‘look beyond’ blackness – make the colonised aware of their difference; it is precisely this ‘difference’ – the fact of being a ‘Negro’ or a ‘native’ – that is produced by the framework imposed by the coloniser. In this situation, writes Fanon, “I try then to find value for what is bad – since I have unthinkingly conceded that the black man is the colour of evil” (BS 197). The result is a falling back on and a romanticising of blackness that, while useful initially in terms of primary conscious raising, ultimately traps the person within “an unhealthy, conflictual solution, fed on fantasies, hostile, inhuman” since it derives its coordinates from the colonizer’s own psychopathological projections (BS 197). Liberation from the “unhealthy” black / white opposition will come only with the breakdown of such monumental identity moulds, their absolutism predicated on a suppression of contingencies. “Those Negroes and white men will be disalienated who refuse to let themselves be sealed away in the materialised Tower of the Past,” argues Fanon; for him, the answer is to “rise above this absurd drama that others have staged round me, to reject the two terms [Negro / White] that are equally unacceptable, and, through one human being, to reach out for the universal” (BS 226, 197).

As Patrick Taylor has convincingly shown, the traumatic and stasis-inducing dualism of the black / white relationship is, in Fanon's medical as in his political writings, the key drama or tragedy of colonialism; it must be overcome to enable the individual and the community to be healed. Hegelian ideas of history and liberation narrative are used by Fanon, claims Taylor, to demonstrate how true freedom will be achieved when a closed totalization such as racial affirmation (unifying but trapped within tragic binaries) is transcended and history understood as an open totality. The primary struggle must be gone beyond in order to open the historical horizon to infinite totalization, which, breaking with determining finitudes or boundaries, offers the opportunity for community within the universal (Taylor 25-26). To achieve this requires a mutual recognition that exposes those connections repressed by closed monuments of selfhood: "The only means of breaking this vicious cycle that throws me back on myself," explains Fanon, "is to restore to the other, through mediation and recognition, his human reality, which is different from natural reality. The other has to perform the same operation" (BS 217). The struggle to force such recognition (one inseparable from the demands of anti-colonial resistance) involves a dialectic in which conflict and a rehearsal of roles or possibilities uncovers contrary potentials within an apparent absolute; subsequently, the negation of this original negation points to a new unity. Thus far this dialectic would seem to account for Harris's approach to Caribbean history: a playing out of the past to unearth alternatives that transform this monument into a vision of consciousness in which opposed forces are reconciled. But as suggested earlier, there are aspects of the Caribbean experience – those phenomenal legacies in particular – which remain outside a strictly historical

dialectic; moreover, it is such legacies that provide the native key, as it were, to transform the horizons of history and manifest the specific Caribbean approach to space and identity that will open their sovereign biases to a density of memory. Taylor emphasizes that for Fanon liberation narrative “could be truly concrete only if it expressed the lived experience of the individual in the community in a form that was both appropriate and indigenous to the community” (26). Here, liberation from the prison house of tragedy requires the excavation of a form of memory that simultaneously revises the very grounds of identity and dialectic.

Before coming back to Texaco, a brief look at Césaire’s work will help shed light on these issues. The motif of swallowing, it was suggested earlier, is often used by Césaire to indict the forced ingestion of colonial ideology. Through his rehearsal of this image, however, he converts it into an eruptive vomiting that not only negates or signifies a disgust with the imposed culture, but also reveals the suppressed black history beneath the calcified deposits of colonialism. In “Avis de tirs,” the first poem in Les armes miraculeuses, Césaire summons the “sunken freight” of the slaves (7), swallowed by the belly of the slave ship, before concluding: “the white-toothed black flag of the Vomito-Negro / will be hoisted for the unlimited duration” (8). The consuming slave ship is thus regurgitated as the Vomito-Negro, the evocative name of which, as Rosello observes, underlines a new sense of “revolt against the colonial authorities” (128). Nevertheless, Césaire does not simply negate the white to impose the black. If at times his critical writings – like many other espousals of Négritude – seem to promote this reversal, his poetry transcends such binaries; the uncovering of the suppressed ‘other’ history is the prelude to a liberating opening onto a new history or community for all.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Cahier. Here the sterile, rotten colonial town and all it represents is subject to the cleansing rupture of “words which are tidal waves and erysipelas and malarias and lavas and bush-fires” (99). The trauma of being force-fed colonial mores (“Europe has been stuffing us with lies and bloating us with pestilence for centuries” [125]) is again evoked to be swept away by the volcanic eruption of the new order; yet crucially this does not just entail a simple inversion or ‘re-colouring’:

you know that it is not from hatred for other races
that I force myself to be the digger of this unique race
that what I want
is for universal hunger
for universal thirst
to summon the race free at last (117-19)

The “unique race” is freed only in the context of universal liberation and the assertion of one’s community with others. This idea reaches its climax at the poem’s end as the buried self is ‘dug up.’ Césaire returns to the belly of the slave ship to locate the “original cry,” as Chamoiseau and Confiant put it, the “cry that surged from the hold of the slave ship” to articulate a selfhood subsequently stifled by the accretion of oppression (LC 127). The terrifying consumption of identity is thus converted by the poet who liberates this cry or self, scraping away the colonial detritus encrusted upon it. As Dash contends, this action is encapsulated in the word “verrition” on which Cahier finishes. Derived from the Latin verb ‘verri,’ meaning to sweep or to scrape a surface, the “magical retrieval of purity” Césaire seeks is “inscribed in the obscure newness of this invented word” (Dash 64). Space is exploded and made a *tabula rasa* in which the freed

self is rooted like a tree.

But it is here that problems with this discourse arise. Though Césaire stresses that the ‘pure’ identity he proclaims is not exclusive (“my purity will blend with your purity alone / but then embrace / [. . .] our multicoloured purities” [135]), the dialectic he pursues still enshrines the purity of the sovereign individual. His restoration of the “cry,” while integral, entails a transcendence into a new unity that is monumental. It is now the revolutionary “blazing monument of the volcano” (Dash 65) of course, but it is still a monument and remains enmeshed in the notion of root identity. As such, it continues to fail to address the issue of the Caribbean’s multiply-inscribed, creolised space and an identity defined as much by absence and voiding as presence and stability. The resulting repetition of past modes that impede the full expression of the community is hinted at in Césaire’s own play, La tragédie du roi Christophe. Here the stagnation of the promise of the new Haitian nation is encapsulated in the towering edifices the King demands be constructed, a task that entails the re-enslavement of his subjects. These monuments thus also become symbolic of Christophe’s megalomania, and of the divorce of his body, locked away in the heroic sovereignty of (as he sees it) the saviour, from the collective body of the people. While Césaire indicts this egoistic monumentalising of the self, his response, within the tragic form he employs, appears unable to move beyond the cycle of the ‘verrition’ of the stultified subject followed by a revival of sovereignty. And the failure to unearth an alternative to this dialectic stems precisely from what is lost in Césaire’s approach to history.

The poet returns to the cry on the slave ship in order to escape the purgatorial burden of the striated space of the colonial town; subsequently, the

latter is destroyed by the eruption of the new, revolutionary order. But in triumphing over this terrifying void “swayed from its only true cry,” as he puts it in Cahier (75), Césaire misses the opportunity to redeem this space, as well as that of the similarly striated plantation, in terms of the potentials nevertheless contained in its silence. To uncover the seeds of an alternative identity he had to enter the void, to follow, suggest Chamoiseau and Confiant, “this line [*tracée*] of silence in the meanders of the plantation system, to espouse the African stammerings, to be moved by the ethno-cultural diversity, and to inhabit the new nocturnal word that rises within the plantation” (LC 127). Crucial here is the recognition that the keys to a resistant, original history lie within the block of plantation History. This compromised, compromising space of cultural erosion can also be the site of a form of selfhood that truly breaks with the framework imposed by the colonial order. Chamoiseau and Confiant point to the *conteur*, for example, whose ritualistic storytelling, as we saw earlier, not only fosters resistance but also challenges sovereign models to facilitate an identity coincident with ‘New World’ experience; yet the *conteur* is often sanctioned by the master and holds a “quasi-official” status on the plantation (LC 36). Something similar occurs in the city: beneath the striated plan of ‘white’ space there is the “obstinate progress of ourselves,” to employ the Créolistes’ phrase. An/other memory is woven into and mutates within this block in the way that in Texaco, for instance, when forced to build those houses for the whites that looked “like the ones of their original province,” the “spirit of the black workers undid and reinvented the dwelling” (104).

The persistence of this alternative history is bound to that practice of cultural reassembly predicated on what has been labelled here the Caribbean

‘marvellous.’ It is because the latter is able to apprehend the collapse of sovereignty in a productive fashion that, on the one hand, it is open to the reinscription of other legacies in order to make them practicable in the contemporary context and, on the other, it can countenance the subsistence of history in the void. This in turn emphasizes the need for that new anthropology able to unearth a tradition in terms not just of its presence as a historical fact, but (like the artistry of the builders in Texaco) of its ‘absent presence’ as a practice of culture, that is, as that “spirit” – the imaginative character of the community – which is manifest in different forms in different periods. To perceive it one must read *through* the de facto plane of existence since it testifies to a form of memory at odds with that held in self-evident historical tropes. Thus, though in Texaco the striated centre of Fort-de-France consumes the surrounding landscape, there remains another space, subsisting beneath and around it, shaped by and endowed with the experiential memories of lower class Martinicans: “In its old heart: a clear, regulated, normalised order. Around it: a boiling indecipherable, impossible crown, masked by the misery and obscure burdens of History” (235). Denied legitimacy in the monumental block of the former zone, the memories embedded in the latter have not been assimilated or codified as historical information. Instead, they remain traces connected to material marks or practices, “grassroots occupations, rich with the depth of our stories” (218).

Chamoiseau, setting out his own theory of memory, describes these as *traces-mémoires*. “The *trace*,” he argues, “is a concrete mark: drum, tree, boat, basket, a quarter, a song, a path that goes. The *mémoires* radiate in the Trace, they *inhabit* it as an absent-presence offered to the emotions” (EPD 130). Thus, such traces are an anthropological density, ruins or vestiges that, if read aright,

nevertheless open out on to a practice of culture imbued with another history. In Texaco these memorial marks are often glimpsed as textual vestiges, fleeting images within the body of the narrative appropriate to their interred condition. When De Gaulle visits Fort-de-France, for example, there appears in the crowd a “*négresse* from Morne des Esses [who] carried him a Carib basket braided in red and black according to an immemorial *geste*, and howled her thirty patient years working on these fibres” (422). This apparition knits the craft of the Amerindians, and so the spectre of their vanished presence, into the heaving urban roads. Indeed, as the residue of a “*geste*” – meaning ‘gesture’ but also referring to the *chanson de geste* – it evokes both corporeal and epic memory. Yet it is not epic as an exclusive, univocal form: *trace* can mean ‘mark’ or ‘tracing,’ and so alludes to inscription as palimpsestual rather than originary; *les tracées* refers to what Chamoiseau and Confiant describe as the “infinite small paths [. . .] [f]orged by the maroons, the slaves, the creoles, through the woods and hills” (LC 12), that is, to a space different to that defined by the linear biases of economic imperative. The *trace-mémoire* thus exists within a ‘marvellous’ prism. A frail remnant in a void, its loss of sovereignty enables it to graft itself into the modern body of culture and hence to continue to function beneath the monumentality of the imposed order. Its material legacy and the sense of space-time embodied therein feeds back as a cross-cultural pressure that helps unravel the all-enveloping, uniform canvas of reality. By so doing, it points to the potential for a rewoven epic patchwork of diverse memory strands.

Since the other reality or space sustained by these traces subsists in striated space, therefore, one cannot simply destroy the latter. To do so would be to amputate a part of oneself. Those ‘ruined’ vestiges gestating inside the

dominant monument must instead be uncovered in terms of the promise, borne by their eroded sovereignty, of a re-visionary rapport between multiple traditions. Such memories do not, says Chamoiseau, “form monuments, nor crystallise a unique memory: they are a play of memories that entangle themselves. [. . .] Their meanings continue to evolve; they are not fixed-univocal like those of the monument” (EPD 130). The potential of these frail memorial bodies is highlighted during the Gros-Joseph episode in Texaco. A mulatto fixated on acceptance by the white world, Gros-Joseph (Marie-Sophie’s new employer) builds into his house (“Petite France”) a ‘white’ space in the shape of a library stocked with classical French literature. In an attempt to enter the colonial economy, he eschews subsistence agriculture to sell crops to a barracks. But he lacks the requisite resources and must rely on the buried treasure Marie-Sophie discovers in the garden – a fantastical occurrence belonging to the world of creole folk culture. The unearthing of the gold in the heart of Petite France, and of this “treasure tale” in the heart of the narrative (275), reveals how the sovereign, white carapaces of Gros-Joseph’s imitative identity and domicile are fractured by *trace-mémoires* that furrow another history. Subsequently forced to recognise his blackness and the lived reality it entails, Gros-Joseph suffers a mental breakdown.¹⁴ Though ultimately destructive, this madness nonetheless allows us to glimpse a way through the polarisations of space and identity.

Earlier we examined the Hegelian notion of mutual recognition and its role in Fanon’s analysis of how the drama of colonialism was to be overcome. In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel posits that self-consciousness “exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (111). Self-consciousness is, he contends, initially

“simple being-for-self, self-equal through the exclusion from itself of everything else” (113). As such, however, it is “certain of its own self, but not of the other, and therefore its own self-certainty still has no truth” (113). Indeed, the excluded ‘other’ is a limit on the first self-consciousness, a limit that negates it yet also makes its reality so that it has to be for another as well as itself. Thus at the limit “each extreme is this exchanging of its own determinateness and an absolute transition into the opposite” (112). Following this negation of itself, however, self-consciousness, having recognised the other in itself, can supersede this other (and its own self) to be truly for itself. At the heart of Hegel’s understanding, therefore, is the principle that self-consciousness, though always existing for another that is mutually constitutive, accedes within this dialectic to a subjectivity that is self-certain and sovereign; in other words, the supreme value for consciousness is inextricable from the achievement of the primacy of the subject now inclusive of its superseded other as part of its own separate being, albeit a being located henceforth within the universal.

The difficulty with this view, in light of the arguments advanced earlier in the chapter, is that, for the “subtle and nebulous links” that shape Caribbean identity, full expression subsists in the void where sovereignty collapses, that is, at that limit where “determinateness” dissolves to become other. The multiple shocks and collisions of colonial history, the repeated crises and catastrophes, cannot be negotiated effectively in terms of an identity predicated on a reconstituted sovereignty. The dialectical movement of supersession can unite and transcend contraries so that, as in Césaire’s *Négritude*, a universal is posited that is “multicoloured” yet comprised of distinct facets. But while the “conscious harmonisation of preserved diversities” is likewise the *Créolistes*’ goal (EC 54),

they stress that to account for the impact of the overlap of influences in the Caribbean the very grounds of identity must be transformed, not just the relations between individuals. In Césaire's "multicoloured" vision each entity contributes to the new whole, yet this contribution remains limited to a specific (past) moment since each is seen as a fixed element. Only via a relational selfhood that does not foreclose the constituent strands within itself can the promise of a cross-cultural community, able to adapt to further influences without re-instituting an exclusive monumentality, be fulfilled. This change in thinking is encapsulated in the difference between the image C. L. R. James uses in Notes on Dialectics to illustrate Hegel's Doctrine of Being – "Water is a quality, a small stream negates the surrounding land. It is a stream because it is no longer land" (68) – and Harris's vision in Four Banks of the overlap between the rocks, waterfall, and greenheart trees. Only with the collapse of their sovereign boundaries – not as a negation leading to the re-establishment of self-certainty, but as a constitutive condition – can one see the depth of histories in the landscape, a process underlain also by African and Indian philosophies of ego-displacement. In other words, liberation here from the primary struggle, the drama of colonialism, must involve a recognition of the other that, rather than instantiate a renewed sovereignty within the historical dialectic of oppressor / oppressed (or rebel), looks beyond this to that phenomenal history of constitutive connectedness grounded in the void of an unfulfilled créolité. With this in mind, Gros-Joseph's breakdown in Texaco can be read as indicating more than just the neurosis of a mimic man.

The recognition that the black 'other' is in fact within himself precipitates the collapse of Gros-Joseph's selfhood. Blackness emerges as the limit to the

sovereign white carapace he has adopted, negating this carapace to provoke the “dissolution of that simple unity” Hegel characterises as the first movement in the development of self-consciousness (115). But of course, Gros-Joseph’s “dissolution” is not the start of a progression towards a new (‘white’) unity since his ‘whiteness’ is an inculcated fantasy. Instead, he goes mad. His previous prodigious consumption of French literature was aimed at denying his skin; now he locks himself in his library to spend “two days delirious under a pile of Montaigne, Descartes, and Montesquieu” (281). Later, he “pissed and crapped on and then ate his own books” (285). Thus literalised is that trope of the ingestion of French culture, as well as its conversion (in Césaire’s work, for example) into an eruptive liberation. Devouring his books, exclaiming manically “Ah Zola taste of shit, Ah Daudet taste of shit” (286), Gros-Joseph’s actions become a violent repudiation that cracks open his white mask. Indeed, his incarceration in the library so decomposes the mimic man that even his wife, “trying to discover her husband in a look, a familiar gesture,” sees “nothing in this degenerate [that] evoked Gros-Joseph” (286). As his breakdown becomes a ritualistic desecration of colonial values, Gros-Joseph exposes the racist limit of the ‘civilising mission’: the collapse of his ‘white’ sovereignty reveals the barrier his black or “degenerate” self will always form to his being accepted as an equal by the colonizer, no matter how well he mimics the latter. Simultaneously, though, he exposes how the excluded black other is in fact an internal limit required by the dominant order to define its own boundaries.

Gros-Joseph thus makes manifest the repression upon which sovereign unities rely. Indeed, if his inability to make a compensatory turn towards blackness, or to subsequently achieve transcendence into a new universal, is

testament to his mutilated psyche, it is nevertheless possible to see in him the beginnings of an alternative to sovereignty. The way he expresses his disillusion with 'white' values by eating and regurgitating the (French) words of others suggests that there is no essential 'other' to fall back on. Identity is instead a relational process of contestation and negotiation, a situation figured by Gros-Joseph remaining at the limit of selfhood – that is, in the void of non-being – established by the negation of his 'white' self. The “degenerate” his wife catches a glimpse of, who behaves in such a fashion that “the true Gros-Joseph would not have approved” (286), is the embodiment of the indeterminacy of identity at this limit. That 'ruined' figure is not the prelude to a new monumental selfhood; instead it represents the frail, alter/native cultural body consumed by such monuments, its erosion of sovereignty the gateway to new architectures of culture and consciousness. Gros-Joseph's ritual repudiation but also re-consumption of French culture – this time as a form marked by his own body (the books covered in faeces) – uncovers this alter/native. Like the vodun dancer in a trance, his displaced self (the “degenerate” who seems not to be the “true” Gros-Joseph) gives flesh to the phenomenal cross-cultural community that mutates beneath the polarisations of *de facto* reality. Yet just as Gros-Joseph is ultimately locked away in an asylum, so this potential community has been interred; indeed, it has been buried more deeply by modernisation. Nevertheless, in the final section we will see how Harris and Chamoiseau, having thus articulated the revised form of identity and space required to free the promise of *traces-mémoires*, bring these ideas together in an original epic able to narrate the shocks both of the colonial past and the modernised cityscape.

Spectres of Memory: Consumption and Cannibal Epic

In “Oedipus and the Middle Passage” Harris refers to Dash’s image of the ‘lost body’ of Caribbean experience, an image that, given the role of corporeality in the region in the preservation of memory, can be understood literally. Harris argues that not only must this lost body be released from the material and discursive blocks through which the colonizers “monumentalise the occasion of their arrival in the new land” (11); it may also “be equated with a ‘failed insurrectionary body’” (18). He evokes the rebel slave Cuffey, whose revolt against the Dutch in Berbice – his eruption into the body politic – was defeated and consumed by the state. For Harris, however, this failure can be re-read from the present in such a way as to “rehearse a visionary counterpoint of resources in long eclipse beneath the ascendancy of conquistadorial regimes” (18). By breaking the equivalence between power, violence, and justice, the “failed political insurrection highlights the partiality of both so-called victim and so-called victor” (19). The defeat can be redeemed as more than the tragic end of a challenge to the authorities; it contains within it the seeds of an alternative form of identity that can be taken up *now* to contest the underlying principles of the dominant order. Harris views the sculpture of Cuffey in Georgetown as embodying this potential. In contrast to the totalising and integrative statues examined earlier, this sculpture is not the monumentalised triumph of a heroic rebel but “an alarming and moving figure – it has no status in power and sovereignty” (19). Thus more “provocatively alive than it would otherwise be did it accord with conventional expectations” (19), the sculpture’s eroded sovereignty points away from epic history as synonymous with monolithic territorial inscriptions and exclusive root identities; it instead gestures (or its

geste is) towards an epic based on a rapport between cultures and frail *traces-mémoires*.

What this sculpture manifests architecturally is repeated in the architecture of the texts under discussion. In their approach to the past they seek not to destroy the monuments of History, but to make them move anew. As Harris notes, in the “so-called Third World the [. . .] ‘native’ archetypes are all overlaid by European skeletons and archetypes as well. You will never activate them unless you activate the so-called ‘European’ skeletons as well. They are locked together and there is no way around that” (RI 40-41). It is this dual process of excavation and reactivation that the novels perform. The monument of reified reality is consumed not to be obliterated in a Césaire-style verription, but to release from its belly, corseted by past colonial biases and the rationalised meshwork of the modernised cityscape, those suppressed vestiges and traditions that can institute a re-visionary counterpoint between themselves and the thereby transformed monument. Translated into textual form, this is reflected in a shift from what Harris calls “cannibal tragedy” to “cannibal epic” (WOS 31), so from the polarisations of tragedy – the sterile and repetitive consumption of one absolute by another – towards cannibalism as communion or rapport of forces. The new cannibal epic has the “capacity to digest as well as liberate contrasting figures” (Harris, ES 53) in order to host or transubstantiate an unconscious or spectral reality – that vision of consciousness in which a new community gestates.

The key to Harris’s understanding of cannibal epic is the native vestige of the Carib bone flute. Fashioned by the Caribs from the hollowed out bone of an enemy, a morsel of whom was first eaten in a ritual ceremony, the flute

connects ingestion to redeemed memory and the transformation of History.

During the ceremony, explains Harris, “flesh was plucked and consumed and in the process secrets were digested. Spectres arose from, or reposed in, the flute” (“A Note” 9). The purpose was to gain prophetic insight into the enemy’s plans. Thus, the ritual transubstantiated the Carib into a ‘host’ who sustained, corporeally, self and other, a play of contrasts then given voice through the music of the bone flute.¹⁵ “In parallel with an obvious violation ran therefore [. . .] another subtle force,” writes Harris, “resembling yet differing from terror in that the flute became the home or curiously *mutual* fortress of spirit between enemy and other, an organ of self-knowledge suffused with enemy bias so close to native greed for victory” (“A Note” 9-10). The flute manifests the trace memories of contingency, the recognition of one’s own conquistadorial biases in the mirror of the conquistador. Indeed, its music is ‘corporeal’: emanating from the skeletal morsel of a victor (conquistador) turned victim, it re-fleshes (and transfigures) the ingested body in a paradoxical corporeal spectre that figures the ‘lost body’ of a communion aborted by the polarisations of history.¹⁶ For example, a common omen glimpsed by the Caribs in the “sparks which flew up” from their cauldron “as they plucked their bone or hollowed their flute” was the bush-baby (ES 55). This spectre is no ethereal ghost, however. The child is embedded in – and embodies – the landscape (it rises from the sparks, so the wood, so the forest). Hence it is a transubstantiation that, sparked in relation to the (institutional) conquistadorial bone in the pot, provides “an essential contrast [. . .] and an essential *rapport* between ruin and origin,” thereby fleshing out the memory of the community through the active alchemy of self and other (ES 55).

Four Banks performs such epic cannibalism as it re-narrates Anselm’s

history in particular and the Caribbean's in general. The bone flute becomes an organizing motif as the text looks to transfigure static memory tropes into an active, contrapuntal form of experiential remembrance. Introduced with the Macusi woodman, the flute is associated with the three drowned children (or spectral bush-babies). Indeed, it "tells of the passage of the drowned into the river of the dead. The flute tells that the river of the dead and the river of the living are one quantum stream possessed of four banks" (310). In other words, the density of the music, its combination of notes (of host and consumed body), enables it to connect the "living" (conscious, assimilated memory) with the "dead" (unconscious, repressed memory):

Listen to the voice of the flute. It sings and tells its tale in the English language yet solid (however whispering) music gives the Word that echoes in one's frame as one kneels uncanny twists, uncanny spirals, that relate to ancestral tongues, Macusi, Carib, Arawak, Wapishana pre-Columbian tongues that have been eclipsed. (310)

These associations "tilt" the river so that one no longer reads its banks in a horizontal fashion, but as a vertical ladder that extends through the "rich spoil and upheaval of the Word" (310), and where at each stage elements are brought into new relationships that transform them.

This idea may seem somewhat abstract, but it translates into a definite textual strategy. If one understands the novel as the river then the first bank (chapter) plays out the one-sided, congealed epic memory of Canaima as murderer. As the Word of History (often using the simple, declaratory phrasing of epic), it follows a horizontal trajectory back into a static past. But also

introduced here are those objects – the knife, the axe, the tree – that evoke a diversity of traditions, suturing together ‘dead’ memory (the Carib genesis myth of the sculpted tree) with its ‘living,’ institutional counterpart (the Christian cross of resurrection). The density of meaning this invests in the Word (or linear narrative) of the text “tilts” it so that one can no longer read ‘horizontally’ but must trace these associations ‘vertically’ through the novel. As they are unpacked on banks two and three, the memories unleashed animate other possible pasts or narratives, converting the epic of section one into something new when its imagery is replayed on bank four. The images released in the first consumption of the past on bank one thus become spectral ‘image bodies’; like the bush-babies from the Carib pot, they rise through the text and manifest a vision of consciousness, fleshing out the lineaments of a potential new community.

Following the motif of the knife, we can trace this ascent through meaning. On the first bank the knife is Canaima’s murder weapon but is linked also to the creativity of sculpting. Hence, when Anselm is pierced by the blade his metaphorical death is simultaneously a rebirth since it punctures the perceptual frame that blinds him to his repressed memories. The reappearance of the weapon on the second bank sees it now linked to the thorn of a rose. Rose is the name both of Anselm’s mother and her sister, Canaima’s mother, although Anselm only uncovers this connection towards the end of the chapter. It is underlined, however, by the imagistic similitude between the thorn (associated with the crown of thorns and so Anselm as Christ) and the blade (associated with Canaima as devil), a similitude that suggests that these two are in fact parallel opposites. This sameness of the different disrupts absolutes so that the clear

distinctions of epic become ambivalent. The desire for heroic revenge has become enmeshed in the unforeseen linkages that arise from sexual exploitation. Anselm's mother was abused by his father Harold, prompting the latter's own 'exploitation' by the Rose twin that culminates in the birth of Anselm's half-brother Canaima – a situation that recalls the entanglement of cultures born from the oppressive sexual relations within the plantation. As Anselm muses of epic convention: "I had expected him to worm his way into the Rose garden and slay his enemies. But instead the imperial design of the homecoming lord and master had been converted into a colonial fable that spun its web in reverse order in the branches of the lofty rose tree over my head" (329). As good and evil, thorn and knife, reveal their contingency, fixed epic fate and its tautologies of power (evil is forever evil) are reversed.

This conversion heads towards redemption on bank three, where the knife is glimpsed in the ribs of the "sculpture of black Agamemnon" (352). Thus it is again associated with a slain king and sexual betrayal. Yet as "black" Agamemnon, the sculpture represents that 'lost' or frail body buried (like Gros-Joseph's "degenerate" self) beneath socio-political convention. The notion of violent sacrifice – the death of the hero to restore unity – is thereby transfigured: black Agamemnon is no martyr consolidating a cycle of violence, but represents a "prime refugee of war": "He was running through a hail of bullets. Slain child, slain dancer, slain man, slain woman. [. . .] I saw the glimmering seed of a new dynasty in resurrected family from the body of a slain child" (358). The knife now resonates with the rebirth of the body politic freed from the violence of exclusive, foundational epic; it is bound to the newly recognized interpenetration of victor and victim, with its once murderous cut now the slice that sculpts this

creative counterpoint.

By the fourth bank, therefore, the knife both as murder weapon and signifier of institutionalised violence (justice as vengeance) has been transfigured. At the end of the third bank (“The Trial”) the “great judge” – the static institution of retributive Law – becomes for Anselm “a shape I held now in my arms, a shape of the law I nursed in my arms within a balance of furies, a shape that edges Memory’s man-made legends, man-made martyrdoms into the new inner craft of Rose and the prospect of a newborn state” (383). The “balance” achieved – the reanimation of the Law (the Word) via the rapport established to the frailty of the Rose (the ‘lost’ body of experience) – enables unassimilated or repressed memory to be expressed from within the reinscribed body of the institution. Consequently, on the fourth bank the first bank can be replayed in light of such counterpoint, its univocal Word and congealed epic narrative endowed with the polyvocal fluidity produced by the ascent through meaning. The text is thus ‘scaled’: like a musical scale its notes / images are transformed in relation to the ‘chords’ that surround them. The ‘note’ of the knife, thrown into the air on the first bank, returns to Anselm now as “the knife of civilization” within a “cornerstone encompassing [. . .] the thorn of the Rose” (419). The conversion of the knife in this way into a sign of contingency – the “profoundest self-recognition of ourselves in and through others” (408) – is hence emblematic of the ‘musical’ narrative form Harris employs, one capable of orchestrating multiple memory strands.

Such musicality returns us to the bone flute and to bank four, which not only reiterates past images, but also enacts the consumption of Four Banks itself. The text – the institution of the novel form – is ingested from within by its own

language so as to be reborn. In the first section Canaima holds in his arms the murdered Macusi and sprinkles his face with water to make it seem as if he has drowned. On the final bank this consumed textual past is regurgitated as Anselm and the others carry the dead Macusi children through the waterfall. As Jean-Pierre Durix notes, the “rhythm of the drums that envelops the characters in the final scene is likened to ‘fine spun and delicate’ rain, a web or tapestry of fertility that has now replaced Canaima’s deceitful sprinkling of water” and thus (since the children are also the embodied Word) points to the “revitalization of the apparently dead shell of language” (64). In addition, the stress on rhythm emphasizes the new ritualised corporeality of the Word, a condition vital to the expression of bodily memory. Indeed, the style of language employed in this section transforms that used in the first. The conventional epic phrasing of the latter becomes a host body that spawns the vibrant contrapuntal poetics of bank four.

Take, for example, the description of Proteus’s cabin, a fossil space glimpsed in the hillside that contains within itself vestiges of other fossil spaces:

It was hollow, beached, it seemed to levitate a little, Newton’s gravity, Einstein’s counter-gravity, it was the painted light of an apple in a sun-ship, cave-rocket-apple to the moon, it was the painted bone-light of a night-ship, cave-rocket-bone to Venus, it was everything one salvages and nets from the body of a man or a woman akin to ours in palaeolithic corridors of space, savage electricity in fingers and joints, savage umbilicus or eel encircling the stars. (416)

The short statements (“It was time to ascend god-rock” [303]) and repeated

epithets (“the bone-sockets of his eyes” [303]) that accompanied Anselm’s first climb up the Waterfall with Robot find an echo here; yet their imagery has been sliced out of its conventional frame and sutured together in new, rhythmic compounds (“night-ship, cave-rocket-bone”). Language is hence re-ritualised. In the earlier discussion of Benjamin it was noted that the repetitions of ritual function to suspend time; they do not simply recall an event but reproduce it in the present. The ritual act, as Octavio Paz has observed, replaces “chronometric time” – a “homogenous succession lacking all particularity” – with “mythological time” – a cyclical form in which “all times, past and future, [are] contained” (209). The break with linearity thus enables one to access the reservoir of collective memory, to return to past experience but also to impregnate the present, to endlessly re-create it, by way of this return: “The fiesta becomes the creator of time; repetition becomes conception. [. . .] Through ritual [. . .] man gains access to a world in which opposites are reconciled and united (Paz 210). In the above passage, the ritualistic use of chains of images suspends ‘progression’ to evoke a re-creative circularity. Indeed, the hyphenated compounds stress how each element is now penetrated by the other, and thus impregnated with new meaning. The rocket, for example, alludes to the technological future and to the missile-like linearity that defines progressive realism. Here, however, it is sutured to the cave, that is, the past or the Palaeolithic fossil space, and to the apple, which again refers to scientific discovery (Newton’s falling apple), but also to religion – Adam and Eve and the apple in the Garden of Eden. The latter allusion, strengthened by mention of the “body of a man or a woman akin to ours in palaeolithic corridors of space,” emphasizes not only the reconciliation of opposites (science and religion), but

also a (re)creation stemming from their interpenetration. And at the heart of this contingency (“cave-rocket-apple”) is the institution of the rocket or missile. Now reinscribed in relation to the other elements, it becomes the “ship” that sustains their play of contrasts. When this “ship” returns as a “cave-rocket-bone,” the latter term, previously associated with the “bone-sockets” of Robot’s one-sided technical vision, is re-ritualised in relation to the associations evoked by the reinscribed institution: the ‘dead’ bone is transubstantiated into the prospective new body (the new cross-cultural Adam).

The textual past is re-created, therefore, so that a continuity can be established with this past – an epic can be narrated – that is not grounded in loss or retributive violence. And since such continuity relies on the disinterment of ‘other’ memories, it does not consolidate a linear exclusivity; rather, there is a constant re-incorporation of other textual pasts, other images and rhythms. This strategy underpins Harris’s vision of a form of remembrance resistant to the sclerosis inflicted by the burdens of history. The bush-baby-like corporeal spectres of the dead children, arising from the ‘cannibalised’ text on the fourth bank, signal the burden of the past Anselm and the others must carry; yet by materialising anew the past in the present they allow for a simultaneity of times in this ritual moment. Thus, the past can be re-examined beyond the framework of causality, that is, without the process of looking back on the *then* consolidating the *now* as its only and necessary outcome. To bear witness from the present is no longer to make the latter the *de facto* endpoint of the history that puts one in a position to look back in the first place. It is the past of Canaima as absolute evil that causes Anselm to re-visit history, yet the past of Canaima as reborn child that enables him to understand their twinned identity. Equally, the past of the

community understood as loss is torn from a continuum by its being ritually replayed to be reborn as a series of alternative perspectives – just as the vodun ritual displaces conventional social structures (the consolidated ego) to open up a ‘mythological’ time in which alternative phenomenal legacies can be manifested. And just as the ego-displacement enabled by vodun entails, as Deren observed, “collective participation” which “guarantee[s] the burden [. . .] [is] distributed and shared” (250), so for Harris the break with causality pluralizes the historical burden. To come to terms now with a traumatic legacy does not involve its assimilation into consciousness as a fixed segment in a linear narrative; rather it must be kept in play, spread out through diverse pasts and personae to transubstantiate a history beyond loss: “The need to stagger the burden of memory, replete with guilt,” writes Harris, “is essential to the creation of a new age” (“Profiles of Myth” 208).

It is worth recalling here Brathwaite’s “stammaments.” These statuesque Words or monuments impose a silence or ‘stammer’ on the histories they absorb. Yet the word “stammaments” also implies ‘stamen,’ indicating that this “obstruction and the stutter it occasions are germinal, generative” (Mackey, “Wringing the Word” 136). Harris’s re-ritualising of the Word exemplifies this: his linguistic ‘stammers’ (“cave-rocket-apple . . . cave-rocket-bone”) become the forerunners of a creative reassembly. Indeed, just as the impediment of the stammer, the breakdown of syntagmatic unity, results in (to employ Brathwaite’s image) pebbles of language from which to erect a new, polycentric architecture, so the impediments of History – fragmentation, over-determination – provide the (non-monolithic) foundations of its alternative. The historical stammer is transformed into a way of re-energising institutions, reiterating the past so that it

continues to jab into the present, just as Canaima jabs his knife into Anselm's ribs to facilitate his re-encounter with memory. The re-visionary rapport thus established between the recovered 'lost body,' its nerve-endings restored by its re-ritualisation, and institutional History, transformed rather than amputated, points to the transfiguration of the body politic. Texaco emphasizes this as it pursues its own epic cannibalism; for, as Walcott has observed, the novel, "like Ulysses, is a large prose-poem that devours the structure of narrative fiction" ("Letter to Chamoiseau" 218-19).

Chamoiseau's reiteration of the past unearths fossils spaces inside the 'sacred' institution of History in which to ground alter/native or 'profane' histories. This sacred / profane iconography (or at least the first term in the pair, the second being a silent or repressed implication) appears frequently in the work of colonialist writers.¹⁷ Descriptions of plantation life, for example, often efface or reduce to fleeting shadows the slaves or, later, the 'freed' black and Indian labourers. The inferno of exploitation is occluded to portray the plantation as an exotic, rural paradise. To redeem memory from within this 'sanctuary,' Chamoiseau repeats structurally what Harris manifested in the king of thieves. There it was the profane in the sacred – the pagan Amerindian axe in the hand of the Christian Anselm – that reanimated memory. Here Chamoiseau hollows out the Word of History and the sacred canon of French literature to reveal a profane Creole counterpoint.

The key to this invocation of absent(ed) Creole voices lies in the relationship Chamoiseau forges between the linguistic structures of French and Creole. Just as Harris's architectures of space give shape to absent histories via the outlines created by the reassembly of present traces, so Chamoiseau breaks

the rock of French into pebbles that can be reconstructed into shapes that evoke Creole through the play of relations they establish. Chancé's analysis of Glissant's treatment of these two languages is helpful here. Glissant, she notes, shows how it is possible, by the use of certain structural patterns, to "speak Creole without the Creole language" (125). He observes, for example, that the stress in creole culture on the body means that one does not say "me" but "my body": a "Creole speaker does not say «I have a bad back» but «my back makes me ill»" (Chancé 125). Yet Glissant evokes this Creole linguistic register and its attendant worldview by way of French, albeit a French now reinscribed to "have sense only in reference to the Creole language" (Chancé 127).

Chamoiseau reproduces this strategy on a narrative level in Texaco. The text consumes, for example, the "incantatory memory" found in the litanies of Saint-John Perse (Walcott, "Letter to Chamoiseau" 218). The poetic prose in which Perse, a white creole landowner, narrates what for him is an Edenic island space –

Palms! And the sweetness
of age-old roots . . . ! The breath of the trade winds, the
woodpigeons and the chestnut brown cat
furrowed the bitter foliage where, in the harshness of an evening
in the perfume of the Flood,
the pink and green moons hung like mangoes. (Éloges 39)

– echoes in Texaco's descriptions of plantation life and natural phenomena:

It was the month of the digging for the planting of the cane, and in
the digging one weeded the mad grasses. The fine-fine rain dug
its heels in, hypnotising the work, forcing the men to watch out for

its moods, to count the lost time in the prolonged evenings. Then the rain took the bad path of a perennial waterfall until it reached an orchestra of winds, patient trumpets full of nine thunderous blows [*neuf tonnerres du sort*]. (74)

The rhythmic evocation of bygone days evident in Perse's work ("in the harshness of an evening in the perfume of the Flood" / "dans la crudité d'un soir au parfum de Déluge") returns in Chamoiseau's, the same lexical repetitions ("the month of the digging for the planting of the cane" / "le mois de fouilles pour la plantée des cannes") used to convey a similar sense of fecund nature. Yet what is paradisiacal in Perse is inseparable from the torments of exploitation as Chamoiseau articulates them. While the latter gestures towards the style of the former, he nevertheless structures his own writing in such a way as to evoke an/other reality. The 'sacred' poetics of Perse are infused with the 'profanities' of Creole vernacular, so that, for example, the elevated phrase "an orchestra of winds" descends into the 'low' Creole of the trumpets' "*neuf tonnerres du sort*" – an arcane formulation that also incorporates the common creole superstition of numerical luck. Yet this créolité has been achieved without Creole itself. Through his particular arrangement of French syntax, Chamoiseau not only evokes the rhythms of Creole, but also reveals the world to which it is adjoined, that reality of hardship – of slaves labouring in terrible conditions – so often occluded in the paradise Perse articulates.

Thus Chamoiseau, rather than reject the institution of (canonical) French, re-ritualises it. His adoption of this linguistic register as a mask, which, as it is replayed is invested with a profanity that transforms its absolute 'civility,' enables him (in the same way that Harris's image masks, like the body of the

vodun dancer, manifest a vision of consciousness) to flesh out the spectral lineaments of reality's underside, its 'lost' body. Indeed, the narrative enacts ritual ceremonies of possession throughout. Just as Harris "plays on the fears of his European ancestors, 'inhabiting' their texts, preying upon them like a ghost" (Huggan 139), so Chamoiseau inhabits the voices of his literary forbears. Take, for example, the description of Saint-Pierre as Esternome and Ninon wander the city:

In the depth of dark shops he showed her strange things come from other countries. [. . .] Carafes of misty porcelain at a cloth salesman's. Pans with guaiac handles at an angelic haberdasher's. Portuguese lace inside a jewellery store. [. . .] At a sorceress's who filtered aromas, he showed her Judaic balm, double-rose water, raw mint water, templar water, epicurean water which smelled like marjoram, and maiden water. Proud, he pointed out to her the bits of arches he had replaced at the bottom of façades.

(140)

In this litany of images there again lurks the incantatory style of Perse. But the text also 'possesses' the poetic voice of Baudelaire, the lyrical cadences of his wandered-in cityscapes: "The chimney-pipes, the steeples, all the city's masts, / The great, inspiring skies, magnificent and vast. // How sweet it is to see, across the misty gloom, / A star born in the blue, a lamp lit in a room" ("Landscape" 167). A process of linguistic carnivalisation is thus at work. The 'sacred' masks Chamoiseau adopts are stitched together into his own unique style, a harlequin patchwork that swathes and figures an absent or 'profane' underside (the sorceress who appears amongst the bounty of capitalist trade, for instance). This

carnivalisation enables the buried history of creole experience to be uncovered from within the urban space, its lurking presence underlined by the architectural changes Esternome has had a hand in.

“The carnivalesque phenomenon in Third-world cultures,” writes Harris, “may [. . .] sustain an evolution in allegory that points to a spiritual irony or capacity to bear the ‘unbearable’ quest for justice” (“Comedy and Modern Allegory” 138-39). Thus, Chamoiseau’s carnivalised language, his placing in parallel, rather than opposition, of the sacred (French) and profane (Creole) is another means by which the burden of history can be staggered and borne. However, the importance of carnivalisation and re-ritualisation to the original epic articulated by these writers stems not only from the need to express the shocks of the past without becoming fixed in one-sided formulas. It is also key to the narrating of the cityscape – the place where the shock experience had, for Benjamin, become most intense – in such a way as to expose and resist the power relations that have become more visible yet less recognised in the period of late capitalism. The Gros-Joseph episode indicated that it is only at the limit where identity becomes non-being (understood here as the void of *créolité*) that recognition of the contingencies that define selfhood can be achieved in a manner that moves beyond the premise of sovereign subjectivity. Such recognition provides a gateway to a transformative rapport between ‘lost’ and institutional bodies. However, the increasing reification of urban reality makes more difficult the penetration of official reality to force this recognition; moreover, the ruling social order offers an invidious ‘freedom’ that short-circuits even the already compromised version that Gros-Joseph’s collapse yields.

As capitalism mutates it repeatedly sweeps away old institutions in order

to re-structure the socius along new economic axes. In so doing, it appears to augur a less repressive milieu. As we have seen, though, such shifts often entail only a mutation in earlier modes of domination, which assume more insidious guises. Indeed, it is in part precisely the ‘freedom’ promised by the new order that exacerbates oppression. On the plantation, for example, exploitation was overt, if inculcated as natural; in the city the asymmetrical power relations around commodity production have been occluded, thwarting even the potential their visibility would offer for a *prise en conscience*. When, in the passage cited above, Esternome and Ninon wander around Saint-Pierre they encounter only the objectified goods, inextricable from the uneven circuits of capitalist production, that they are ‘free’ to buy.

The misrecognition of these (recognised) power relations becomes ever more ingrained as the late capitalist economy develops, something Harris points to in Four Banks while suggesting also that modern epic or allegory could reveal and challenge this situation. As Anselm muses:

‘I needed a dark comedy of blind warriors and suitors, half-epic guilt, half-theft of love. [. . .] In this late cycle of cosmic Capital are there not rich, desirable slave women (enslaved to systems of money) with a dozen suitors, divorced husbands and lovers, rich, desirable slave men (enslaved to the Stock Market) with two dozen mistresses, all fighting, arguing, over fortunes [. . .]?’ (323)

Capital thus makes visible its means of control in order to better obscure the strictures it imposes. As Bourdieu observes, “when domination can only be exerted in its elementary form [. . .] it takes place overtly and has to be disguised under the veil of enchanted relations” (LP 126). With the “objectification of

capital,” however, power relations “are mediated by objective, institutionalised mechanisms such as the ‘self-regulating market’, the educational system or the legal apparatus, where they have the permanence and opacity of things and lie beyond the reach of individual consciousness” (LP 130). Hence, the enslavement to “systems of money” – which in their objectified state appear inevitable – presents itself as a freely taken decision. Indeed, one does in a sense desire this enslavement since the licence for ‘unconstrained’ consumption is now the orthodoxy of freedom; and precisely because this ‘freedom’ appears absolute, one is blinded to the continual impositions regulating behaviour, to the way in which this ‘paradise’ chains one to an inferno of exploitation. Thus, declares Anselm, we ““need to see our acceptance of a hidden state of unfreedom masked by ideal freedom in an eruptive light”” (423).

This “eruptive light” is Harris’s new Divine Comedy, a cannibal epic that, via its consumption of bias and carnivalisation of voices, places the profane and sacred in counterpoint (distinguishing it from Dante’s absolute separation of realms). The blindness wrought by “ideal” conceptions is punctured as consciousness is raised to the interdependence of apparently opposite poles, opening the way to a re-vision of society. “Modern allegory,” writes Harris “works through a paradox of forces in which materialism [. . .] is repudiated to yield an insight into spiritual irony or spiritual comedy that runs in concert with deceiving [. . .] appearance” (“Comedy and Modern Allegory” 140). To both articulate, and invoke the transformation of, the contemporary situation requires an aesthetic shift from Tragedy to Comedy, the latter establishing that necessary rapport between ‘lost’ and monumental bodies. Texaco’s ‘comedic’ portrayal of Fort-de-France shows the significance of this. The city is split between its

‘sacred’ centre, “living on the new demands of consumption,” and the ‘profane’ Quarters that surround it, the insalubrious shanty towns where “one survives on memory” (218). Yet this ‘split’ is deceptive: the centre cannot survive without its outlying settlements, which comprise a vital pool of labour. Consequently, there is “a constant going-and-coming between the Quarter of the Wretched and the heart of the City. City was the open ocean. The Quarter was the port of registry” (220). The city seeks to conceal this dependence via an objectification of capital that makes the urban economy appear the self-sufficient apotheosis of freedom; hence do the old industries “vomit[. . .] blackmen who detested the fields, and who, more assured in their so-called knowledge, went into City like one runs into the biggest factory on hiring day” (246).

For Chamoiseau to engage the ‘reality’ inculcated by late capitalism, Texaco must show the apparent absolute separation of city and periphery imposed by capital to mask its exploitative reliance on the workers crammed into the inferno of shanty towns. Thus is Burton’s criticism of what he sees as the “reductive dualism” present in the novel misplaced (Le roman marron 199). The articulation of this split is a key element in Chamoiseau’s approach to a transformative “spiritual comedy” – to use Harris’s phrase – “that runs in concert with deceiving [. . .] appearance.” Moreover, Burton reads Texaco’s portrayal of this dualism as an unintended slip into Négritude-style binaries, there to be transcended through a dialectical movement. He thereby misses the alter/native philosophy at work in the text. Just as the Gros-Joseph episode could have prefigured a Césairean eruption of renewed sovereignty but instead hinted at a fundamental re-imagining of identity, so here liberation from the tragedy of a colonially-inspired opposition arises via a fight for recognition significantly

altered by a plunge into créolité that revises its bases (biases). By bringing to the city that new anthropology, with its emphasis on frail cultural bodies and a ‘marvellous’ reassembly of eroded sovereignties, Chamoiseau produces an epic able to uncover that *practice* of culture which forged an alternative history but appeared lost with modernisation. In Chronique and Solibo the tragedy of cultural expiration dominated as traditions which had previously sustained an/other reality vanished. But the principles behind these traditions – their “spirit” (like the “spirit” the black workers wove into their re-making of colonial residences) – remained, only in transfigured guise as the socio-economic context had changed. This could not be expressed in the earlier texts since they were unable to marshal (at least thematically – Chamoiseau’s linguistic code-switching did gesture towards it) what Glissant terms the Caribbean’s “irruption into modernity” (DA 438) – that synchronous experience of histories which results from a legacy of abrupt socio-political impositions and uneven development. In Texaco, however, the polarised plane of surface reality is consumed to uncover contingent pasts as still live potentials; staggering the burden of manifold memory traces, the text enables their simultaneous articulation and the transubstantiation of a mutative history of coexistent worlds and cross-cultural interaction. In so doing, it reveals how that ‘marvellous’ deformation and recombination of influences continues, albeit now in relation to new conditions: the increased shocks of the modernised city; the restructured socius of commodity capitalism.

Take, for example, the following passage in which Marie-Sophie describes the lanes that run through Morne Abélard. Her incantatory geographical litany recalls the oral performance of the plantation *conteur*. The

latter's ritual recitation freed slave consciousness from the blockages of colonialism to effect a reconciliation with 'New World' experience, articulating the reassembly of eroded traditions. Similarly, Marie-Sophie redeems the cityscape as her ritual mantra undoes the urban monument to yoke together the multiple *traces-mémoires* of uncovered legacies, spawning a vision that penetrates Martinique's complex, overlapping history. There was, she asserts,

[t]he lane where hunger whittled teeth. The calenda lane where one lurches into the cossack, the guiomba, and the bombé serré. The pious lane where white whales sparkle at night. The lane where dawn's blackbirds learn a lot of things. The lane of forgotten mysteries where old blackmen resemble Carib warriors. The lane of black maroons who sculpted ferns while speaking other tongues. [. . .] The lane of the syrians [sic] who went through every Saturday with their big bundles. The lane of holy water sprinkled on each Friday the thirteenth. The lane of drying laundry clothing the wind. [. . .] The lane of lost chinese [sic] waiting for what boat? [. . .] The lane of Adventists gathering on Saturdays on numbered cafeteria chairs in red to read the Bible's songs some other way. The lane where the general councilman held his meetings on the idea of happiness. (357-58)

Through the layered mass of rhythmic sentences, the narrative articulates space as an entangled accumulation of fragmented memories and diverse practices, creating a rhizomatic topography. Indeed, vividly encapsulated is the uneven development that results from the irruption into modernity. A variety of cultural practices coexist here. The 'profane' créole dances performed in the calanda lane

overlap with the ‘sacred’ rituals of the Adventists, who nevertheless read the Bible’s songs “some other way” in a setting (with its “numbered cafeteria chairs”) distinctly marked by modern consumer culture. Similarly, Christian beliefs are entwined with folklore (“holy water sprinkled on each Friday the thirteenth”), while traditional craftwork (the “sculpted ferns” of the maroons) overlaps with the economic demands of the new industries that have drawn people to the area. In fact, these lanes contain all that the interior of the mimic city would deny yet cannot; their ritualised delineation erodes a striated separatism, thus enabling the stitching together of apparent polarities.

As the narrative knits past or suppressed memories into the fabric of the urban area, it accedes to that form of writing Marie-Sophie desires, one that is informed by the word, and the silences, and which remains living, which moves in a circle, wandering all the time, ceaselessly irrigating with life what has been written before, and which reinvents the circle each time like a spiral that at any moment is in the future, ahead, each loop modifying the other, non-stop, without losing a unity difficult to name [. . .]. (413)

The description of the lanes reflects this idea of a “unity” of different, coexistent times and influences that are not brought together in a progressive, sublimating movement, that is, with each aspect incorporated as a primary element whose impact is fixed at a particular past moment. Rather (and owing to the feedback from traditions outside the historical dialectic, here signified by the *traces-mémoires* of Caribs and maroons) each circle of movement is, like the ego in African philosophy, constantly voided to be reinvented by live pasts that return and modify the present. The spiralling motion thus produced, the back and forth

momentum with its repeated erosion yet accumulation of historical bodies (what Brathwaite, playing on Hegelian dialectics, calls tidalectics¹⁸), is manifested in the passage's rhythm and imagery. As well as the sense of accumulation engendered by the refrain "The lane," the scene is constructed around relays and juxtapositions that abrade absolute limits, causing each node or motif to seep into the other. The deprivation ("hunger") of the first lane is countered by the living cultural history of the dances in the second. The ensuing references to natural history ("whales," "blackbirds") mutate into lanes imbued with a cross-cultural human history: Caribs, maroons, Syrian and Chinese immigrants. The latter two are closely associated with the new consumerism found in the inner city. Indeed, the Syrians who come "through every Saturday" with their products provide a thread into other strands of memory – subsequently rewoven – that are intimately bound to the 'civil' space of central Fort-de-France; for after the Syrians come a series of sacred / profane images (the holy water followed by someone's laundry) that take us through to the institutions of religion and politics (embodied in the Adventists and the councilman).

Integral to this re-narration is a new polyvocal relationship to space. The plan that was inextricable from the army's striation of Fort-de-France is overwhelmed: the lanes are too densely packed with sensations to be grasped from an abstract, sovereign viewpoint. Instead, they are attributed meaning via the passage of the body within them, something emphasized by the way in which the text leads the reader through Morne Abélard step by step. Thus is striated space translated into what Deleuze and Guattari term "smooth space": heterogeneous and rhizomatic, the latter is defined by experiential relations and not the univocal decree of an abstracted observer; it is a "'tactile,' or rather haptic

space” in which “orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation” depending on the position (both in geographical and socio-economic terms) from which they are experienced (Thousand Plateaus 492) – just as the significance of the maze-like lanes and their spiralling histories is open to constant reinvention.

The vision of consciousness manifested by Marie-Sophie’s ritual evocation of the lanes later inspires her own attempt to materialise, in Texaco, an alternative to striated space and the ideological framework it entails. Rather than organised around the atomised, ‘modern’ body, confined and regulated within a modular dwelling, Texaco is structured in relation to the communal experience of its inhabitants and the practical links they establish both to each other and to the land:

Our shacks sat on the earth, espousing its contours [. . .]. No private land, nor collective land [. . .]. [I]f the first had a good spot, he could [. . .] only contemplate the settlement of the other; he even had to help him [. . .]. Each hut, day after day, supported the other and so on. Same for the lives which reached out to each other over the phantom fences writhing on the soil. (407-08)

The Quarters around the city concretise a socio-cultural framework coincident with their population. Able to architecturally ground their worldview and history, the Martinican lower classes pose a challenge to the externally-orientated and exclusive spatial order currently dominant, the alternative spaces they construct providing the potential bases of an alternative social order.¹⁹ However, it should be stressed that such settlements cannot be an endpoint in themselves. On their own, Quarters such as Texaco are vulnerable to the decrees of the ruling

class, which still retains control over politico-economic structures. The squatter settlements remain illegitimate sites in constant danger of being razed.

Consequently, a paradoxical 're-rooting' of the rhizomatic Quarters must occur to secure their promise and to ensure that their occupants can stake a place in a restructured social order. To do so requires that the institutional body of the city-centre be brought into transformative rapport with the tenuous 'bodies' – clinging to hillsides or swampy ground – of the Quarters; in other words, the institution must be reclaimed and reinscribed to ground an alternative form of community that would otherwise lack the requisite infrastructure to maintain its viability.

Such is the revelation Texaco's urban planner is brought to via Marie-Sophie's (re)visionary storytelling: her narrative, he claims, has "modified my eyes" (212). He sees now that the Quarters, which comprise "the roots of a new identity: multilingual, multiracial, multi-historical, open, sensitive to the diversity of the world" (282), must be incorporated into a city space thereby transfigured. The various forces within the urban sprawl need to be understood as an ecosystem or "urban mangrove" (336). This eco-systemic conception of the city is the spatial equivalent of an identity defined not by monumental sovereignty but by the network of contingencies that comprise the amniotic space of *créolité*; its literary equivalent is that form of redemptive, cannibal epic based not on exclusionary consolidation but an open vision of consciousness in which ritual, far from restoring the 'absolute' sacred Benjamin considered lost, places in counterpoint the sacred and profane, the institution and the 'lost' body.

Chapter 4. The Unfinished Body: Nationalism, Narrative, and Global Community.

Who among us has not dreamt, in his ambitious days, of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and rhyme, supple enough and resistant enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the shocks of consciousness? It is above all from the exploration of enormous cities, from the crossing of their innumerable connections, that this obsessive ideal is born.

Charles Baudelaire, Preface to *Petits Poèmes en prose*

The new architecture of the world must be a profound understanding and revelation of all factors that combine into the phenomenon of effort and achievement not for one race of men but for all mankind together.

Wilson Harris, *Tradition, the Writer, and Society*

The poetic prose of which Baudelaire speaks in the passage cited above was to be of a sort able to narrate the turbulence of modern life, the “shocks” to consciousness that arose from the encounter with the crowded streets of Paris in the nineteenth century. The modernisation of the cityscape and the proliferation of new technologies actuated an original spatial experience. Previous modes of perception were disrupted and a change in bodily habitus occurred: the city’s busy boulevards created in the passer-by a new kind of movement, responsible in Baudelaire’s “Loss of a Halo” for a poet’s halo being jolted from his head and into the mud. Equally, a shift in sensibility took place, imaged in the circumstance of the de-haloed poet. In the preceding chapter, we touched on Benjamin’s exploration of Baudelaire’s poetry as a response to the impact of such transformations on memory. As Marshall Berman has shown, Baudelaire’s “Loss of a Halo” is for Benjamin paradigmatic of the process of desanctification that attends modernisation. Berman further argues that the story can stand also as a motif for the movement of the force behind this change: capitalist expansion. As it revolutionizes production and re-structures society, capital dissolves the certitudes of past eras, so that, says Berman, alluding to the Communist Manifesto, all “that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned” (89).¹ In

Europe, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this new socio-economic logic was tied to the emergence of modernism in the arts. The latter derived its coordinates from the experience of the overlap of the expanding mode of commodity production with earlier epochs. Thus, modernism, as Frederic Jameson summarises it, must “be seen as uniquely corresponding to an uneven moment of social development [. . .]: the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history – handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with [. . .] the Ford plant in the distance” (Postmodernism 307).

As suggested in the previous chapter, Chamoiseau’s Texaco similarly seeks to conceptualise the modernised urban and economic landscape. The descriptions of Martinique’s Fort-de-France reveal a change in the relationship of the body to space connected to the need to negotiate coterminous realities. Bearing out Jameson’s notion of the coexistence of different historical moments, the modern service economy of the city-centre overlaps with the traditional means of subsistence utilised on the outskirts. However, this unevenness is more intense and persistent here than in Europe due to the imposition of external socio-political models – the Caribbean’s ‘irruption into modernity’ – and the entrenchment of grossly lopsided concentrations of wealth inherited from colonial power relations. In Texaco (itself an epic “prose-poem,” as Walcott’s observes) Chamoiseau moulds a form able to express this coexistence of realities, as well as the shocks to consciousness derived not only from modernisation but also from a brutal history of oppression. Converting a morass of fragmented pasts into the basis of a literary vessel of memory, he (like Harris) seeks not to re-consolidate recovered histories as new absolutes; instead, their excavation is made inextricable from the revision and redemption of History. In other words,

the narratives of both victor and victim, the sacred and profane, are placed in counterpoint so that resistance opens the way also to a transfigurative exposure of contingency and, therefore, community.

The novel form thus becomes an architecture of forms: traditional 'high' epic sits alongside 'low' folktale to express a comparable architecture of cultures. Indeed, what Harris terms 'cannibal epic' or modern Divine Comedy is "an art of fiction as architectonic scale" (ES 65), in which "scale" (alluding to the musicality of the Carib bone flute) implies the allying of high and low. Such 'scaling' not only enables the articulation of an expanded consciousness; it can also articulate the impact had by the uneven development capital produces. Jameson argues that with the advent of late or multinational capitalism "the residue, the holdover, the archaic, has finally been swept away without a trace. [. . .] Ours is a more homogenously modernized condition" (Postmodernism 306-07). But the disappearance of non-synchronous histories, with new haloes now installed around the homogeneity of the consumerist market, does not hold true in the Caribbean. The density of its overlapping legacies, plus the continued unevenness of development across the globe, means it exhibits a different relationship to such capital. It is not that it is not fully integrated into this order, for it has been integral to capitalism understood as a world system from the latter's inception.² As noted above, moreover, the market and the new service economy have saturated Martinican urban space. But the response to this space retains a Third World specificity, hence Texaco's recovery, from beneath Fort-de-France's modernised cityscape, of that Caribbean 'marvellous' practice of culture, the latter able to reinscribe a diversity of influences within a framework coincident with the lived reality of working class Martinicans.

Nowhere is the reinscription of the contemporary socio-economic logic better symbolised than in the settlement of Texaco itself, the name of which refers to the multinational oil company upon whose land Marie-Sophie founds her Quarter. Both the privatised soil and the commercial moniker are re-appropriated and transformed into something expressive of the community. The rhizomatic construction of the site and the relationships it encourages to the land and between settlers renders Texaco a concretisation of the buried history of its inhabitants. Indeed, its architecture reflects the architectural construction of Chamoiseau's novel from a multiplicity of discursive materials. And just as this new epic form requires that 'high' and 'low' literary styles be combined, so the popular Quarters, if their resistance is to be made the basis of a new social order, must be brought into rapport with the institutional body of the city-centre. Thus can the latter be transfigured, its structures appropriated by the former to ground a specificity that would otherwise be lost by the razing of the squatter settlements.

With this in mind, the present chapter will move on from the city to focus on the relationship between an original Caribbean epic and the institution of the nation. Through an examination of Lovelace's Salt, I will explore the way in which the polity is re-structured and re-articulated to transform the national framework and re-energise the nationalist project. As the above discussion would suggest, however, any analysis of the nation must also take into account its position within the world system, especially given the diversity of influences that have shaped the Caribbean in human and economic terms. The second half of this chapter will consequently assume a global perspective. Returning to the philosophies of history and identity outlined previously, I will focus on Harris's

incorporation of these into a general philosophy of reality. In The Infinite Rehearsal he “envision[s] a cross-cultural history of global proportions” (Johnson 124). And the form he employs to deal with issues such as the Cold War and the impact of post-1945 capitalist expansion – the use of images and myth to embody a vision of consciousness, for example – becomes a means to map the iniquitous but obscured power relations of the international order. Moreover, this always-unfinished totalization of global contingencies subsequently enables Harris to articulate an alternative universalism. Rethinking the paradigms of development and selfhood, particularly as these relate to the body (both human and politic), his work contests the assumptions that underpin capitalist / colonialist frameworks.

At the heart of the re-visionary epic style Harris characterises as new Divine Comedy is the placing in parallel of the paradise and inferno. The potential of such “carnival allegory,” notes Harris, “lies in its capacity to turn sacred images around so that nothing is taken for granted. Nothing is an ideal solid or absolute. Rather than ideal solids one is involved in a paradox of forces” (“Comedy and Modern Allegory” 139). In Texaco the articulation of this “paradox of forces” exposes the reliance of the ‘sacred’ service economy on the ‘profane’ workers ghettoised on the city’s outskirts. But it also becomes integral to the uncovering of a potential within traditional epic for the conversion of its absolutism into a frame for the density of interwoven, creolised histories that define Caribbean territories. Just as the urban planner recognises the need for the city-centre to be in rapport with Texaco, so Texaco establishes a rapport with a series of literary institutions. These include European epic, the Bible, and institutionalised ‘indigenous’ discourses: Marie-Sophie’s founding of her Quarter alludes to the Aeneid’s account of the founding of Rome; the Christian

landmarks of “The Annunciation,” “The Sermon,” and “The Resurrection” periodise the text; the Noutéka section echoes the epic vision of Négritude. But such literary rehearsals are transformed into an expression of cross-cultural community as they are replayed by, in Harris’s words, profane understudies.

The profane understudy or comic scapegoat re-ritualises the mask of tradition or the conventional epic hero. By so doing, he or she embodies the counterpoint of profane and sacred, revealing their contingency; in other words, he or she shows how the hallowing of the singularity of a particular culture or nation, as performed by epic narrative, suppresses the interdependencies, links, and diversities – in cultural or economic terms – that existed either with other groups or internally, and upon which the new unity is based. The profane understudy – the carnivalesque clown who punctures sacred dogmas – reveals this obscured underside and so points the way to a new apprehension of cultural entanglement. In a contemporary context, moreover, he or she (like the ‘understudies’ in Texaco) can highlight the veiled dependence of the sacrosanct consumerist market upon the exploited labourers. Indeed, this comic scapegoat addresses some of the shortcomings of the traditional hero when set against the background of late capitalism. In Chapter One we saw how socio-economic shifts had rendered the martyrdom of the tragic saviour inapposite. With the obscuration of overt violence by (misrecognised) symbolic domination, the hero’s actions appear to lack a referent and so fail to raise the consciousness of the community. A simple oppositional stance cannot expose the now occulted underlying framework of power; and without this exposure, the hero’s death becomes only a testament to violence and victimhood. By contrast, the understudy dons the mask not just of the oppressed but of the oppressor too; re-

ritualising the codes of official reality to thereby displace the consolidated social structure (just as ritual practice entails ego-displacement), he or she unmask in ‘playing mas’ objectified power relations. Subsequently, resistance can be grounded in relation to this newly perceived mode of domination. In a “pitiful or pitiless age,” writes Harris,

‘understudies’ sustain a measure of the play of tradition (whether it be the revival of allegory or epic or poetic drama) but at the same time their peculiar miseries and absurdities bring home to us the times in which they live [. . .]. Except that we perceive a choice. We may settle on the wasteland of the times as part and parcel of an absolute realism or we may attempt to appraise the comic scapegoat within the tapestry of ‘impossible tradition’ that bears upon inner space, inner time.

(“Comedy and Modern Allegory” 136)

Thus, in Texaco, a Négritude-style epic – the search for an Edenic space in which to ground a black subjectivity and found a pure community away from the compromised city – is replayed in the (mis)adventures of Esternome in the Noutéka section. Styling himself a new “master of the hills” (echoing Roumain’s Christ-like saviour and ‘master of the dew,’ Manuel), Esternome’s adoption of this heroic persona is undercut by his carnivalesque antics, not the least of which stems from him in fact knowing “nothing of the earth” (174). While this ‘hero’ develops a comical obsession with his new-found “I” (“I this. I that. I built the hutch [. . .]. I know. I. I. I. [174]), it is left to his partner Ninon to work the land, since otherwise “they would have been lost in these motherless heights” (176). Unsurprisingly, Esternome’s reiteration of the Négritude epic ends badly:

Noutéka is powerless to resist the modern socio-economic pressure of the factories. Nevertheless, the rehearsal does reveal the impossibility of such ‘pure’ or ‘paradisiacal’ communities – of a Césairean “verrition” (Esternome’s original plan was to site Noutéka in virgin space, but he discovers that the hills are already inhabited by a multitude of peoples who have “drawn with their heels [. . .] the geography of another country” [165]). And this knowledge, alongside the practical sense of the land also gleaned during this period, will become integral to the creation of Texaco.

Similarly, the urban planner first appears as a carnivalised Christ-figure. The novel opens with the portentous declaration that: “Upon his entrance into Texaco, the Christ was hit by a stone”; yet this biblical assertion is quickly undermined by the qualification that such an “aggression [. . .] surprised no one” (9). Placing the ‘high’ in parallel with the ‘low,’ the text takes a detour through Creole folklore as attempts are made to discover who attacked the planner. More broadly, the latter’s epic role as saviour of the salubrious ‘order’ of the city-centre is ‘profaned’ by his conversion to Texaco’s cause and to the belief that it is the city which must be transformed in light of the reappraised “wasteland” (to borrow Harris’s phrase) of the Quarter.

Significant in both Esternome’s and the planner’s understudying is the theme of the Christ-like hero. A key trope in Caribbean literature, this hero often appears in ‘high’ portrayals as either a martyred rebel or a messianic politician (as we saw in Chapter One). However, the carnivalesque image of the saviour is a recurrent one too; indeed, Texaco’s profane rehearsal of Christ’s stoning appears in a number of other Caribbean texts.³ The contrast between the straight and the carnivalised treatment of this trope can be seen to symbolise that shift

from Tragedy to (new, Divine) Comedy, the latter better able to express the complexity of contemporary cultural and socio-economic conditions. In this respect, Naipaul's Miguel Street occupies an interesting in-between position. The text portrays a carnivalised Christ through Man-man, a self-appointed Messiah who arranges his own crucifixion, only to forgo his biblical rhetoric (“Stone me, brethren”) on actually being stoned (“Cut this stupidity out. [. . .] I finish with this arseness” [39]). Yet Naipaul's novel ultimately represents a tragic vision: many of its protagonists are shown to be self-deluding; indeed, far from affirming the value of carnivalisation and masquerade, it suggests such actions must be abandoned, just as the narrator abandons the street having come to see his neighbours' antics as empty posturing. Thus denied is the creative element in the carnivalesque, the very element that underpins Harris's Divine Comedy as a serious gesture (or *geste*) made in 'serious jest.' When Harris evokes this form, therefore, he is referring not just to comicalness (for Miguel Street is comic), but to a comedy that derives from the recognition of contingency, from the loss of an illusion of strength understood as potentially productive rather than as only a mark of failure. Such comedy, entailing the opening up of oneself to the other, can hence be both painful and liberating.

It is this type of comedy that Salt pursues, marking a clear shift from the tragic narrative that structured The Wine; and it is the philosophy behind such comedy that is the key to the novel's re-imagining of the national project. Nevertheless, the text opens with two traditional epic stories, each linked to a specific manifestation of the saviour character trope. The first chapter begins with Bango's recital of the tale of the slave Guinea John, who one day mounted a cliff and “flew away to Africa, taking with him the mysteries of levitation and

flight, leaving the rest of his family still in captivity mourning over his selfishness” (3). The myth of the redemptive flight to the ‘homeland’ contains the skeleton of conventional epic. Africa is the sacred origin, the root that anchors one to a pure identity. Hence, to be ‘exiled’ in the ‘New World’ (as the rest of Guinea John’s family are) is to be left bereft of wholeness, condemned to a history defined solely by loss. In addition, many of Guinea John’s descendents would prefer that this particular epic skeleton remain buried. Consequently, there is little chance to reassess the past. Indeed, it is Bango’s insistence on recounting the tale that sees him branded a rebel and treated as a danger by his relatives. As his nephew observes, “there was nothing I could identify as threatening [in Bango]. And I knew of no possession of his, or of any previous differences between either my mother and him, or him and my father, no family quarrel. All that I could see separating him from my other uncles was this story that he was ever willing to tell. So it had to be his story” (4).

But if the latter narrative is regarded with suspicion, many are only too willing to subscribe to its alternative: the epic of the redemptive flight to the promised land of the colonial ‘mother-country.’ Echoing the Guinea John episode, chapter two begins on the “morning of the day that Alford George was to discover that he wasn’t going to be leaving the island” (8). For Alford the blow is immense since all that is of value, both in economic and ontological terms, lies outside Trinidad. Farmed produce from his hometown of Cunaripo is taken “by rail to Port-of-Spain, the port where they all led, the train lines and the ribbons of road, streaming through forest [. . .] until they reached the port from which ships sailed out to England, out into the world, *the world*, already to him more than a place, a mission, a Sacred Order that brought him into meaning, into

Life (26-27). As with the 'African' epic, the 'home' of identity or root of Being is located in an elsewhere: the world is the sacred, Trinidad only a profane "dot" on a map as Alford, now a schoolmaster, instructs his pupils (72). Soon Alford comes to believe that it is his mission to protect others from this 'profanity.' Asked by his lover Gloria why he will not follow her by leaving the island when he again has the chance, he replies that he must stay to "save" his pupils. To Gloria's query "'Save them for what?'" he responds: "'Not save them *for*; save them *from*'" (69-70). The idea that Trinidad is only a "penitential island" (44), its past deprivations and present problems such that salvation must take the form of escape, recalls the distinction made in the previous chapter between the redemption *from* history and the redemption *of* history. Hence, we are returned to the failure of conventional epic in the Caribbean context to narrate a collective identity beyond the framework of victimhood. The repercussions of this ideological straitjacket later become inextricable from Alford's shortcomings as a politician, his desire to 'save' the nation in the same way that he sought to 'save' his pupils.

Salt thus introduces us to two protagonists who parallel The Wine's would-be saviours: Alford, like Morton, is a schoolmaster-turned-politician who becomes enmeshed in the dominant order; Bango, like Bolo, is a rebel and martyr who refuses to countenance any change in his traditional stance. I will return to Alford later; at present I wish to focus on Bango, whose continued resistance to the compromises of the post-Emancipation and post-Independence settlements is a necessary thorn in the side of the supposed freedom these instituted. Nevertheless, his response appears to have congealed into a static vision of liberation in an African past, as signalled by the story he never ceases to reiterate

– itself problematically bound to the assumptions of traditional epic.

Significantly, however, there is another way of reading Bango's tale that opens up an alter/native vision, one present less in its literal content than in the style of its telling. This becomes clear if we look first at Bango's physical style, for the negative attitude some have towards him comes in part from the way in which he carries his body. His nephew, for example, watches him "come into our front yard with the brawling parrot-toed sure-footed walk with which I had seen him step on to the cricket field and into the stickfight ring, grand and compelling, making my mother step back, draw away as in the face of some danger" (4). Here Bango's movement expresses an identity that disturbs the strictures of 'official' culture (emphasized by the reference to stickfighting, which was banned from 1884 to 1951). His posture is bound to what Lovelace calls "indigenous traditions" – traditions that "arose or had their meanings in direct response to our Caribbean reality," even if their basis lay in African or European custom (GD 34). As such, it contests 'respectable' values, meaning those imitative values derived from a belief in the (European) elsewhere as the model of identity.⁴

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the body becomes the prime site of contestation in the struggle to impose the latter model. To counter the kind of backwardness Bango is seen to represent in his desire to "dredge up a past that everybody gone past" (49), the school system is used to instil in pupils a 'redemptive' bodily style that matches the redemptive promise of the 'mother-country.' This style is best exemplified by their teacher, Alford, who in an attempt to shed his Caribbean habitus develops "a new walk – gait would be the word – slower, more leisurely steps that gave him time in which to work out his translations from his thinking

into what he saw now as proper English” (34). Ultimately, Alford sculpts his entire body into a material signifier of social aspiration.

Against this is Bango’s style. And if we extend this to his epic tale of Guinea John, it too can be seen to contest the European myth of redemption, not as an equally rooted African version but as an indigenised narrative, a piece of storytelling or ritual act pregnant with another history, one that re-visions the surface meaning of loss and flight:

Two months after they hanged his brother Gregoire, king of the Dreadnoughts band, and Louis and Nanton and Man Man, the other three leaders of African secret societies, who Hislop the governor claimed to be ringleaders of an insurrection that had a plan, according to the testimony of a mad white woman, to use the cover of the festivities of Christmas day to massacre the white and free coloured people of the island, Jo-Jo’s great-grandfather, Guinea John, with his black jacket on and a price of two hundred pounds sterling on his head, made his way to the East Coast, mounted the cliff at Manzanilla [. . .] and flew away to Africa, taking with him the mysteries of levitation and flight, leaving the rest of his family still in captivity mourning over his selfishness [. . .]. (3)

The linear absolutism of the traditional epic – the return through a filiation to a sacred origin – is disturbed here by the very style – the movement – of the recital. The single sentence that unfolds the action in a meandering stream full of diversions (we only hear whose brother has been hanged following the comment on Hislop and the detour through the testimony of the “mad white woman”)

recalls the entanglements and loops of the folktale. Different pasts and legacies intersect so that what we are presented with is not a consecrated History – the unified narrative of legitimisation, which it was the function of epic to provide – but an unstable story woven from rumour and “mad” testimony, its protagonists both profane understudies (an insane woman; alleged slave insurrectionists) as well as conventional historical personages (the governor). The rhythm of the language, moreover, creates a sense of excess that fractures closure and unity. Epic discourse, argues Bakhtin, is based on the direct word: the ‘purity’ of the national myth is reinforced by a language whose meaning emerges “as a single intentional whole” (*Dialogic Imagination* 297). Here, however, the relentless cadence blurs histories together so that the reader seems always about to stumble into another story; meanwhile, the incantatory style evokes ritualistic practice and so an alternative repository of history. Since the fullness of Caribbean experience is not amenable to the sovereign Word, predicated on self-sufficient presence, one must go beyond direct representation and engage other expressive forms. “The rhythm is meaning too,” says Lovelace: “[w]e have tended to look at language in terms of its linear aspect, its logic, and that logic as meaning. But sound itself, after it is repeated, has an accumulated effect of communicating a deeper meaning. What we are really translating with words is not words, it is meaning” (*GD* 94). The passage’s repetitions, its rolling, exuberant stride, recalls Bango’s own style of movement and so the ‘profane’ indigenous experience his body manifests. There occurs an overspill of meaning beyond the literal content: despite its theme of a return to Africa, Bango’s story contains the seeds of an original Caribbean epic and of an alter/native conception of the nation grounded in a multiplicity of voices and an entanglement of beginnings.

Nevertheless, these seeds appear destined not to come to fruition. Bango is unable to communicate his indigenous narrative to those around him; his actions continue to be read in terms of a retrograde and threatening obsession with a lost African past. The trouble derives in part from the lack of appropriate structures in which to anchor his alter/native vision, of institutional frames coincident with the lived experience of the people. In addition, there is a problem with the way in which Bango conveys his message. Like Bolo, he assumes the role of the tragic rebel, the Christ-like saviour and martyr. Chapter One explored the difficulties with this position, so I will not reiterate these here. I do, however, wish to examine one aspect of such martyrdom as it relates to the idea of freedom and institutional power.

Significant here is Harris's contention that traditional epic should not be seen as complete, or as an exhausted husk. Despite their drive to consecrate a community in an exclusive territory, epic narratives are often concerned with issues of exile or errantry; frequently they tell not of heroic triumphs but of defeats and cunning ruses. Alongside victory (Odysseus's homecoming) runs the promise of a more relational form of identity and a recognition of frailty (Odysseus's wanderings; his return in the rags of a beggar).⁵ Such potential is obscured, however. Conscripted by the ruling premises of a civilization, the depth of epic is flattened out within a conquistadorial framework; the resurrection of Christ, for example, is "fallaciously aligned to the *conquest* of Death or to a structured immortality replete with one-sided bias" (Harris "Quetzalcoatl" 191). Thus, the redemption promised by this 'victory' is only an absolute inversion of the original oppression. Similarly, Harris argues that Orpheus's failure to observe the decree not to look back at Eurydice can be re-read as an unconscious

insight “into Eurydice’s fate as a *continuing pawn* of sovereign Death if her release is sanctioned within a frame of absolute rules and commandments issued by the identical regime that promises to liberate her” (“Quetzalcoatl” 192). To bestow freedom as an absolute in this way is in fact to consolidate partiality: the structures of power remain biased towards the ‘giver’; the ‘receiver,’ meanwhile, enmeshed within the ‘paradise’ of an apparently total liberty, is blinded to the ‘inferno’ of inequalities that circumscribe his or her position. The persistence of the premise of command or absolute victory as a frame for perception thus ensures that “the promises of ancient epic, like ancient scriptures, remain unfulfilled” (“Quetzalcoatl” 192).

To paraphrase Harris, then, one could say that the promises of Bango similarly remain unfulfilled. The reason for his rebel stance, though, is also inextricable from unfulfilled promise: that held in both Emancipation and Independence. The failure of these latter to truly transform the social order, especially in terms of the underlying structure of power relations (as concretised in land distribution), inspires the refusal of Bango and his forebears to concede to either settlement. Bango continues to live on the plantation where his ancestors worked, since together they “believe that somebody owe them something. It have something to do with land that they waiting on Government to give them; but they have no papers and no claim” (139). This belief goes back to Emancipation, which, as Bango’s grandfather Jo-Jo realised at the time, condemned the freed slaves to “second-classness”: not only did it fail to acknowledge the injustices they had suffered; it also instituted an inimical land settlement policy in which one either had to buy land, and thus accept that it was the planter’s to sell, or squat it (a more feasible option since the law forbade more

than one buyer per eighty acre plot, thereby preventing the poor from making small-scale or communal bids). Either way, the commandment of freedom only conferred a dependent (or illegitimate) status on the newly 'liberated,' entrapping them in an iniquitous social framework. The resistant posture maintained from Jo-Jo through to Bango over this issue is crucial to the preservation of the possibility of an alternative social order. Unfortunately, having become entangled in a notion of martyrdom, its potential has stagnated into what appears to the community as empty protest, for it fails to communicate the alternative it holds out.

As well as re-emphasizing the dangers of such martyrdom as they were first outlined in *The Wine*, *Salt* is notable for the way it uses the shortfalls in the male protagonists' relationships with women to interrogate the position of the rebel. Like Bango, Alford's father Dixon, for example, repeats Jo-Jo's history, refusing all offers to better his position as a labourer since he does not want "to be beholden to Carabon [the estate owner], not for house or land or anything" (20). He thereby maintains that crucial resistance to an inimical 'given' freedom. Gradually, however, his behaviour begins to perpetuate the underlying principles of this 'gift.' His wife observes that Dixon's "way to feel himself the equal of if not the superior to anybody was to give more and more of himself, this giving making him more martyred and heroic" (19). His act of giving remains tied to the cultivation of debt; and he is unable to 'receive' anything for fear of being obligated to someone. Consequently, he locks himself in a sacrificial posture that thwarts an engagement with others on a reciprocal basis, just as the very power relations he resists do. The parallel ritual Dixon performs in the courtship of his wife highlights this point. Spying her with a group of girls at a dance he

approaches; yet instead of going directly to May he first asks each of the other girls onto the floor, all of whom refuse: “He continued down the row of them, with [. . .] the martyred smile, holding himself with a pained haughtiness as each one turned away, not as if he was the one rejected, was the one doing them a favour, or was it putting them to a test?” (14). The rejection becomes for Dixon a sacrificial act that leaves his intended with a sense of debt. When she sees behind his smile “the wound, the bleeding, his desperate appeal” (14), she feels obliged to dance; and Dixon, having given so much of himself, believes he now has a right to her, standing guard over the “space in front of her, so that fellows approaching her to dance felt it necessary first to ask his permission” (14).

Bango too, enmeshed in his heroic martyrdom, is unable to escape the pattern of gift and obligation. His resistance to a legacy of inadequate political settlements is aimed precisely at their consolidation of an uneven reciprocity; but his failures on a personal level show why politically he is incapable of breaking the mould. The belief that he must always be the one to give, and that to receive – in whatever circumstance – or to open oneself to an other is always to compromise the ‘purity’ of one’s stance, prevents him from forging a productive dialogue with anyone, including both his wife and the community. Concerned to maintain his heroic posture of “undefeat” (155), he isolates himself and stifles his message. “[Y]ou never tell me why,” says Myrtle, his spouse, of his actions. “If somebody was to ask me, I wouldn’t know what to say” (164). Moreover, his all-or-nothing mindset encourages him to carry as his burden the needs of the village, which “woulda been all right,” observes Myrtle, “if people pull together and share the responsibility; but like the knowledge he was there leave them free to do as they please” (147). His organization of the Independence Day parade is

a case in point. The first year is a success: “[w]hatever was his point Bango had made it alone [. . .]. Everybody was witness. And right there he shoulda stop, invite other people in and if they wanted to carry it on, OK. He had done his part” (161). But true to his absolute ‘heroism’ he is back every year thereafter, soon marching not just for Independence but for any other cause. However, the lack of real engagement between Bango and the people renders this ritual hollow: “Every protest, every celebration, he was there [. . .]. And why is he marching? Nobody ever ask him a word. Sometimes they bring him on the stage with them like a clown, like a puppet show, on parade. They giving the speeches and not asking him to say a word” (161). Trapped within an empty spectacle, Bango looks likely to repeat the ultimately fruitless fate of Bolo in The Wine.

In this respect he is twinned with Alford, who seems on course to replicate the failures of Morton. If Bango lacks the appropriate structures through which to express his vision to the community, Alford’s political career grants him access to the institutional framework of government. Yet this framework, inherited from the colonial state, requires radical transformation, something Alford fails to achieve. Soon caught up in the “tapestry of pretence of power” (130), he becomes cut off from those he was elected to represent. As such, he figures the more general dissipation of the potential for change inherent in Independence and the emergence of democratic political forces such as the National Party (a fictionalisation of Trinidad’s PNM), for whom Alford campaigns. Even from the outset, though, problems were apparent. At the formation of his own party, Alford stressed the “need to go to the people”; his new (self-appointed) colleagues agreed, but argued that first “we select the Cabinet [. . .] then [we] go to the people,” since once the latter “see that they

are represented by good people they will give us their support” (85). With the democratic process apparently reversed (the party *already* represents the people before it even has their support), the failure of the national project pursued by the political classes to correlate with the social demands of the people becomes clear.

Salt captures this loss of potential through its portrayal of the National Party’s initial rallies in contrast to the atmosphere that later surrounds the Prime Minister’s office. Myrtle, for example, encounters an early National Party meeting and is made to “see the world afresh” by the energetic speeches that narrate five hundred years of Caribbean history (152). The verbal picture painted, however, recalls a real painting seen in the Prime Minister’s office earlier in the novel (but chronologically at a later date), at a time when the Party is ensconced in power. The dynamic history evoked by the rally is repeated here; yet it has been turned into a static mural full of visual platitudes. Emphasising this shift, the language deployed in the two passages differs markedly, despite the similarities in content. The account of the mural is a straightforward denotation of its subject matter:

There it was. Native Indians in a ballet of welcome offering gifts to Columbus, who stands with imperial nonchalance, one hand on his hip, the other holding a lance as if deciding whether he should accept their offering. [. . .] Africans are dancing to their jungle tom-toms. [. . .] Toussaint L’Ouverture in the dress of a general is on horseback at the head of a ragged army [. . .]. (126)

In contrast, the description of Myrtle’s reaction to the speeches repeats, expands, and re-animates this history:

She see the Indians of the Indies in a ballet of welcome, offering

gifts to Columbus who stand up disguising his wonder with a pose of imperial nonchalance, one hand on his hip, the other holding a lance [. . .]. She see Africans in Demerara with lithe limbs of dancers and teeth of ivory and torsos of gymnasts hanging on gibbets from their waists [. . .]. She witness the grand uprisings in Haiti with Toussaint L'Ouverture and Dessalines [. . .]. (152-53)

While the first version is defined by the fixity of the opening "There it was," the latter suggests an active awakening to history, emphasized by the use of verbs ("She see" or "She witness") and the rhythm of the passage with its sense of rising excitement and a rapid expansion in perception. Indeed, as in Bango's story, the rhythmic excess seems to cause an overspill in content that opens up other perspectives. So whereas we have in the painting only a restrained, stereotypical portrait of Columbus, "who stands with imperial nonchalance," in the second scene the surging flow of the line – "Columbus who stand up disguising his wonder with a pose of imperial nonchalance" – unleashes an extra dimension: that sense of wonderment that ran in parallel with the sterile greed of conquest. Moreover, while the painting provides only the static trope of "Africans" with "their jungle tom-toms," the verbal picture with its poetic cadences – "teeth of ivory and torsos of gymnasts" – becomes a celebration of vitality even in the midst of barbaric "gibbets."

The suggestion, then, is that all those memories and experiences dismissed as 'past,' but which the National Party made people see afresh, have congealed in the painting; the energy and potential generated by the Party's campaigns has evaporated in the stifling office space of the Eric Williams-like Prime Minister. Indeed, history has been reduced to a series of tropes that

consolidate the new status quo; the once challenging National Party is transformed into another 'sacred,' positing itself as *the* History of the nation. On its own terms this is not necessarily problematic, since all nationalisms aim at something similar. The trouble, however, is that this particular nationalism has drifted away from those whose "innermost hopes" it was to be the "all-embracing crystallization" of, to borrow Fanon's formula (WE 119); and it now hides behind the absolute History it has proclaimed in order to avoid contestation of its power. The real PNM was to become adept at this; indeed, by identifying itself with national harmony, it framed political debate in terms not of specific social issues but of sweeping battles over the right to define collective identity, something taken up by other parties seeking to mobilize mass support. The "displacement and postponement of crucial national business has arisen," notes Lovelace, "because many people have been persuaded that they are fighting not simply for political change but for their political and racial life" (GD 144). In short, the cultivation of the perception that individuals must vote a certain way to preserve their culture enables the parties to consolidate their political position, yet defer the need to tackle wider socio-economic issues.

Both the rebel and the politician in Salt, therefore, appear unable to unlock the shackled potential of the community. Yet the novel concludes with the recognition of the alter/native history conveyed by Bango; Alford, meanwhile, is made to understand the need to tackle the entrenched power relations materialized in the land ownership system if all in the island are to be truly equal. From what new perspective is reality articulated for consciousness to be finally raised in this way? The shift in perception and the institutional changes that accompany it can be read in relation to the mode of vision, and

attendant narrative form, encapsulated in modern Divine Comedy. To break the stasis around the protagonists – to pierce their blindness – the institution of History and the ritual of Bango’s story, the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane,’ must be played out in parallel with one another. Indeed, Harris’s conception of such Comedy as entailing a recognition of contingency as well as of one’s own frailty is crystallised in the I-narrator’s recognition at the end of Salt that “if what distinguishes us as humans is our stupidity, what might redeem us was our grace” (259). This parallel opposite – humanity’s beautiful stupidity – defines the comic tone of the novel, its conversion of the trope of Tragedy. As characters come to accept their mutuality, the breakdown of polarized absolutes produces a “kinship of exchange” (Harris, Carnival 45). In fact, the pivotal moment in the text – the point at which Bango is ‘released’ from the static trope of tragic fate – occurs when the rebel finally emerges from his enclosed posture of “undefeat” and opens himself up to his wife.

Myrtle cannot understand why Bango insists that Alford’s offer of land must be given as a public form of reparation or not at all. Exasperated with what she sees as a vainglorious martyrdom, she complains that: “If I miss the point, then why you don’t tell me the point” (164). Bango realizes he has never finished his story, never explained the history he protests against; hence, he does indeed resemble a martyr without a cause. This realization and the subsequent openness it encourages allows him to appreciate the sacrifices his wife has made. For Myrtle (her being acknowledged now as central to Bango’s history emphasized by a shift from third to first-person narration), there is a sense of “triumphant peace” because “she could see that Bango had recognized her. He had made me out. All at once he realize that in the journey he thought he had

made alone, I had been with him the whole way” (165). Thus, no longer is their relationship constrained by the ritual of commandment that leaves one in debt to the other. Instead, each can now ‘consent’ to the other without this placing either under a burden of obligation.

This change in personal ritual foreshadows and enables a change in political ritual. The next chapter opens as Bango enters the offices of the National Party, ready now to tell his story not just to his family but, via Alford who sits opposite him in the Prime Minister’s chair, to the nation. Freed from the trope of absolute protest, he can do so without feeling that he is compromising the ‘purity’ of his resistance. There is a recognition too that he can utilise institutional frameworks. He injects his ‘profane’ story into the ‘sanctity’ (and stasis) of History as concretised by the Prime Minister’s office, its walls filled with portraits (colonial governors; the Independence mural) that tell the ‘official’ story of the nation: imperialism followed by freedom under the National Party. Bango’s alter/native epic of Guinea John and Jo-Jo re-ritualises this institutional past, and in so doing ‘converts’ its hitherto myopic representative Alford. On the one hand, this conversion is facilitated by Bango’s re-appropriation of institutional structures, figured on a textual level by the way the narration is relayed between voices. First told via Bango, the story is then focalised through Jo-Jo; yet his tale assumes a literary poeticism and appears to be mediated by another consciousness. Indeed, some passages – for example, Jo-Jo’s assertion of the claim to the land of “a new people whose sweat and blood has fertilized the soil” (173) – recall the anti-colonial analyses of revolutionary intellectuals like Fanon, and so would seem not strictly coincident with Jo-Jo’s position. (Although intelligent, Jo-Jo has not had access to the level of education at times

implied in his discourse.) Through the switching of narrative consciousness, therefore, the voices of those hitherto denied political consideration (except insofar as they have been legislated for) are retained yet ‘translated’ into an institutional or ‘high’ discourse, one that resonates with Alford.⁶

On the other hand, the very ‘comedy’ of Bango’s tale renders Alford far more receptive than he otherwise would have been. Expecting a sterile tragedy “of self-pity and martyrdom,” he is ready to be dismissive; yet tragedy, he admits, is “not what I got from Bango” (167). “Understand from the start,” says the latter, “I ain’t come here to make the Whiteman the devil. [. . .] This business of being human is tougher than being the devil, or being God for that matter. And it doesn’t matter whether in the role of brutalized or brutalizer” (168). Bango certainly does not abjure the need for resistance against the dominant order. But he recognises that if such opposition is to be successful and constitute the basis of a new political settlement, the tragic pattern of binary inversion, and of mutual recrimination, must be broken. In particular, the polarising influence of a racialised party politics has to be countered. Bango’s vision of a different model for human relations, one bound to an acceptance of humanity’s beautiful stupidity – “people have always done each other wrong, not because one fella is so much more wicked than the next but because to be stupid is the principle part of what it is to be human” (168) –, provides the conceptual context in which the material changes (such as in land distribution) required to achieve these ends can be effected, but without these entrenching resentment or an inimical framework of debt and obligation.

The demand that people recognise their mutual fallibility, enabling reparations that restructure the power relations of the polity in the above way,

will of course have to surmount the barrier of self-interest. Nevertheless, this vision does offer a way forward; and in the impact it has on Alford as representative of the official order, the indication is that it could prompt the concrete institutional reforms necessary to fulfil the potential heralded by Bango. Indeed, viewed through the optic not of the tragic hero but of the fallible, carnivalised protagonist, Bango not only embodies an original epic form but also an original national project. Significantly, as the understudy who places in parallel the sacred and profane, ‘high’ tradition and ‘low’ histories, he does not seek the absolute destruction of the institutions he confronts. Rather, he upholds Lovelace’s injunction to “reclaim institutions that can carry us forward, make us new” (GD 162), which entails here the reclamation and redemption of the institution of the nation. His ‘comic’ re-ritualisation of History not only recuperates the rich underside of epic, the trickeries, fallibilities, and contingencies flattened by its conscription to political biases. The insertion of his ‘profane’ story into the ‘sacred’ narratives of the colonial past and the National Party’s present also recovers the rich potential of nationalism – a potential squandered by the National Party. That congealed national project, promulgated by the latter, is irrigated now with other nationalisms and other cultural histories.

The implications of this are perhaps most clearly apparent on the level of form. In illustration I want to turn briefly to Confiant’s Le Nègre et l’Amiral, which shares certain structural similarities with Salt. Like many of Confiant’s novels, it is split into non-chronological but intersecting narrative ‘circles.’ Typical is the section detailing the life of the Indian character Vidrassamy. It opens with the protagonist Rigobert trying to deduce who has betrayed him to the authorities; the chapter then circles back to a past *damier* confrontation between

Rigobert and Barbe-Sale, the event which prompted the latter to inform on his old rival. However, in the middle of the account of this ritual combat-dance, the text switches focus to Vidrassamy after he attempts to intervene in the confrontation. Subsequently, we are plunged into a story about his childhood in which his parents, recognising their son's creolization, decide he should remain in Martinique rather than return with them to India. Through this narrative detour into Vidrassamy's past, initiated by the 'indigenous' practice of the *damier*, the novel enacts the re-ritualisation of the nation. An/other national and cultural history is uncovered, one nevertheless bound to a collective Martinican experience (Vidrassamy in later life will help organize numerous cross-racial strikes). This spiralling back thereby enables the incorporation of an 'Indian' strand into the island's cross-cultural tapestry; the idea of 'Martinique' as a nation is re-opened to include what is both a distinct tradition and an integral part of island creole society.

Salt employs a similar narrative form for similar ends. Alongside the multiple histories that infuse its wandering sentences, the novel has a burgeoning trajectory that defies the conventional arc of consolidation. Once Bango has told his story to Alford, a conclusion seems imminent; yet the novel then opens back up with chapters on the white creole Carabon and the Indian Lochan family, each of which replays earlier episodes from a new perspective. This accumulative narrative style, with stories overlaid rather than shoehorned into a neat resolution, highlights the need for a national discourse able to constantly revise itself. Nationalism must be seen from that re-visionary tidalectic perspective central to an original Caribbean philosophy. By re-ritualising the national project, thus, the univocal nation is re-opened to other cultural legacies. It also ensures that the

failed nationalism of the bourgeois elite, represented by the National Party, is not assumed to bespeak the failure of nationalism *per se*. For in Lovelace's view there are other national projects and struggles – like Bango's – that offer an alternative to the moribund version promoted by this elite.⁷ Indeed, it must be remembered that the Independence period *was* full of promise, it did connect with people in the way that in Salt the National Party's early rallies awakened Myrtle's consciousness. Though this promise remains unfulfilled, the tidalectic return to such nationalism enables its undoubted potentials to be resuscitated. Moreover, it enables nationhood to be seen for what it is: a continuous struggle that did not end with 'decolonisation'; a struggle that remains as significant today given the (neo-colonial) pressures of the contemporary world. "The battle," writes Lovelace, "is between the promise of National Independence and being diffused into an impotent individualism in the post-colonial world" (GD 185).

Resurrecting the Body Politic: The Promise of Development

As the remark of Lovelace's that concludes the above section indicates, the national project remains a key locus of resistance against the pressures of the world order in which it is necessarily located. But implied also is the idea that this project – in the renewed or 'redeemed' (rather than bourgeois elite) form it assumes here – can open onto a solidarity with others that would provide an (*inter*-national) alternative to the dominant order, countering the threat of dissolution into an "impotent individualism." The way in which a nation conceives the relationship between itself and others is intrinsic to its formulation of nationhood *per se*; the rebirth of the body politic will entail the revision of both the nation's internal *and* external coordinates. For the Caribbean, this might

mean a shift from the concept of the nation as an enclosed sovereign entity to that of the nation as a specificity that attains its national character only within the regional context; national consciousness would be in some way incomplete unless it also gave on to a pan-Caribbean consciousness.⁸ There is not space here to explore the specific ramifications – in political, economic, and conceptual terms – of a regional Caribbean identity. I do, however, want to pursue what is at stake in any restructuring of inter-national relations more generally. The latter would require a change on a world level parallel to that articulated via Bango regarding internal political frames, that is, to the recognition of contingency and to the move from ‘command’ to ‘consent.’ This would have to translate into decisive socio-economic shifts on a global scale, and so a struggle against the uneven development engendered by capitalism.

It is in this light that I want to approach Harris’s The Infinite Rehearsal. The latter conceptualises a global history that narrates (particularly through its re-writing of Goethe’s Faust) the integration of the world into the imperialist / capitalist system and the impact had by the iniquitous relationships upon which this is based. The novel does so from the perspective of what Glissant has called the previously “hidden face of the world,” meaning those oppressed cultures that erupted into ‘visibility’ through anti-colonial struggle (DA 329). As Harris’s narrator Robin Redbreast Glass explains, the book is part of an approach to the “ruling concepts of civilization from the other side, from the ruled or apparently eclipsed side in humanity” (171). This alter/native take on the world system exposes its biases, tilting its axes to release a different apprehension of reality. Indeed, Harris attempts on a global scale what we saw him do in the previous chapter for the Caribbean. Adopting a ‘total’ standpoint, he reads in counterpoint

the experiences of the colonizer and colonized, the 'centre' and 'periphery.' By so doing, he reveals the global vectors of exploitation, as well as the unacknowledged biases on both sides; but he also makes manifest an eclipsed legacy of global cross-cultural interaction, 're-scaling' it as a communion of opposites. The rebirth of the national body politic is thus linked to a vision of the rebirth of the global body politic, with both, moreover, inextricable from a rethinking of the body itself.

Returning to Salt for a moment we can see how the rebirth of the body politic there is presaged and symbolised by the 'rebirth' of Alford, the institutional figure whose encounter with Bango carnivalises him. Divested of the 'sacred' mask of the absolute political saviour, he becomes a fallible, comic understudy. Like Bango, the transformation in his political stance is foreshadowed by a personal revelation: his recognition of his need for his lover Florence. By extension, this entails a recognition of the world she represents, which he has hitherto shunned in favour of that of the bourgeois elite. For Florence's bodily movements, like Bango's, are associated with the indigenised traditions and corporeal memory of the community. In the pivotal scene between Alford and Florence, this sense of bodily recognition as key to 'rebirth' is clear:

As if he knew of all that he had put her through, there in the dark the fingers of his other hand found their way to her face to wipe away the tears [. . .], and long after the tears had ceased to flow he continued wiping them away with the calming tenderness of an anointing, making her feel herself someone discovered, someone new and precious that he wanted to cherish and heal. (255)

Alford here connects in a ritualistic manner both with his own body, via the

gesture of consecration he performs, and with Florence's as a store of 'profane' memory. This mutual 'rebirth' of the self through the other and the attendant rediscovery of the body mirrors Alford's political rediscovery of the cultural body of the people as manifested in their rituals and practices. This in turn allows him to adopt a new role: (re)educated as regards popular consciousness, he can better articulate this as its elite representative at an institutional level, without grossly distorting it in the way that he had done when locked within the 'sacred' (and alienating) carapace of the saviour.

Similarly, The Infinite Rehearsal opens upon a rebirth, upon the 'resurrection' from the watery depths of a 'dead' body that will not only again come to symbolise a national body politic (Guyana), but will assume a wider significance too, figuring the experience of the Third World or global 'South' in its relationship to 'the West.' Following a shipwreck, Ghost emerges from the "grave of the sea" to be welcomed by Robin as a "conquistadorial and victimized Ghost (was (s)he male/female? I could not tell)" (173). He accepts "IT" as male, trusting that "new fragile complications of divinity's blood would drive me to see the phenomenon I had encountered in the wholeness of a transformative light bearing upon all genders, all animates and inanimates" (174). Clearly, the "grave" or tomb is also to be read as a transfigurative womb, with the rebirth of Ghost signalling the emergence of an original apprehension of the global order, a *re-visionary* world historiography. Ghost as both conqueror and victim not only personifies the 'scaling' of colonizer and colonized into an alter/native architecture; he also embodies a global cross-culturality: his "hollow yet inexhaustible body" (175), imbued with multiplicity on its return from the depths, images the raft of histories that, since the circumnavigation of the globe in the

fifteenth century, have become ever more entangled with each other. The series of motifs Harris orchestrates around the opening scene serves to highlight this interpenetration of traditions.

The sight of Ghost washing up on the beach alludes to the plight of refugees around the world, emphasized when the immigration officer Frog arrives at Robin's house in search of the shipwrecked stranger. Yet Frog himself is an "inferior Don Juan Ulysses" (176); and in this (cross-cultural) respect he reflects another strand of Ghost, whose appearance recalls also the return of Odysseus to Ithaca after years lost at sea. As Ghost's arrival is retold, however, Harris's 'scaling' language causes one image to linger as a residue upon another. As a result, the subsequent image or 'note' in the scale is transformed. Thus the allusions to sea-faring adventurers / conquerors (in addition to Odysseus, Raleigh and Magellan are mentioned) echoes in Robin's description of the "towering beast of a wave upon which Ghost came with unwritten, written volumes for my library in the sacred wood" (180). (The "volumes" indicate Ghost's connection to a new historiography). Yet the insistence of the conquistadorial 'note' is such that the figuratively bestial wave, suggestive of the relentless tide of explorers, is inversed to emerge as a figuratively wave-like beast: "Ghost slid from his towering wave of a horse in my library of dreams" (180).

The image of the horse suggests in particular the Spanish conquistador Cortez. Indeed, when Frog exclaims to Robin, "My information is that some God rode ashore here'" (181), it recalls how the sight of Cortez on horseback was said to have been treated as a god-like apparition by the Aztecs. But it may also allude to the legend of the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl (Ghost is often associated with the snake-bird imagery of the latter), who in some myths left Mexico on a raft

promising to return in an Aztec year 1 Reed. In fact, part of the reason for Cortez's status as a god or king on his arrival from the sea in 1519 was that "a year 1 Reed by the Aztec calendar was just coming around. For Aztecs, the legend explained the fate that had now caught up with them" (Bierhorst 164). Moreover, Cortez adopted this legend to reinforce his power. Such machinations thereby sustained the reality of conquest. But this early instance of global cross-cultural contact, framed by rapacious territorial and financial imperatives, could also be read figuratively as gravid with the (unborn) potential for a new community: Cortez's contact with the Aztecs, his adoption of alternative cultural forms (albeit for pernicious ends), sparks a mutation in tradition; beneath the *de facto* conquistadorial plane, the European framework has become entangled with the reality it seeks to subjugate and destroy.

Thus emphasized is Ghost's embodiment not only of an admixture of legacies, but also of their rebirth as an original constellation: "Resurrection from a particle or a wave was a quantum saddle upon which a new physics rode into Bethlehem" (180). This variation on the wave / horse / god / resurrection 'chord' indicates the point from which reality is to be read anew through Ghost: the old order (symbolised here by the Roman Empire or Einsteinian mathematics) is transformed by the eruption of a frail yet revolutionary force (the infant Christ as saviour; quantum physics and its emphasis on minute energies – the rhythm of the butterfly's wing – as inextricable from global forces – the fury of the hurricane). In "The Fabric of the Imagination" Harris contends that diminutive emblems or poles "may offer a key to the cross-cultural imagination": each "diminutive" exists "in a certain field, or upon a certain frontier or margin of being, to apprise us of the polar life of other fields, to warn us of the necessity to

read the mutual attraction of apparently remote poles of existence” (22). These fragile poles, then, by the resemblances they establish between sovereign monoliths, puncture exclusive block identity, exposing hitherto unacknowledged contingencies. Just as the butterfly’s wing ‘translates’ the rhythm of the storm – otherwise seen as an element of absolute terror – into one expression upon a scale of interrelated yet apparently opposed values, so the diminutive signals the fragile contact – fragile since it entails a new vulnerability as the cloak of self-sufficiency is shed – between cultural traditions, their absolutism converted as they are re-read in light of their connection to other poles.

As the “apparition of the resurrection of the body,” in Robin words, Ghost is just such a diminutive or frail pole, stitching together seemingly polarised blocks of tradition (175). Indeed, s/he speaks “in a foreign tongue” that mixes “vernaculars it seemed, bawdy verse and waste land poetry” (175). Through the by now familiar combination of the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane,’ ‘high’ discourse and ‘low,’ Ghost is linked to new Divine Comedy and the Caribbean’s irruption into modernity. But s/he is also associated with that shift in the post-1945 world when the ‘profane’ or ‘hidden’ face of the globe emerged in the form of the anti-colonial struggle and the rise of newly independent nations. Indeed, Ghost’s chronicle becomes a re-narration or ‘re-scaling’ of global history via this contrapuntal paradigm.

When they first meet, Ghost presents to Robin several heads through which he can read a brief history of the world up to this period. First, s/he shows him the “El Doradonne brow” of Sir Walter Raleigh, on which Robin scans the words: ““History revises itself within the intervals of consciousness and unconsciousness that it takes for the economies of our age to fall again and again

from the block” (180). This idea is revisited in the next head, Prospero’s, where Robin reads: “1832, emancipation of the slaves, the axe falls on plantation El Dorado”; subsequently, the First and Second World Wars are evoked: “1914-18. The axe falls on dynasties and privileges. Where will the unemployed go?”; and: “1939, the axe falls on Chamberlain’s *peace in our time* . . .” (180). What we are presented with, then, are landmarks in the rise and fall of different socio-economic systems, or rather of the different phases in one mode of production: capitalism. Each ‘decapitation’ (“the axe falls”) can be understood as the breakdown of a particular nexus of power relations. Each time this occurs, moreover, the ‘profane’ underbelly of society (the freed slaves; the “unemployed”) erupts into the ‘sacred’ order, bringing with it the possibility of radical change. However, each transitional period also contains within it the seeds of new modes of domination; and thus far it is the latter that have come to fruition more often than the potential for transformation.

Ghost is a new eruptive moment for the post-1945 world, emerging alongside the contemporary re-structuration of the socius, something emphasized when Frog, interrogating Robin as to whether he saw the stranger come ashore, asks: “Have you seen the axe fall upon the neck of the Old New Forest sun and moon economies? Has the industrial revolution of the sea given up its unemployed dead?” (177). Ghost is thus connected to the appearance of the ‘profane’ masses following the ‘decapitation’ of the previous Old New Forest socio-economic system. That this ‘death’ is the prelude to the potential ‘rebirth’ of the body politic in a more equitable form is underlined by the recurrent motif of headless-ness. The latter can be read as referring to the fertility or vegetation rites of ancient Greek religious cults, and in particular the ritual worship of the

divinity Adonis. Regarded as the embodiment of nature's cyclical rhythm of decay and growth, Adonis was celebrated through the re-enactment of his death and resurrection. An effigy or papyrus head representative of the dead god was committed to the sea to be revived, with the arrival of the head on another shore signalling resurrection. Subsequently, fertility was expected to return to the land. This rite survived in medieval and modern nature rituals, with the coming of spring celebrated in some ceremonies by the decapitation of an effigy of the king as a prelude to his resurrection (Weston 55). The twinned image strands of sea and headless-ness as conjoined in *Ghost* thus convey this potential for renewal.

The problem at present, though, is that Robin is unable to understand *Ghost*, to make sense of the possibility gravid in his admixture of traditions. He admits to being "baffled" (175) by *Ghost*'s juxtaposition of the sacred and profane, his use of "bawdy verse" alongside "waste land poetry." If Robin could 'read' the history on the heads up to World War II, the quest now is to 'read' the post-1945 world. Indeed, the novel opens with Robin's assertion that "the hope for a universally just society" is part of an "impossible dream," an "impossible quest for wholeness" – impossible yet necessary since that quest "nurses [. . .] [and] gives reality to the creative imagination," that is, it fuels a ceaseless totalization and re-imagining of the world order (173). The emphasis on Robin's *quest*, combined with allusions throughout the text to the "waste land," the "chapel perilous," and "fishing," inserts another strand of tradition into the novel: the Grail legend of the Fisher King. The restoration of this maimed or impotent monarch to health and virility signalled the return of fertility to the land.⁹ Thus, its advent in the text not only underlines the idea of rebirth; it also emphasizes the

need for there to occur, alongside the re-imagining of the world order, an appropriate material transformation on an institutional level. In other words, the reborn body politic – here imaged in the king’s ‘resurrection body’ – must be sustained by coincident social and civic structures, just as in Salt Bango’s story alone is insufficient and requires apposite institutional frameworks (embodied by the ‘converted’ elite figure of Alford) for its promise to be concretised as reality.

Of signal importance in this respect is Harris’s use of myths such as the Grail legend as a means to conceptualise the context in which change is pursued. For although it might appear an abstract way to explore vital socio-political concerns, it is precisely the figurative connections established by these mythic imageries that enables Harris to move beyond the conventional model of polarising historiography, and to grasp the interdependencies of different forces from a totalising perspective – his “impossible quest for wholeness.”¹⁰ Myth is an “untameable force or *unstructured* mediation between partial systems high and low”; it “mediates ceaselessly [. . .] between institutions, man-made and nature-made, whose hubris of total model cannot be maintained in the light of truth” (ES 132). Thereby, it manifests unseen linkages between supposedly sovereign monoliths – in this instance, the masked exploitation attendant upon the centre / periphery relationship. As a result, light is shed on the global nexus of power relations within which the reborn polity is situated. This in turn points to what might, given these relations, be a ‘false’ resurrection, the potential inherent in rebirth frustrated, the freedoms engendered squandered or converted into a new dogma. By extension, therefore, it indicates why any revised political settlement must be global in scale.

The use of myth to pierce a reified apprehension of reality, and the

connection between these motifs, the world system, and the body, is established through Robin's birth. This occurs in 1945 within

the instant hour – or flash of eternity – the Bomb fell. [. . .] I bowed to my mother's ghostly legs as I emerged through them into the blinding light, the blinding axe, as they [. . .] seemed to break and fold under her yet in other women's bodies reflecting my mother's, *through* other women's bodies reflecting my mother's. They gave birth to me even as she did. (189)

Not only did the bomb signal the end of the war; it also ushered in a new conception of existence, with the possibility of worldwide nuclear destruction forcing the recognition of the interconnectedness of all peoples. To be born is to be sutured into the 'body' of the world, emphasized by the way the corporeality of Robin and his mother extends beyond sovereign boundaries and into the bodies of other women. Paradoxically, then, as the recurrence of the "axe" motif suggests, the global threat of death is tied to the release of new potential in the form of a global consciousness able to unite the oppressed. Moreover, just as in previous incarnations, the image of the axe signifies a shift in the socio-economic order. Following World War II, the capitalist world system went through a series of changes. As Samir Amin notes, the "interpenetration of capital" into unindustrialized areas was so widespread that "the national productive systems were dismantled and re-established as segments of a globalized productive system"; hence, the post-war cycle can be regarded "as a period of transition from the old system to the new" (57). Robin not only lives through this period of transition, but also must re-narrate it to uncover its potentials. His quest to do so begins when he too is 'decapitated' by Frog: "[H]e struck me a blow on the back

of my neck. [. . .] My head toppled into the Globe” (183). The fragile Robin from the Old New Forest of Guyana – as such, symbolic of Third World peoples – is thus thrust into the global economy, just as the ‘peripheral’ nations are with the post-war expansion of capital; and being also the drowned / headless fertility god, he sets out to ensure that the possibilities thereby engendered are correctly brought to fruition.

The political context in which this takes place is highlighted a few pages later as Robin reiterates the nature of his quest:

FROG’S MOTTLED HAND HAD FALLEN LIKE AN AXE IN MY SLEEP. Fallen on many a reflected economy in Mirror and Shadow of Flesh-and-Blood in the flight of the crane or the swallow or the dove from north to south. Shadow-crane, shadow-dove, shadow-fish, with broken neck floating high on a wave or high on the land. I, Robin Redbreast Glass, flew headless then spun with a feather and a scale into the turning Globe [. . .]. Put my head and my hat on again and bowed in my Sleep to Prosperity’s block and Necessity’s block.

Capital block prosperity? I asked Ghost [. . .]. Marxist block necessity then? I asked Ghost: ‘Tell me, Ghost – how deceptive, how real, are Necessity and Prosperity? Are they disguised ballrooms and cells of evil in which the heads of the unemployed roll? Are they in essence the polarizations of a Faustian morality that we need to untangle [. . .]?’ (184-85)

The complex imageries of this passage replay those encountered previously; by doing so they offer a condensed, allegorical account of post-1945 history. The

development of the globalized productive system is captured here via the axe and its re-crafting of “many a reflected economy” into a network stretching from “north to south.” Key to the new system was the increasing modernization of the unindustrialized nations of the “south,” that is, the Third World, many of whom were now in the midst of, or had achieved, national liberation from colonialism. Amin observes that “‘development’ was the major preoccupation of all regimes” in the first three post-Second World War decades, during which time “generalized economic development, in some ways more rapid in the East and the South, [gave] rise to the idea that it was possible to catch up with the developed countries” (93-94). The post-war expansion of wealth, in conjunction with the advent of independence for many nations, is imaged in the flight from north to south of the “dove” (the peace), the “swallow” (migrating to the African ‘periphery’), and the “crane” (symbolic of the movement of money in the Americas). Their “broken neck[s]” recall the headless motif and so indicate the potential inherent in the rising (“floating high”) status of the post-colonial countries. This period also bore witness to world conflict in the form of the West-East Cold War and the struggle between the West and the Third World, alluded to in the passage via the Capital / Marxist opposition. Significantly, the gains won by the East and South helped check the power of unilateral capitalism to the benefit of “poor nations and the popular classes,” with capital forced to engage in “the historic social-democratic compromise” (Amin 94).

Harris’s imageries thus point to the need to adopt a ‘total’ (and not just Third World) perspective, exemplified by the way the labour / capital compromise of the welfare state in the West must be seen in the context of the interrelationship between ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ – reflected here in Robin’s

“headless” flight between global poles and its exposure of the exploitation at the heart of the international division of labour. The potential for beneficial change therefore exists not only in the rise of the South, but also in the recognition and re-structuring of the masked and iniquitous vectors that define socio-economic relations *globally*. Robin must “untangle” the polarizations of block “Prosperity” and block “Necessity” to reveal their constitutive contingency within the current world order, thereby pointing to its re-stitching upon radically different, equitable axes.

Historically, however, this potential for change has been stifled precisely by the consolidation of these polarizations, not only by the ‘West’ in its attempt to maintain its ascendancy, but also internally in the newly independent nations of the Third World. Here this often took the form of an absolutist promotion by the ruling post-colonial elites of “Necessity” in the form of victimhood or certain ‘national’ conflicts (in fact, elite struggles over executive power) that enabled them to defer tackling social issues of poverty and class inequality (the actions, as we saw, of the political classes in Salt). By the 1970s, moreover, the world economy had entered a period of crisis. In response, capital implemented various strategies designed to dissolve the restrictions placed upon it by labour, further aggravating the decline of the post-war potential for greater social democracy. As Amin attests, this “phase of structural crisis” was marked by “the return of high and persistent unemployment accompanied by a slowing down of growth in the West, [. . .] and serious regression in some regions of the Third World, accompanied by unsustainable levels of external indebtedness” (94).

All these issues are expanded on The Infinite Rehearsal, though they appear in condensed form in the passage. The image of Robin putting “my head

and my hat on again and bow[ing] in my Sleep to Prosperity's block and Necessity's block" presages a 'false' resurrection. The potential for rebirth present in his headless condition is lost, for his premature restoration to wholeness – he continues to move blindly in his "Sleep" and has not awakened to re-visionary perspectives – only consolidates (he bows down to) absolute proclamations of wealth or poverty (victimhood). Indeed, when Robin asks whether these blocks are "disguised ballrooms and cells of evil in which the heads of the unemployed roll?" he alludes not only to the post-1960s economic crisis, but also to the failures of a number of Third World regimes.¹¹ The juxtaposed "disguised ballrooms and cells of evil" signal the way in which these regimes, pursuing modernisation policies incompatible with their states' conditions of production, created grandiose structures yet failed to alter underlying social iniquities, their power sustained by violence. These difficulties are connected in the passage to a "Faustian morality," one that would trade human needs for 'development.'

The Faustian theme of the temptation of false technologies – those ostentatious yet hollow projects, which in their pursuit of immediate gain lay the foundations for future crises (the exhaustion of resources) – becomes central to the novel. Brought to the fore by his grandfather's re-writing of Faust, its association with Robin connects it to the problem of the 'false' resurrection of the body, and hence to the Fisher King motif. Chapter three explicitly weaves these image strands together. It begins with an account of Robin's pre-natal, knight-like test in which he is tempted to "seize the species, seize the kingdom of the earth'" (192). This seizure recalls Faust's final grand project, his massive appropriation of territory and the creation of an expansive new system of

production founded on exploitation and violence (the murder of Baucis and Philemon). As the symbol of Third World peoples, the soon-to-be-born Robin's comparable desire for absolutist power points to how some emergent states came to epitomise only a false freedom, recycling the repressive ideologies they once fought against.

This transmutation of the questing knight of the Fisher King into a re-narration or 'post-colonial' re-scaling of Faust is continued when Robin hears "the clamour of church bells in the sacred wood [. . .] as if a flock of mighty bell birds flew from down under and encircled the globe." Subsequently, he is

seduced by another curious and strange bell at the end of a long fishing rod which Faust held over my grandfather's creek in the sacred wood. 'Faust,' my grandfather had written [. . .], 'is the comedian of the kingdom bell. The fisherman-bell is the kingdom bell.' [. . .] Robin Redbreast's revised foetus, glass bird, flew in his mother's cinematic body and alighted on Faust's fisherman-rod. [. . .] The fisherman-rod swayed as [Robin] danced. [. . .] But the kingdom bell on the fisherman-rod did not make a sound.
(192-93)

The reference to birds recalls the motif of the flight from "north to south" and thus the emergence of the formally-colonised regions of the globe. But in combination with the bell motif it also indicates the Faustian difficulties these regions encountered. The "church bells" allude to those that Faust hears as he is about to commit suicide: "these sounds, familiar since my youth, / summon me now again to life" (Faust lines 769-70). Restored by this childhood memory, Faust ventures out into the world, only to become depressed at the static social

order of his hometown and, in turn, susceptible to Mephistopheles's offer. Here, the bell-birds become Robin and the "kingdom bell" on the "fisherman rod." Thus is the kingdom or newly independent state linked to the Fisher King, emphasizing the notion that the nation – the *body* of the people – has been returned to virility. However, when Robin's dancing on the pole elicits no noise from the bell, the efficacy of this restoration is placed in doubt. Robin's "claws [. . .] danced on the bell but felt nothing. [. . .] Why had he not known the instant he *touched* the bell that it was devoid of a clapper and a tongue, that it was a *simulated* bell and not a real bell?" (193). As the words Harris italicises suggest, a disjunction exists between touch – bodily sense – and technology – the mechanical bell. Indeed, the bell as simulated points to its being a false technology; like the grand development projects of certain post-colonial regimes, it is divorced from the material reality of the people. Hence does the bell's "tongue" – the voice of the community – remain silent: it lacks the requisite institutional form in which its sentiments can be crystallised.

The Global and the Grotesque: Towards a New World Order

. . . the stress of imagery in such orders of the imagination is not only one that taxes the individual artist in undermining monolithic convention but steepens him or her in a-causal . . . links between sovereign poles of experience that begin, in degrees, to yield their mechanical sovereignties and become potent parts of an unfathomable whole which activates a ceaseless quest for community.

Wilson Harris, *Explorations*

To ensure that the potential gravid in the emergence of the "hidden face of the world" is not lost requires that the institutional frameworks of these nations – their political administrations, their means of production, and their civic structures – are coincident with the lived experience of their peoples. But it requires also a rethinking of the body as central to such concerns, both

ontologically (its role in particular concepts of identity) and materially (the structural organization of labour / citizens). In The Infinite Rehearsal the evocation of the restored Fisher King in the Faustian context points to the dangers inherent in the notion of the pure or virile sovereign body. Indeed, it returns us to many of the ideological and physical schemas that under-girded capitalist / colonial expansion: the self-sufficient subjecthood of the colonizer; its apparent opposite – in fact its economic and conceptual constitutive underside –, the homogenised body-as-commodity of the slave or wage labourer; and the trope of the colonizer as heroic knight come to convert the ‘feminine’ wilderness of the ‘New World’ into an ordered hive of productivity. Moreover, a specific epistemology is implicated here. The impact of the transcendent authority of the King on the fertility of the realm recalls that worldview in which physical reality, conceived as inert matter, is imbued with meaning only through the order imposed upon it by an abstract sign system. Thus, we have also the separation of word from thing, subject from object, human body from landscape, and hence all the difficulties this entails in terms of reification and alienation.

If sovereignty, therefore, in its centrality to capitalist logic, persists as the core principle behind the structuration of reality, the disjunction between human needs and institutional aims and capacities will be perpetuated. Against this background, any ‘resurrection’ in the form of development projects and their attendant socio-economic programmes will only consolidate Faustian false technologies, that is, unsustainable state and civil structures. Through the diminutive Robin, however, the re-visionary perspective required to illuminate the lineaments of an alter/native and appropriate ‘resurrection’ is revealed, auguring in turn the revised notion of the body and the re-structured institutions

necessary to facilitate such transformation. The focal point of multiple legacies, Robin's frail ("glass") dancing body on the fishing rod provides a counterpoint to the restoration of the Fisher King's corporeality to a 'smooth' sovereignty, the latter reminiscent of Bakhtin's description of the modern body as one in which all "signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated [. . .], its apertures closed. [. . .] The accent was placed on the completed, self-sufficient individuality of the given body" (Rabelais and his World 29). Robin's corporeality, his physicality and incomplete, mutative form (he conjoins bird, fish, and crab attributes), contests the boundaries imposed by this bodily mould. His fragility challenges the self-sufficient "immortal" body with which he is tempted by Faust, whose accompanying admonition – "Put your faith in material progress" (194) – underlines the connection between this corporeality and the socio-economic logic of capitalist expansion. Moreover, the way in which Robin's body crosses and blurs the borderline between the human and animal worlds marks it out as a grotesque, Carnival body. In contrast to the modern, atomised Lenten body that superseded it, the grotesque body, writes Bakhtin, is "unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits"; it is "not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (Rabelais and his World 27). Thus, we are returned to that revised conception of reality as a fluid architecture of overlapping forms (the imbricated rocks, waterfall, and greenheart trees in Four Banks). In addition, the carnivalesque movement of Robin, his association with the "riddle of *touch*, the riddle of the *dance*" (193), not only points to an expansive rather than regulated corporeality; it also recalls how the body of the dancer in rituals such as vodun manifests an otherwise nebulous vision of consciousness, one expressive of the

yoking together of diverse traditions.

The potential thus inherent in a corporeality no longer structured along the axis of (capitalist-defined) sovereignty – the alter/native *sense* of reality it makes tangible – underscores why the body, in this revised form, must be considered in any approach to the re-structuring of the social order. It must be stressed, however, that the grotesque Carnival body as a means to contest the limitations imposed by the sovereign mould should not be understood in the sense of a return to a ‘pre-modern’ corporeality. It is not a case of going back to a time prior to that separation of the body from the world and the subsequent atomisation of individuals. Rather, the point is to drive beyond the dichotomies (modern / pre-modern; nature / culture) instituted by this separation and the material and ideological shifts constellated around it; to drive beyond the model of the ‘finished’ sovereign body towards a renewed vision of the connectedness of all – a vision linked to that changed philosophical perspective on a world understood now in terms of the constitutive overlap of all elements.

In The Infinite Rehearsal this perspective is imaged, fittingly, via the world as a global Carnival body. In Ghost’s final account of the ‘true’ resurrection or “thread” into “the cross-cultural humanities of the future,” s/he intones:

I write to you of a seamless robe but find it necessary to stress that such seamlessness is not to be equated with the bounty of conquest. Rather its fabric lies in the spinning vortex of the sea, the still vortex of the sea; as if the still vortex of air, earth and sky [. . .] secretes a corridor or passageway through every wave and overturning of rigid expectation. [. . .] As the hollow wave

breaks, the chorus of the world becomes all at once sacramental self-confession. [. . .] [To] redeem the sale of the earth and the sky in our nuclear age [. . .] [requires] drawing us – you and me – to the nerve-end fabric in the resurrection body. (258-59)

The ‘resurrected’ body of the world in the shape of the seamless robe implies both the recognition of the global entanglement of cultural legacies and a new apprehension of the environment. No longer predicated on the sovereign human self as the nodal point in relation to which inert matter is organized, this worldview posits all orders as sutured together in a Bakhtinian grotesque whole. Kerry Johnson offers a useful gloss on the passage, noting that “[s]pace as constituted by sea, earth, and sky provides a medium of connection or ‘passageway’ to the ‘chorus of the world,’ to a sense of the universe outside the self-contained and suffering [regulated] body” (138-39). The world as seamless robe is hence not to be understood as absolute, that is, as ‘smooth’ or complete in the way that the restored Fisher King was. Instead, its “seamlessness” is indicative of its fluidity and inclusiveness, its unfinished, accretive character.

The political implications of this global vision resonate most sharply in terms of its contestation of the equally global impact of the capitalist world system. In that it restores a ‘true’ attachment to the “nerve-end fabric” of the body, the conception of the world as a seamless robe implies the reconnection of people to their material conditions, and so, necessarily, the instantiation of institutional structures coincident with lived (bodily) experience. Thus, it envisages an alternative to the integration of all into the logic of generalised commodity production, into an uneven world system predicated on the polarisation and exploitation produced by capitalist relations yet concealed by

their structural impersonality. By emphasizing the body's sensuous presence, Harris both renders tangible its violent subjugation within this system and underscores how the latter is sustained by the physical labour of the worker. Thereby countered is capital's tendency – resulting from its saturation of social relations – to make “the productive forces of social labour appear attributable to [capital], and not to labour as such, as a power springing forth from its own womb” (Marx, Capital Vol.3 966). As the reified plane of existence is pierced via this stress on the body, Robin is able to apprehend the structural inequalities of the world system, its non-coincidence with development and its reliance on the underdevelopment of its ‘peripheries.’ This realisation is crystallised most fully upon his encounter with the city of Skull.

Skull represents the pinnacle of that version of Faustian ambition which values immediate profit over long-term equitable sustainability. A paradoxical “faeryland Chernobyl” or prosperous wasteland, it depends on “cheap electricity and deceptively overabundant goods” (217). Developing from a “Chapel perilous” to a wealthy city in the 1980s (227), Skull is the product of the reassertion of the logic of unilateral capital following the crisis in the world economy in the 1970s. Significantly, this crisis was not a unique event but inextricable from capitalism's inherent tendency towards cycles of expansion and contraction. Amin argues that the system “tends, by nature, to create relative overproduction” (19), which it must then work to overcome to prevent stagnation (Skull's “deceptively overabundant goods”). In the 1970s, the crisis was ‘managed’ in part by imposing structural adjustment policies on the Third World. The IMF, which regulated these policies, did nothing to halt the excessive borrowing they entailed, argues Amin,

because the rising debt was very useful as a means of managing [. . .] the overabundance of idle capital which it produced. The logic of adjustment requires [. . .] that the free mobility of capital prevail, even if this should cause demand to contract because of reductions in wages and social spending, [. . .] and thus bring about a regression in the possibilities for development. (20)

By way of Ghost, Robin is made to see Skull's reliance on this pernicious 'management' of capital, its need for underdevelopment elsewhere as a way to offset overproduction:

'The archetypal colony may seem remote from the West but it is an extension of the West. The refugees will come. Indeed, they have never ceased to come [. . .]. Look deep into the necessity to manufacture asylums for refugees, ghetto asylums, god knows what. [. . .] Skull may be converted into a prosperous concentration camp.

'Think of the prospect of cheap energy. [. . .] Look deep into the electric stars and the cheap electric suns reflected there in the mirror of coming technologies, coming at any price, any human price.' (226)

The prosperity of Skull is predicated – like capitalism – on a limit it would claim to transcend but constitutively never can: it needs those refugees who serve as cheap labour, those underdeveloped ghetto asylums whose construction provides an outlet for surplus capital. Thus the “prosperous” freedom of this “faeryland Chernobyl” in fact only retards development, prostituting the future of the earth – its resources and the environment – through ultimately unsustainable

“technologies” achieved at “any human price.”

Counter to this ‘false’ resurrection of what was, notably, a “Chapel perilous,” Harris’s “seamless robe” envisions a more even, sustainable world system. This requires, on the one hand, a stress upon the specificities of a territory, that is, on the “nerve-end fabric” of the body politic and so the creation of appropriate institutional structures for national development. On the other hand, this must be matched inter-nationally with a global politico-economic settlement that enables such development to come to fruition without its being short-circuited by polarising, iniquitous power relations. Necessary, therefore, would be a fundamental shift in trade policies and in the international division of labour. The nations of the global South must be able to assert control over their means of production and diversify output if they are to avoid being fixed as merely a resource from which to extract (as Skull does) cheap labour and raw materials.

If Harris’s philosophy of history draws on the Caribbean Marxist tradition of C. L. R. James (as argued in the Introduction) yet transforms this by allying it to a legacy derived from the native arts of the region, the global vision articulated here could be said to draw upon yet transform Marx’s vision of the world system. Marx contends that capital drives “towards its own suspension” as internal contradictions constantly thwart the “universality towards which it irresistibly strives” (Grundrisse 410). Similarly, Harris drives beyond sovereignty in its various ideological avatars, pushing the dichotomies and contradictions it institutes towards suspension via the exposure of constitutive contingency (in ontological, cultural, socio-economic, and national terms). Again distinctive to Harris’s vision, then, is the incorporation of his insights into cross-culturality.

His desired transformation of the iniquitous power relations that polarise the globe entails also the transubstantiation of cultural polarisations into a new, non-adversarial community.

The politico-economic concern for the sustainability of each national body in a new world system runs in parallel, therefore, with a concern, as regards identity, for the affirmation of specificity, but only as part of the struggle for the specificities of all since it is the interaction of each partiality in the whole that secures selfhood. Harris's (always incomplete) totalization of global connections – the revised universalism of the Carnival world body – is, then, forged in the light of that understanding of reality as constituted not by sovereign forms that negate each other at their limits, but by the overlap and interaction of properties at these limits. Identity is to be conceived from the standpoint of the web of contingencies and wounds of cultural collision, from the eroded limit or void where self merges into other, rather than from the self-sufficient, 'smooth' node or fortress of the sovereign body. The 'weak' fissure of the wound is in fact a transfigurative womb, out of which (like Ghost from the sea) the individual or culture emerges as a distinct diminutive pole, linked now to the material conditions and reinscribed institutions – the 'true' technologies – of a certain place, even as it connects to other poles. So, what we have here is a globally articulated version of the philosophy outlined in the previous chapter, and figured in Chamoiseau's portrayal of Gros-Joseph. This philosophy transforms the Hegelian concept of self-consciousness, with its emphasis on transcendent self-certainty, into a distinctly Caribbean expression of identity defined also by African and Indian philosophies of ego-displacement. The collapse of sovereignty and the negation of one form by another, during which the "extreme"

or limit of each undergoes the “exchanging of its own determinateness and an absolute transition into its opposite” (Hegel 112), is no longer the prelude to the re-establishment of self-certainty following the supersession of the antithetical other. Instead, it becomes the constitutive condition for an identity grounded in the void of indeterminateness, with the “transition” between limits now the basis of a relational selfhood.

In “Metaphor and Myth” Harris expands on this philosophy, underscoring the conception of the globe as a grotesque, Carnival body in which the human, animal, and object worlds blend and overlap. Under the term “asymmetric infinity” – the phrase bespeaking an emphasis on the locating of always unfinished connections between different orders – he outlines an understanding of reality in which apparently unlike entities are constantly ‘scaled’ into new architectures. The sun shining on a rose, for example, becomes in part that rose; the rose is an incomplete embodiment – incomplete since it can exist only in relation to its surroundings (sunlight, water, soil) – of certain natural rhythms that associate it to the sun, which is visually echoed, as it were, in the rose’s bloom. Thus, one must look beyond the self-evident sovereign form, that is, “look *through* the sun with the ancient psyche of paradox, [. . .] look *through* the rose at an unnameable centre or a coherence beyond common-sense exactitude. And sun and rose are but two factors in *asymmetric infinity* amongst incalculable others” (“Metaphor and Myth” 2). The rose is one node or specificity within a soup of rhythms that comprise the fabric of reality; it is not self-sufficient matter, but a fold in this fabric, a peak derived from the particular coalescence of rhythms at that point. “Asymmetric infinity,” writes Harris, “implies [. . .] an innovative conversion of deprivations that seem changeless, and of an apparently sovereign

identity – ego-rose, ego-sun as it were – that seems absolute, into cosmic paradox as well as into physical and cultural genesis” (“Metaphor and Myth” 3). Each form remains distinctive, therefore, but is divested of sovereign ego; each is given shape at the limit where diverse forces overlap, and so is enmeshed in the surrounding network of forms; consequently, each is always fluid or mutable since its specificity is conceivable from different perspectives *in relation* to the connection through which it is apprehended.

Following his various temptations and tests, Robin is brought in The Infinite Rehearsal to just such an understanding of reality, of the potential inherent in, yet suppressed by, the post-1945 world order for its own transformation. If previously he could not ‘read’ such potential (as manifested in *Ghost*), now, having pierced the reified crust of reality and unmasked the polarising, structural iniquities of capitalist ‘development,’ he is able to envision the lineaments of a ‘resurrected’ world body. Significantly, the body itself is central to this vision, not only via its foregrounding of the human relations that underpin any politico-economic or socio-cultural system, but also since its movement is able to translate the flux of forces that comprise a multiply inscribed reality into material expression. In other words, a reality understood as constituted through the material interaction of bodies with the environment, and, too, the perceptual frames created by the mediation of these interactions, is *corpo/realised* in movement. Hence, the final spectacle he encounters is that of a carnivalesque dance upon the ship *Tiger* in which Robin and his mother (Alice) and aunt (Miriam) were drowned after it foundered on a reef. The fact that the boat shares its name with a rebellious strike leader featured earlier in the novel, whose protest against the underdevelopment of his country became entangled in

an absolute martyrdom that froze its potential, indicates how the craft's re-emergence points to the need for a 'true resurrection' – for sustainable development coincident with lived experience – not just in those Third World regions the rebel Tiger represents, but across the globe.

The re-visionary sense of reality concomitant with this resurrection is vividly imaged as Robin "drift[s]" into the "psychical glass eyes" of the Beast (the symbol of global cross-cultural contact hitherto dominated by the brutalities of conquest) and perceives

the vortex of the Tiresian dance. It was the dance of bone and flesh within and without the Beast in the mystery of the resurrection body. [. . .] The crew upon *Tiger* were masked in bone as they danced. [. . .] I dreamt I now saw Alice and Miriam on the deck of the Beast-ship of life under the sea. They were masked in flesh. Not bone. But as I scanned their curious bodies in 'sleeping top' dance of *stillness* and flesh with sailors of bone I saw the *stillness* for what it was. *Stillness* was a 'hole' in each body through which I looked beyond the dance into vistas of oceanic spirit. There was a shout [. . .] and one of the bone sailors heaved upon his fishing rod and drew in his line. Beast-fish at last! [. . .] The bone-sailors in their dance, in eating the fish, had subtly cannibalised the spectre of death and eaten [. . .] into the dance and into themselves as well, into their male bone and acquired in consequence a crack or tooth-mark, a sparkling intensity or flute of soul. (248-49)

Depicted here is an alter/native Fisher King-like restoration of the body, the flesh

now a grotesque Carnival vessel, the sovereign body transgressed as it is opened to, and cannibalised by, others. The vision points to the global extension – emphasized by the Beast, the cultural contact it embodies now converted from conquest / polarisation to community / cannibal communion – of that ‘marvellous’ Caribbean philosophy based upon the ritualistic plunge into the depths of cross-culturality as the prelude to the accretion of original architectures of consciousness. The immersion in the fluid ground of créolité is translated here into an apprehension of reality as a flux of rhythms (the “vistas of oceanic spirit”) which mediate between and connect all partial structures (sun-rose-soil and so on). And just as the body of the ritual participant (the vodun or limbo dancer, for example) materialised a vision of consciousness expressive of the yoking together of eroded legacies, so the dancing bodies of those on the *Tiger* manifest that idea of each entity as a crystallisation of a specific conjunction of the forces constitutive of the fabric of reality.

The apprehension of substance or identity as a mask (“masked in flesh”) over this flux should not, however, be taken to suggest that this appearance is merely a free-floating performance, something to be adopted or exchanged at will. For though underscoring the interconnectedness and mutability of identity forms, Harris’s worldview, in looking to drive beyond the absolute separation of subject and object, harnesses all elements – mind, body, the environment – into a mutually determining whole. As such, identity cannot be conceived apart from, and indeed is constituted through, the dialogue between these forces. If it assumes a new aspect as one-sided sovereignties are dismantled to expose their wholeness or, as Harris puts it in another context, “the dialectical field in which they stand or move” (TWS 55), it nevertheless remains imbricated in the energies

of this field as a specific accretion of their interaction, even as it impacts subjectively back upon them. Summarising this vision of reality, Harris contends that “the impact of the human mind and body on the hard world, in constructing and destroying something, has a unity or combination that is both secret and plain, immaterial and material [. . .]. What is truly particular is not isolated or static but is an association of numerous factors” (TWS 9). Paradoxically, then, it is the web of links in which all forms are enmeshed as contingent nodes that grounds the specificity of each. This is the meaning of the contradictory “dance of *stillness*” that turns the body into a ‘hole’ through appearances. By its movement, the dancing body manifests the fluid contours of the morass of interactions, impacts, and connections that shape reality – just as the vodun dancer embodies a nebulous vision of consciousness. The body thus, in *corpo*/realising this flux in motion, paradoxically makes it *still* to be apprehended, which in turn renders the dancing body also a ‘hole’ since this specific presence gives on to the “oceanic vistas of spirit” or the wholeness of a ceaselessly unfinished real. The body therefore enables another form of ‘scaling,’ this time between a particular manifestation of an entity and the wider conjunction of influences that give it shape; unshackled from sovereignty, it ‘scales’ together objects and subjective actions that might otherwise be broken apart into reified isolation.

The paradox of movement as providing a concretisation or stillness by which to grasp the fluidity of relations that define reality hence offers a way to conceive the relationship between the particular and the universal, between the fluidity of relation and the need for a grounded specificity – the need, evident in Texaco’s account of the Quarters, to re-root the rhizome in institutional structures

(without of course reinstating exclusivity). As such, we are returned to Lovelace's concern to 'redeem' the nation as the institutional framework capable of securing particularity, but a particularity viable now only in relation to that of others on, first, a regional level and, subsequently, a global one. The alternative world order or global body projected here is not a 'smooth' form (and thus equivalent to the 'smooth' sovereign body) but instead comprised of interconnected specificities or 'grotesque' nodes that overlap; for as Glissant stresses, "if there is dilution, there is no relation. Relation plots itself only between persistent entities" (IPD 105). Of course, if this relational concept of identity is to come to fruition it must be in dialectic with that politico-economic drive to restructure the world system along more equitable, sustainable lines.¹² If not, the axes of relation will remain uneven; those nations that retain monopolies over resources and trade will continue to dominate, simply commodifying and reintegrating difference back into an unequal system. To convert the polarisations of the global order, fulfilling the potential for a new community / communion already gravid in the increasingly integrated post-1945 world, a transformed consciousness in tandem with a transformed polity is key. The positing of such total transformation may appear utopian, but it is this radical re-imagining that allows hitherto occulted possibilities to be recognised: Robin's desire for a "universally just society" needs that "impossible dream" (173) to open the way to its realisation; to paraphrase Martin Carter, Robin does not sleep to dream, but dreams to change the world.

Conclusion

These poet words, nuggets out of corruption
or jewels dug from dung or speech from flesh
still bloody red, still half afraid to plunge
in the ceaseless waters foaming over death.

Martin Carter, *Words*

In 1997 Chamoiseau's fourth novel L'esclave vieil homme et le molosse appeared. In comparison to the expansive national epic of Texaco that preceded it and to the global epic of Biblique des derniers gestes that followed, this story about a slave who flees the plantation would seem to be a fairly straightforward affair. In fact, the narrative provides a complex reiteration of Chamoiseau's literary development thus far, as well as an insight into the concerns his next novel would enlarge upon. The tale returns us to the archetypal scene of the maroon pursued by the master, and so it could be said to Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Immediately, however, the title of the book suggests a different take on this: it is the molosse – the hound used to hunt down plantation runaways – and not the master who headlines with the slave. This shift hints at the transformation in philosophical perspectives required to articulate the distinctive contours of Caribbean history. To conclude my thesis, then, I want to analyse briefly Chamoiseau's short text and its underlying philosophy, since it allows for a restaging and summation of the themes hitherto explored.

These themes have been articulated around the body, its 'production' in terms of the material and discursive pressures applied to it by the dominant order, and its centrality to practices such as ritual that have in turn challenged this order. Sovereign subjectivity and its correlative, the regulated atomised body, emerged in Europe in relation to the ideals of the Enlightenment and to the re-structuring of society from the sixteenth century onwards with the expansion of capitalism.

In addition to the labour of the European worker, however, the developing capitalist system was fuelled by the plantation economy across the Atlantic. Here the regulation and subjugation of corporeality was made brutally explicit. But despite attempts by the plantation regime to instil into the slaves a habitus attuned absolutely to its power relations, the slave body was to preserve another history, another set of values to those imposed by colonialism. As this thesis has sought to show, bodily practices – particularly rituals such as vodun and limbo – manifested the collision of histories yet drew from it too an alter/native heritage. Indeed, the (in Harris’s words) “native consciousness” that underpins these rituals is vital to an original Caribbean philosophy of history, one able to articulate the network of eroded legacies and cross-cultural entanglements that characterise the region. In turn, these native arts, bound to the evocation of a corporeality beyond sovereign strictures, become integral to a new literary form suited to the expression of an architecture of cultures. This form is ‘cannibal epic’ as Harris puts it; and the three writers studied here, I have argued, deploy versions of this ‘cannibal’ style in order to consume the past, releasing eclipsed memories that permit the re-envisioning of present and future relations beyond the frameworks of tragedy and victimhood.

To approach the past, thus, is to re-ritualise it, rehearsing the latent, unfulfilled possibilities it contains. This imaginative re-membering of history implies, we saw in Chapter Three, the suturing together of ‘profane’ experience with ‘sacred’ institutions, the latter transfigured by the new rapport established. The vessel of History is not to be rejected but rather redeemed by the excavation of its ossified or, more pertinently, ‘statufied’ shell in order to liberate the lost body of the oppressed culture from within. Benjamin’s concept of consciousness

as a cushion that parries the “shocks” of stimuli offered a useful comparison to how the creative remembrance practised by Chamoiseau, Harris, and Lovelace enables the articulation of the “shocks” produced by both the colonial encounter and the modernised cityscape. As regards the latter, a further similarity with Benjamin’s work is apparent, but also a significant difference. Benjamin, of course, regarded the increasingly crowded, industrialised space of nineteenth century Paris as causing such a rise in “shock” encounters – now mediated by impersonal technology – that there occurred a disintegration of sense experience or aura. While Caribbean writers like Chamoiseau might follow this diagnosis for a city like Fort-de-France, the loss of aura and the collapse of the old order due to the transformation of the urban landscape is nonetheless vital inasmuch as it implies the desanctification of colonial institutions. To ensure the potential thereby engendered is fulfilled, however, entails also the kind of re-ritualisation referred to above. But such re-ritualisation does not mean the restoration of the lost aura; instead, it maintains the constant re-visionary interaction of the profane with the sacred.

Thus to summarise we might recall that for Benjamin the paradigmatic image of modernity was to be found in Baudelaire’s prose-poem “Loss of a Halo,” in which a halo falling from the head of a poet and into the mud is understood as signalling the disintegration of aura and sanctity. Given the extent to which the authors considered here have carnivalised the sacred – ‘high’ epics replayed by ‘low’ understudies; the ingestion of the covenant by Beti; Gros-Joseph’s fouling and eating his collection of French literature – one could say that they have not only thrown the halo into the mud. Like Gros-Joseph with his books, they have “pissed and crapped” all over it; and they continue to do so,

ceaselessly plunging the sacrosanct into the sacrilegious depths of the bodily stratum until this act goes beyond a repudiation of authority to become the basis of a (re)ritualistic rebirth of identity, community, and language. As such, it can be compared with Bakhtin's description, in Rabelais and his World, of degradation in the Carnival tradition of the Middle Ages in Europe. Degradation, writes Bakhtin, is "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of the earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (19-20). But precisely because this unity links the body to the social and cosmic elements, that is, because this corporeality is not that of the abstracted, atomised sovereign body but one inextricable from the collective ancestral body of the people, such degradation is not only negative, stresses Bakhtin; it has a positive, regenerating character as well: "To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of non-existence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place" (21).

While Bakhtin's analysis provides a useful perspective, however, this process of degradation and rebirth – figured in Martin Carter's vivid image of words "dug from dung" cited above – is better apprehended in terms of specific Caribbean rituals. Indeed, these furnish the key to the philosophy behind this movement. What Bakhtin depicts as the "hurling" of the object "into the void" may be equated with the need to divest the individual of the one-sided identity mould or sovereign carapace imposed by colonialism, plunging the self into the fluid depths of *créolité*. This drive beyond the consolidated ego, opening up the subject to a cross-cultural field of relationships (the creole version of Bakhtin's collective ancestral body), is inextricable from the 'marvellous' strand in

Caribbean philosophy, bespeaking in particular the contribution of African philosophies of ego-displacement. The (now creolised) influence of the latter is clear, for example, in various vodun ceremonies. Indeed, in light of the above it is worth highlighting the death rite of *dessounin*, a “ritual of ‘degradation,’ whose purpose is to detach from the body both the *gros-bon-ange* – the personal soul or self – and the loa *maît-tête*” (Deren 44). Once the *gros-bon-ange* is freed it subsequently descends to the abysmal waters below the earth as a prelude to rebirth.

In Chamoiseau’s L’esclave such rituals are not only alluded to; the text is also formally patterned upon them, its structure manifesting the worldview into which they have fed. Initially, the narrative outlines the situation to which this re-visionary perspective is applied. The novel opens on a Martinican sugar plantation; and its portrayal of the impact on the body of the material and ideological structures imposed by colonialism recalls many of the issues we explored in Chapter One. The old man of the title has been instilled with the plantation’s singular rhythm, the “postures of servility, the cadence of the planting and the cutting of the cane” (22). Trapped within this constrictive carapace he has become stone-like. Significantly, though, the master too is afflicted by inertia. Cloaked in his conquistadorial white linens and helmet, he is seemingly embalmed in the postures of power. The sovereign subjectivity upon which his identity rests – he reflects that trope of the heroic male colonizer as a questing knight whose civilising of the wilderness also ‘completes’ his selfhood – has congealed to leave him isolated and blinkered, distanced even from his own family.

Subsequently, Chamoiseau narrates the slave’s shedding of this reified

shell of identity. Seized by the “*décharge*” – the name given by the slaves to the explosive desire for freedom that can suddenly erupt in them – the old man becomes a maroon, fleeing into the ancient forest bordering the plantation. This flight entails the crumbling of the barriers that have constrained his consciousness and his emergence into a new selfhood. As the slave runs through the forest, pursued by the master and the molosse, he experiences a derangement or ‘degradation’ of the senses, which functions as the prelude to his ‘rebirth.’

At one point, for example, he falls into a well-spring in the ground and almost drowns. As he climbs free from its watery depths, he experiences the renewal of his subjectivity: the text switches from third to first person narrative and the slave, staking his “I”-ness, awakens to a new perception of both himself and the world:

I opened my eyes wide to see better, and the world was born without a veil of modesty. [. . .] I. The leaves were numerous, an infinity of green, ochre too, yellow, brown, crumpled, sparkling, they abandoned themselves to a sacred disorder. I. [. . .] I was able to lift up my eyes and see these trees which had appeared so frightening in their great nocturnal robes. I could contemplate them at last. (89)

Following this near-death experience the slave continues his flight. But he is filled now with a sense of a warriorhood; and when the molosse finally hunts him down the old man confronts the animal before escaping again. However, he subsequently breaks his leg and tumbles into a ravine, collapsing next to an ancient volcanic stone covered in Amerindian engravings. These seem to speak of the plurality of histories that traverse the island and of the overlap in

experience of its peoples. The stone thus constitutes what Chamoiseau (as we saw in Chapter Three) defines as a *trace-mémoire*, a material vestige that feeds back an alter/native memory, one linked to an experiential legacy that has never been assimilated into, or recorded as legitimate by, colonial accounts. Yet it is precisely this frailty or non-monumentality that renders the *trace-mémoire* expressive of the entanglements of Caribbean history: its eroded quality, which allows it to be grafted onto other legacies to ensure its survival, enables it also to articulate this same intertwining. Likewise, if the rock is a foundation stone for Martinican culture, it nevertheless bespeaks not a singular Genesis but a multiplicity of interwoven beginnings. Fittingly, therefore, when the molosse catches back up with the slave at the rock there occurs a recognition of mutuality: transformed by their earlier confrontation, the animal now licks rather than savages the slave; later, the molosse returns to the master divested of its previous implacable ferocity. The old man, meanwhile, clinging to the stone and sensing its ‘memories,’ is brought to another revised sense of himself before his death.

In light of this, many critics, picking up in particular on the scene cited above in which the slave claims his “I”, have seen the text as an “allegory of individuation,” as John Taylor puts it (32).¹ And, of course, to a certain extent it is. However, in line with the arguments developed in this thesis, I want to suggest that there is also something else going on here. For this “individuation” is not achieved in terms of the transcendent sovereign subjectivity posited by Enlightenment ideals and capitalist imperatives. Instead, as the slave runs deeper into the forest and, symbolically, further into his own self, the course of his journey reflects an original rethinking of individual and communal identity.

The series of descents the slave experiences, which recall the plunge into

the lower stratum or depths of *créolité*, serve to unmoor the ideological ligatures that circumscribe identity. The novel, however, has already foreshadowed the rebirth this will engender. During the early plantation scenes, it is suggested that beneath the slave's seemingly petrified exterior there in fact mutates a violent flux of energies over which the slave must "knot[. . .] his gestures and acts [. . .] like creepers around his maddened body" in order to control the pressure they exert to succumb to the *décharge* (49). These energies spring from cultural contact and the clash of histories produced by colonialism. They sketch the outlines of a new identity; for mixed together in the slave now, following the erosion of sovereignty caused by the Middle Passage and the brutality of the plantation, are a "thousand stories come from Africa, a thousand narratives from the forgotten Amerindians, and from the Master himself, and the molosse" (44). Of course, the sense of community such an identity would herald remains a "phenomenal legacy," in Harris's words, its promise unable to come to fruition amidst the atrocities of colonialism. Nevertheless, as the past is replayed this eclipsed perspective can be apprehended now to enable a re-conception of present social relations. Ritual in particular enables such re-visionary returns since it permits an otherwise nebulous vision of consciousness – expressive of the yoking together of legacies – to be embodied or made manifest; and in *L'esclave* it is the patterning of the old man's journey into the forest on the series of ritualistic, 'degrading' plunges he undergoes that reveals the as yet unborn potential of this phenomenal legacy.

As the slave enters the forest, there occurs the dissolution of reified certainties and imposed sovereign moulds, stressed by the fluidity that now overtakes him. The landscape is depicted as a uterine space through which the

old man moves like a “boat moving in a liquid womb” (61). Indeed, as the darkness of the vegetation “decompose[s] forms” (61), his body seems to liquefy: he feels himself a “stream of water in the water of patient leaves” (63). This decomposition, which precedes the slave’s reclamation of a subjectivity, can certainly be read in terms of Hegel’s account of the coming to self-consciousness in the master-slave dialectic. Hegel describes the moment when the slave confronts the master, forcing the latter to recognise him while coming to a new recognition of his own selfhood as previous boundaries dissolve to leave possibility. The slave, writes Hegel, has “experienced the fear of death” and has “been quite unmanned, [. . .] everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations”; there occurs the “melting-away of everything stable” (Phenomenology 117). Obviously, difficulties arise with this formulation in the concrete historical context of the Caribbean. In particular, it fails to account for the pernicious denial of reciprocity that attends any ‘recognition’ granted, without conflict, as a ‘gift’ by the master; for as Fanon observed, this short-circuits the agency of the slave and (as we saw in Chapter Four) reinforces the power of the giver. However, it is worth staying with Hegel’s account of this movement from dissolution through recognition to self-consciousness for the moment, since it throws into relief the transformation worked upon it by a ‘marvellous’ Caribbean philosophy in light of the historical specificities of the region.

Such transformation is suggested at via the optic Caribbean ritual practice provides on the slave’s experiences in the forest. In Écrire en pays dominé Chamoiseau describes how, on the plantation, the Quimboiseur would ritualistically bathe people to liberate them from “the invisible moorings of a

charm” (178). He interprets this practice as part of the more general process of coming to terms with the ‘New World’ environment: the release “from old moorings” undoes the “gnarled and closed conjunctions of Being” to enable the individual to “go to the fluidities of another identity” (EPD 179). In *L’esclave*, the slave’s ‘bathing’ in the amniotic space of the forest similarly unmoors his body from the sovereign shell in which it was encased on the plantation, allowing him to pursue a new subjectivity coincident with the landscape and the histories it contains (a coincidence symbolised by his final union with the Amerindian stone). Moreover, his ‘degrading’ plunges into the depths, which engender his various rebirths, can be connected to the vodun ritual of *dessounin*. Indeed, the topography evoked in the narrative – the undulating terrain of the forest, its heights juxtaposed to its fluid abysses – recalls the features of vodun cosmography, in which the earth is a crossroads whose vertical axis stretches from the heavens above to the watery depths below the earth where the loas reside. Thus, the slave’s renewal on re-emerging from the descent into the well-spring can be said to replay the ceremony of *retirer d’en bas de l’eau*, the reclamation of the *gros-bon-ange* of the deceased from the abysmal waters.²

Significantly, the latter rite is not, as Maya Deren observes, a nostalgic return to the past but the “procedure by which the race reincorporates the fruit of previous life-processes into the contemporary moment, and so retains the past as a ground gained, upon and from which it moves forward to the future” (27-28). Similarly, the slave is each time reborn from his ‘degradations’ with an increasingly expanded consciousness, incorporating previous subject positions into his selfhood even as this is opened to new possibilities. Thus, for example, the Négritude-style warriorhood he feels on re-emerging from the well-spring is

re-decomposed following his fall into the ravine. However, the earlier subject position is not transcended as an obsolete staging post; the sense of warriorhood it engendered remains vital (emphasized by the respect the molosse feels for the power he now perceives in the old man), but its absolute edges have been abraded to enable it to become part of the new relational subjectivity the old man is reborn into when lying next to the Amerindian stone.

Signal here is the way this movement differs from the Hegelian account of the movement of consciousness. As Jameson notes, the supreme value for consciousness in Hegel's formulation "is a development of its own powers by the assimilation of the world outside until at length it reaches the point where it recognises in itself seeds of everything in the objective universe" (Marxism and Form 47-48). In contrast to this progress towards sovereignty as a transcendent ultimate, the philosophy underpinning the development of the old man emphasizes the constant opening up or plunging into selfhood, with past models ceaselessly spiralled back to and unfixed to be reincorporated as still live potentials, a still active layer in a new architecture of consciousness. Hence, identity appears not in terms of a reaffirmed self-certainty that supersedes its negated others as completed stages; instead (to summarise the native ontology delineated in Chapter Three), it emerges from the void of non-being, that is, at the limits of identity where contrary forms become porous and overlap, mutating to produce a specific yet always relational node of subjectivity.

This native ontology has very different implications as regards the relationship between the individual and the world, between the body and the environment, to those that follow from the Hegelian notion of the assimilation of the world by consciousness. Rather than the assertion of the centrality of the

transcendent self, we have a recognition of each element as in relation, of the *mutuality* of influence as a constitutive condition. The consequences that follow from this can be brought further into focus via the rite of *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* and the perspective it offers on the old man's development in L'esclave.

Significantly, this ceremony “does not consist in the spiritualization of matter; on the contrary, [it is a] ritualistic reversal of the rites of death, [which] restores the disembodied soul *to* the physical, living universe” (Deren 32-33). Similarly, the old man's series of dissolutions should not be seen as auguring the transcendence of matter; instead, they presage a rebirth into a new corporeality. Following his ‘liquefaction’ in the forest, the slave's feels himself newly “installed in his flesh” (79). This reborn body is very different from the ossified form he bore on the plantation, as well as from the corporeal mould associated with Enlightenment ideals / capitalist imperatives. For it goes beyond the atomised, sovereign body to extend into others – indeed, into other orders. In a final twist on the Hegelian dialectic, it is not the master who the slave ultimately confronts but the molosse; and as both are brought to a new consciousness, the human, animal, and mineral worlds become porous and intertwined, imaging Harris's conception of reality as asymmetric infinity.

This sense of the constitutive connectedness of all elements is captured in the old man's final, climatic vision as he clings to, and seems to merge with, the rock – a vision that stands also as a good summary of the relational idea of identity that all the writers studied in this thesis drive towards:

[The stone] awakens the disorders that have inhabited me. [. . .]

Flocks of birds burst forth. Flights of butterflies sunk in ecstasy.

Rising to the rhythm of the drums. Orders to the rain. [. . .]

Submissions to the sun. [. . .] All this places itself in a minute part of me. What I call 'me' can also lodge itself in a minute part of what I perceive. Or what I receive. [. . .] No one *Territory*, no language, no History, no Truth is mine; but all this is mine at the same time, at the limit of each irreducible element, at the limit of the melodies they make in concert. I am a man. (134-35)

The simple yet powerful affirmation of selfhood that concludes this passage, coming as it does after the poetic articulation of an identity that emerges at the limit at which one element adjoins another, suggests by its very positioning in the text the relationship between the particular and the universal which underpins these authors' reformulation of subjectivity. The specificity – "I am a man" – remains; yet it is tied to, and unthinkable without, the morass of influences – the rhythms or "melodies" – that connect all orders in a relational whole. In addition, the emphasis on the senses here, on the old man's experiential perception, underlines the critical importance of the body to any rethinking of identity and community in the Caribbean. Indeed, as is emphasized by the connection between the 'expanded' corporality of the slave on the rock, overlapping with all other elements, and his now expanded consciousness, the body provides a vessel for the articulation of that vision of a native consciousness in which mutates an original architecture of cultures.

The potential new polity portended by this architecture is part of the response to a series of issues commonly addressed in post-1950s Caribbean literature: the disappointments of certain 'post-colonial' regimes; the persistence of racial conflict between Afro- and Indo-Caribbean peoples; the inimical impact of the capitalist world system; and the legacy of colonial victimisation. What

unites Harris, Lovelace, and Chamoiseau (as well as a number of the other authors referred to in this thesis) is their distinctive approach – underpinned by a specifically Caribbean philosophy – to these issues, one inextricable from a relocating in history of the body as a key repository of alter/native memory. The upshot of this approach is a shift in literary form away from the conventions of tragedy (the themes of binary conflagration, martyrdom, victimhood, and the heroic rebel) towards what has been identified here, *pace* Harris, as a new Divine Comedy. As the authors pursue the transformation of a reified reality – the slicing free and reconstruction of space, language, and the body, all of which have been enmeshed in petrified sovereign moulds – the original, ‘cannibal epic’ form of revised Divine Comedy not only unlocks a cross-cultural consciousness able to imaginatively redeem a multiplicity of legacies; it also indicates the institutional and material changes that must be instantiated to ground this redeemed history and restructure the socio-political order. Only thus can the prophetic vision of the past articulated by these writers – the promise they excavate and re-member via re-ritualisation – be brought to fruition as the basis of a concrete project in the present and a dream for the future.

Notes

Introduction

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this thesis from the original French are mine.

² While I wish to locate my arguments in the context of the wider pan-Caribbean, especially in light of the cultural connections I have outlined as integral to the region, my specific focus, as this selection of writers makes clear, is upon the Anglophone and Francophone areas.

³ Throughout this thesis I use ‘native’ in the sense that it comes to assume in Harris’s work, where it refers both to the indigenous and indigenised cultures of the Caribbean (see Harris, “Continuity and Discontinuity” 180).

⁴ Throughout this thesis, for reasons of clarity, I use ‘Creole’ (capital ‘C’) to refer to the Creole language and ‘creole’ (lowercase ‘c’) to refer more generally to the culture of the Caribbean that has been produced as a result of the historical process of cultural admixture and creolization (of which the Creole language is of course a part).

⁵ The regulation of the European body can be traced to the ‘Great Confinement’ of the seventeenth century, the history of which Michel Foucault outlined in texts such as Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason and Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. See Francis Baker, The Tremulous Private Body.

⁶ It should be emphasized that while I refer here, for the purposes of chronology, to the practices and rituals of the slaves, these comments also hold true for the practices and rituals of other ethnic groups in the Caribbean – particularly the Indo-Caribbean peoples, whose influence would be felt at a later date.

⁷ Throughout this thesis, I use ‘History’ (capital ‘H’) to refer to the teleological grand narrative imposed by the European colonizers upon the colonized; structured from a ‘Western’ perspective, it denied the validity of other cultural narratives or ‘histories’ in asserting the centrality of the European project.

⁸ Although Alexis was apparently influenced by Carpentier’s concept of *lo real maravilloso*, it is important to stress how his theory diverges from the Cuban’s. By designating American reality as ‘naturally’ marvellous Carpentier was in danger of reifying it within an ‘exotic’ eternity. As the Haitian philosopher Jacques Gourgue observes, “the marvellous real would be intrinsically linked to poorly industrialised countries [. . .] [and would hence] justify hazy ideas and illogical actions that one would prefer to leave hidden behind the mountain of centuries. The ‘irrationalities’ that Europeans venerate among us have been combated by them in order to reach the present technical domination” (qtd. in Richardson 7). By contrast, Alexis’s emphasis on the ‘marvellous’ as defined by a dynamic confluence of cultures that reflect, but also develop in response to, the changing concrete particularities of Haitian reality prevents his formulation from merely naming a supposedly fixed, anthropological essence. Rather, it articulates a worldview and *practice* of culture that mutates in relation to the contemporary situation, sustaining a transformative conceptualisation of the latter whether it be that of the rural plantation system or the urbanised cityscape (as in Alexis’s novel L’espace d’un cillement).

⁹ Sylvia Wynter, for example, has criticised what she regards as Harris’s stress on an “unrelated individual imagination” (qtd. in Poynting 103). Less severely, Jeremy Poynting contends that though Harris offers “an imaginative and dialectical vision of the capacity of people to fulfil their human potential,” the “sources of this vision [. . .] lead away from both the problems and potentialities of material social life. The dialectic is [. . .] much limited by the metaphysic” (104).

¹⁰ Wynter, for instance, suggests in “A Different Kind of Culture” that Éloge de la créolité reverts to an “ethnic” perspective that replicates European nineteenth-century Romantic paradigms of identity and language (159). Thus, she argues, the Créolistes abandon notions of “radical alterity” such as defined Césaire’s Négritude (143). While at times the manifesto does seem to bear out Wynter’s critique, I believe, as I hope will become clear, that Éloge also gestures, contradictorily, towards a radically original ontology, one influenced by, for example, African philosophies of ego-displacement.

¹¹ Such was the conclusion of the Moyne Commission in its investigation into the causes behind the strikes and riots in Trinidad in 1937-38 (cf. Lewis 88).

Chapter 1.

¹ Waterton, Charles. Wanderings in South America (66-67).

² A list of such narratives concerning just Guyana would include: Walter Raleigh, The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana; Robert Harcourt, A Relation of a Voyage to Guiana; Adriaan van Berkel, Travels in South America between the Berbice and Essequibo Rivers 1670-1689; Anon., A Voyage to the Demerary 1799-1806; Lt. Thomas Staunton St. Clair, A Soldier’s Sojourn in British Guiana; Richard Schomburgk, Travels in British Guiana 1840-44; C. Barrington Brown, Canoe and Camp Life in British Guiana. (See Michael Swan, “The Literature on British Guiana,” Appendix E in British Guiana: Land of Six Peoples.)

³ On the reification of land and its transformation into *per se* monopolised land, see Marx Capital Vol. 3 (917-70).

⁴ On the mythic worldview as entailing a blending or confusion of nature and culture, and of language and the world, see Habermas Reason and the Rationalization of Society. Vol. 1 of The Theory of Communicative Action (43-53).

⁵ In a similar way, Sandra Drake points to the separation in Palace of the Peacock between the eye enclosed in regulatory or civic institutions (the prison cell, the operating theatre, the maternity ward) and the external world of nature; significantly, the aforementioned institutions recall those Foucault highlights as crucial to the confinement and regulation of the body in the seventeenth century. See Drake (60-64).

⁶ I take the formulation “principles of vision and division” from Bourdieu, where it refers to the type of perceptual schema inculcated into the individual via the principles of construction of the social reality, that is, the social structures or institutions which define the prism through which reality is apprehended. As Bourdieu puts it: “the common principles of vision and division – the paradigm of which is the opposition masculine / feminine – are instituted in minds (or in bodies) through the whole spatial and temporal organization of social life, and especially through *rites of institution* that establish definite differences between those who submitted to the rite and those who did not” (Practical Reason 53-54).

⁷ For a discussion of the way in which the effacement of the ‘natural bodiliness’ of the corporeal serves as a means to consolidate the restrained or ‘cultured’ bourgeois body, see Bourdieu Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (175-93).

⁸ In this Fenwick’s crew reflect Harris’s own experiences of surveying teams. Crew members, he has written, “operated within a rigid function and [. . .] were excellent within that function”; yet to exercise it, they had to “eclipse a great deal”: they “accepted themselves within a certain kind of hierarchy [. . .] [and] to extend themselves beyond this was a matter which aroused uneasiness” (“Literacy and the Imagination” 77-78).

⁹ For a summary of the crisis in Guyana, see Lewis (270-88).

¹⁰ The phrase “lived modernity” derives from Glissant, who contrasts it to “matured modernity.” “By this,” he writes, “I do not oppose a kind of ‘primitivism’ to a kind of ‘intellectualism,’ but rather two ways of dealing with changes in the contemporary world. *Matured* here means ‘developed over extended historical space’; *lived* means ‘that which is abruptly imposed’” (DA 441). For Glissant, the Caribbean’s overdetermination as a result of the rapid imposition of external socio-political and economic structures, and of the multiplicity of influences in the region, ensures that the people do not accede to modernity via a gradual, linear path, but rather irrupt into it. Consequently, they must forge a mode of expression able to articulate this synchronic heterogeneity in relation to their everyday experience. ‘Lived modernity’ is hence inextricable from the ‘marvellous’: both reflect a *practice* of culture – linked to the diversity of historical legacies in the region and a mixture of the sacred with the quotidian – that mutates in relation to the contemporary situation, combining culturally and temporally diverse elements into productive new architectures.

¹¹ On the rationalisation of the plantation system, see Cross (110-22).

¹² As Rodney notes, a process of cultural creolization and interaction was already underway between the Afro- and Indo-Guyanese; the “evidence of this early period,” he observes, “does not sustain the picture of acute and absolute cultural differences coincident with race” (179).

¹³ As Joy Simpson observes with respect to Trinidad: “between 1946 and 1960, a great exodus began. There was a dramatic movement from both rural and urban areas to urban and suburban areas; a movement so large as to overshadow all other aspects of the re-distribution of the population” (qtd. in Cross 76). As regards Martinique, Serge Letchimy notes how “around the 1950s [. . .] the rural exodus accelerated, resulting in the rapid population expansion in Fort-de-France. Inhabited by 60,000 people in 1954, the city, 15 years later, had nearly 100,000 inhabitants (an increase of 67 per cent)” (17).

¹⁴ Letchimy explains how in Fort-de-France, during the first post-war wave of rural-urban migration, the need to establish a means of survival meant that “in the course of the first years of settlement, the families rediscovered the countryside (or almost) [. . .]. Consequently, life in the quarter [the settlements that comprised the main residential areas around the centre], between 1958 and 1968, was organized on the model provided by the country peasant, on spaces that made reference to the material world” (60).

¹⁵ The theme of the Christ-like saviour or tragic sacrificial victim appears in a number of works from across the Caribbean, including for example: Roger Mais’s The Hills Were Joyful Together and Brother Man; George Lamming’s Of Age and Innocence; Sylvia Wynter’s The Hills of Hebron; Orlando Patterson’s The Children of Sisyphus; Andrew Salkey’s A Quality of Violence; Nicolás Guillén’s “Elegia a Jesús Menéndez”; Jacques Roumain’s Gouverneurs de la rosée; and Jacques Stephen Alexis’s Compère general soleil. A related motif is that of the carnivalised Christ-figure, and in particular the parody-crucifixion, discussed in Chapter Four (see in particular Note 3).

¹⁶ This focalisation of power in the personality of one man was a charge laid at the door of Eric Williams by C. L. R. James in his Party Politics in the West Indies, in which he critiqued Williams’s “concentration on himself of the man who will do everything” (160).

¹⁷ The turmoil in Haiti over the past few years provides a clear example of how countries can become locked in a cycle of violence and political failure (as well as of the continued influence of outside forces). The now deposed President Aristide originally came to power in 1991. An ascetic priest and liberation theologian, his “charismatic and prophetic messianism,” as Fatton observes, embodied the “utopian vision” that had “reappeared again in the defiant eyes of the masses” following the end of military rule (ix). Seven months later, however, Aristide was

ousted in a coup. He was returned to power in 1994 with the assistance of the US military. But his subsequent rule became mired in socio-economic and political crises, and the elections of 2000 were condemned as illegitimate by the opposition. The US and France now turned against Aristide, giving support to anti-government protestors. Eventually, the unrest turned into an armed insurrection that forced Aristide to flee the country in 2004.

¹⁸ The steel drum, for example, was created when empty oil drums from Trinidad's war-time US military base were seized and reused.

¹⁹ In his analysis of filiation, history, and epic narrative in Le discours antillais, Glissant cites Girard's work on the founding role of the individual scapegoat in La violence et la sacré (238).

²⁰ In The Dialogic Imagination Bakhtin defines the chronotope as naming "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. [...] In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (84). He describes the epic chronotope as predicated on a fixity of time and space in which any event, and the language through which it is expressed, is absolute, univocal, and inevitable. For the epic world, he argues, "is an utterly finished thing, not only as an authentic event of the distant past but also on its own terms and by its own standards; it is impossible to change, to re-think, to re-evaluate anything in it" (17).

Chapter 2.

¹ In addition to the work of Glissant and Placol, Ormerod cites Jeanne Hyvrard's three novels of 1975-77 (Les Prunes de Cythère, Mère la mort, La Meurtritude) as typical of this trend. She also points to Maryse Condé's 1976 novel about post-independence Africa, Heremakhonon, as equally concerned with the problems of cultural identity, in this instance in relation to the search for African 'roots.'

² Symbolic capital is any type of capital – economic, political, etc. – that, when perceived in terms of the principles of vision and division in society, is misrecognised as such yet recognised in its objectified state. See Bourdieu Practical Reason (99-104).

³ Glissant argues that in Martinique, due to the lack of collective political action (resulting from the distortion of class relations) and the absence of a mediated relationship to the environment, socio-historical factors can act immediately on the unconscious. See Glissant (DA 486-502). Also, see Britton's detailed discussion of Glissant's notion of verbal delirium (83-93).

⁴ On the power of naming and its connection to the symbolic order, see Bourdieu (LPS 239-43).

⁵ For a detailed analysis of the implications of the theory effect, see Bourdieu Practical Reason (11-13).

⁶ Other examples of this motif can be found in James Gronniosaw's A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, As Related By Himself, John Marrant's A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black, Ottobah Cugoano's Thoughts and Sentiments, and John Jea's The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The Signifying Monkey (127-69).

⁷ The most explicit examples from these authors' works are to be found in Confiant's Eau de Café and Le Nègre et l'Amiral; in Condé's Traversée de la Mangrove, La vie scélérate and Les derniers rois mages; in Orville's Laissez brûler Laventurcia; and in Glissant's Mahogany.

⁸ On Moses' approach to literary tradition and his own unique use of language in his memoirs, see Thieme Postcolonial Con-texts (59-62).

⁹ Bourdieu emphasizes how the institution of permanent, professional political parties, which act as the official representatives of the people, can dispossess these same people through the very mechanisms required for their institution; moreover, those parties that represent the most deprived in terms of economic capital, that is, seek to speak on behalf of the masses, are often – because of the deprivation already imposed on the masses – the ones, ironically, in which political control is most concentrated in the professional delegates of the organization. As Bourdieu puts it:

[I]f the existence of a permanent organization, relatively independent of corporate and conjunctural interests, is a precondition of the permanent and properly political *representation* of the class, it also carries the threat that the ‘ordinary’ members will be dispossessed. [. . .] The *fides implicita*, a total and comprehensive delegating of power through which the most deprived people grant, *en bloc*, a sort of unlimited credit to the party of their choice, gives free rein to the mechanisms which tend to divest them of any control over the apparatus. (LSP 174)

Such processes are evident in Dragon. Fisheye, deprived of the education that would allow him to understand the “words” and “sounds” made by the PNM delegates, is prepared to place himself absolutely in the hands of the party; this would lead to him being dispossessed by the mechanisms of the party (its campaign apparatus and discursive frameworks – the slogans and so forth); that is, by the very means of representation it offers him.

¹⁰ On the allusions to European texts in Guerrillas and Jimmy Ahmed’s inimical attachment to some of the tropes they provide, see Thieme The Web of Tradition (133-78).

¹¹ Bourdieu’s discussion of ritual practice is part of an analysis of a particular epistemology, that of the Kabyle Villagers of Algeria, where the connections between objects or properties (or ‘realities’) made via ritual practice, play a key role in the understanding of the world. This understanding is based upon a network of relations and equivalences rather than upon fixed binary dyads. For example, the bitterness of gall connects it to oleander, wormwood, or tar, and opposes it to honey, while its greenness connects it to lizards and the colour green; it can then also be connected to hostility through the homologous relationship it establishes with these two previous properties. The ‘reality’ of gall, therefore, is not defined by a simple opposition between the abstract word and the thing’s materiality, but is enmeshed in a network of homologies and oppositions that connect it to a series of multiple meanings and significations (Bourdieu, LP 88-89).

¹² Harris has drawn attention to how his use of image clusters in the text sustains “a rhythmic harmony” that, since it breaches a surface uniformity, “reaches through and beyond poetic ornament and metaphor into a real engagement with unfathomable coherency in the body of entire creation” (“Merlin and Parsifal” 64).

¹³ In the epic Hindu texts of the Puranas the universe is destroyed by fire at the end of each aeon (*kalpa*) and reduced to ashes. It subsequently remains submerged in the cosmic waters while the god Brahma sleeps, until all is created anew from these ashes (Hindu Myths 43).

¹⁴ As Maya Deren notes, the ceremony of initiation, which precedes the individual’s entrance into the spiritual community, is a “process of death and resurrection, a re-creation of spiritual genesis. The first phase is one of purification, both physical and spiritual. [. . .] The candidate then withdraws from the world for several days, and this solitude is devoted to an intensification of the purification” (220).

¹⁵ The *vèvès* or *vevers* – the sacred symbols that accompany vodun rites – each represent a particular loa; when drawn on the ground they consecrate the area covered to that loa (Deren 204). Significantly, as regards the doubled faces drawn by Kaiser, the “loa are addressed as mirror images and summoned by references to a mirrored surface”; hence, the *vevers* are “frequently designed in mirrored symmetry to both sides of an horizon” (Deren 34).

¹⁶ As Stephanos Stephanides has shown, the connection between Beti and consumption can also

be read in relation to the East Indian Madras tradition of the Kali Puja, or worship of the Mother Goddess. The Mother Goddess Kali is both Mother of Time and Consumer of Time. When Beti consumes the covenant she recalls “Kali in her ravenous form, the devouring Kali who devours all in her role as Goddess of Death, and also in her role as Goddess of Life because she even devours *kalika*, time itself, and thus renews her promise of fulfilment and regeneration” (Stephanides 133). In this way, the eating of the contract represents the end of ‘conventional’ time; it is the “end of the negative legacy of history and [. . .] expressive of hope for the new man” (Stephanides 133).

¹⁷ On Harris’s use of The Secret of the Golden Flower within The Far Journey, see Maes-Jelinek (25-26) and Gilkes (Wilson Harris 58).

¹⁸ On *Li*, see The Secret of the Golden Flower (18).

¹⁹ On the Osiris myth, see Frazer (362-85).

²⁰ A further association can be drawn between Osiris and Oudin in relation to time. When the sun-god Ra saw that his wife had been unfaithful to him, he “declared with a curse that she should be delivered of the child [she was now pregnant with] in no month and no year” (Frazer 362). But the goddess had another lover who won for her from the moon five extra days; subsequently Osiris was born on the first of these days, which were considered “outside the year of twelve months” (Frazer 363). Like Oudin, therefore, Osiris is ‘outside’ the conventional framework of time constructed and imposed by the dominant forces in society.

Chapter 3.

¹ On the legend of El Dorado, see Naipaul The Loss of El Dorado.

² Naipaul emphasizes what he considers as this determining fraudulency later in the book through his descriptions of various Trinidadian political conflicts, which he construes as parodies of European rivalries.

³ Naipaul summarises the ‘ruin’ of the Amerindian legacy thus: “They had been dulled by defeat and disappointments, and there is no trace in their stupefied descendants today of that intelligence and quickness which attracted Raleigh” (The Loss of El Dorado 91).

⁴ Significantly, given the emphasis in this thesis on the connection between ideas of ego-displacement in African and Indian philosophies and the Caribbean’s ‘marvellous’ reassembly of identities, the theme of yoking elements together can be related to the Indian yogic idea of ‘merging.’ As Henry observes (citing Sri Aurobindo): “The aim of yoga ‘is to enter the divine consciousness by merging it into the separative ego.’ The vision and role of spirituality in Indian idealism cannot be understood apart from the ‘merging’ experiences that yogic practices have produced” (61).

⁵ Compare, for instance, the erotic dream of the I-narrator in Palace or the use of horses in The Secret Ladder as visionary omens. On this subject see Durix (67).

⁶ For how this compares to Homer’s use of specific epithets for individuals, see Peter Jones (xxvii-xxviii).

⁷ Bakhtin defines epic time as comprised of fixed, absolute segments: it is “closed and completed in the whole as well as in any of its parts”; hence, one can “take any part and offer it as the whole” (The Dialogic Imagination 31).

⁸ Compare, for example, Eliot’s line from “East Coker”: “The dancers are all gone under the hill” (187).

⁹ Chamoiseau and Confiat derive the notion of *scription* from the dichotomy posited by Roland Barthes between *scription* and writing, glossing it thus: “[T]he order of writing puts in play the subject within the expression of his liberty and desire, and calls upon the potentialities of the language in order to produce a polysemic text”; *scription*, by contrast, seeks merely to inscribe reality within reductive signs that arise “more from prerequisites than from creation” (LC 25).

¹⁰ Chamoiseau and Confiat’s example comes from archive papers cited by G. Debien in Les Esclaves aux Antilles françaises.

¹¹ On the connection between the plantation and the city, and the overlap in their space-time structuration, see Glissant Faulkner, Mississippi: “[T]hese were an extension of the Plantation and would have been unimaginable in any context other than that of [the trade in] cotton, tobacco, rum, sugar, spices, indigo, (gold and rubber in Brazil), usually bartered for European luxuries or for manufactured goods from the American North” (335).

¹² On this theme see also the significance of the statue of Sir Ralph Woodford in Ismith Khan’s The Jumbie Bird.

¹³ On the construction of Latin American cities on the grid system, and its connection to the words / things split and the primacy of the plan, see Rama The Lettered City.

¹⁴ Significantly, the incident that tips the balance for Gros-Joseph is the failure of his intended trip to France. In Black Skin, White Masks Fanon suggests that for the black Antillean keen to imitate the white world there is always a sense that something is “lacking” while he or she remains in the region; fulfilment can only be achieved through journeying to the ‘mother-country’ and attaining affirmation that one is in fact French (19). Thus, for Gros-Joseph the failure of his trip forces him to recognise the lack of such affirmation and so the lived reality of his blackness.

¹⁵ On the Carib bone flute, see Michael Swan “The Caribs,” Appendix B in The Marches of El Dorado: British Guiana, Brazil, Venezuela. Harris cites Swan’s work as a key source for his own approach to the bone flute ritual. See Harris “A Note on the Genesis of the Guyana Quartet” (9).

¹⁶ On the theme of corporeal music, see McDougall’s analysis of Palace in “‘Corporeal Music’: The Scale of Myth and Adjectival Insistence in Palace of the Peacock.”

¹⁷ On this point, see Ian Gregory Strachan Paradise and Plantation.

¹⁸ Brathwaite defines tidalectics as “dialectics with my difference. In other words, instead of the notion of one, two, three, Hegelian, I am now more interested in the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic [. . .] motion, rather than linear” (Mackey, “An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite” 14).

¹⁹ In Letchimy’s geographical study of Martinique’s popular quarters (which informs many of the details of Chamoiseau’s portrayal), he emphasizes how these spaces materialise the culture, traditions, and history of the lower class Martinicans who construct and inhabit them. The spaces are “free [. . .] non-private space[s], associated dynamically with construction”; their “designation and mode of utilisation [. . .] depend on how they are appropriated and the function attributed them [. . .]. They represent the principal supports of the social and economic life of the community” (Letchimy 32).

Chapter 4.

¹ This phrase, adopted by Berman from the Communist Manifesto as a leitmotif for his analysis of the dialectic between modernisation and modernism, forms the climax of the Manifesto’s account of the revolutionary thrust of modern bourgeois society. The full quotation is: “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face with sober sense

the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men” (Marx, Communist Manifesto 58).

² The argument that capitalism, from its inception, inaugurates a world system is outlined in Marx’s Grundrisse, where it is contended that the “tendency to create the *world market* is directly given in the concept of capitalism itself” (408).

³ The figure of the carnivalised Christ and especially of the parody-crucifixion is, as John Thieme observes, “a popular Caribbean folk-motif” that appears in a number of works by, in particular, Trinidadian artists (Web of Tradition 205). It is the subject of The Mighty Wonder’s calypso “Follow Me Children,” and features, for example, in Naipaul’s Miguel Street as well as in Lovelace’s Dragon and Selvon’s The Lonely Londoners.

⁴ The notion of ‘respectability’ can be understood in terms of the arguments put forward by Peter Wilson in his anthropological study Crab Antics. Wilson contends that present in Caribbean societies are two distinct yet complementary value systems. One, that of “reputation,” is an “autochthonous structure premised on differentiation and equality”; the other, that of “respectability,” derives from “the imposed alien structure of domination premised on inequality and stratification” (219). To adopt the style – the bodily movement, manners, speech, values, and so on – of ‘respectability’ is hence to become enmeshed in an imitative, non-indigenous mould, the legitimacy of which is sanctioned by an external power.

⁵ On this point see also Glissant, who observes that in “the collective books concerning the sacred and the notion of history there lies the germ of the exact opposite of what they so noisily proclaim” (PR 27). He points, for example, to the ruses and failures that underpin many of the surface glories in the epics: Odysseus’s return in the rags of a beggar; the trickery that ensures victory for the Greeks in the Iliad; the story of defeat that comprises the Chanson de Roland.

⁶ Funso Aiyejina refers to Lovelace’s frequent shifts between narrative consciousness as constituting acts of “narrative possession or narrative ventriloquism, a process that allows for the primary narrator to be invaded / mounted [. . .] by the subject of the narration who temporarily takes over the narration” (xvii). As such, this offers another interesting perspective on the centrality of ritual practice and ego-displacement to Caribbean philosophy and literary form.

⁷ The insistence that the failure of one particular form of nationalism – that of the bourgeois elite – not entail the condemnation of nationalism *per se* goes to the heart of contemporary debates on the role and impact of nationalist projects. Some critics have fastened on to the problems associated with bourgeois elite nationalism as grounds for the indictment of all nationalisms. But as Neil Lazarus has argued, the “culturalist emphasis on nationalism as *a mode of representation*,” has tended to elide differences between nationalisms; nationalism, in whatever form, is viewed as, and condemned for being, “an *elitist* cultural practice in which subaltern classes are represented – spoken for – in the name of the nation which is, supposedly, themselves” (108-09). Yet, as Lazarus notes, this is to miss the point that some nationalisms will be more representative than others, correlating closely with the desires of the popular classes and thereby laying the foundations for identification with, and expressions of, resistance and unity (116-17).

⁸ This, for example, is C. L. R. James’s conception of national consciousness in the Caribbean, and the reasoning behind his advocacy of a pan-Caribbean federation. See “Parties, Politics, and Economics in the Caribbean” and “The Making of the Caribbean People” in James’s Spheres of Existence.

⁹ Significantly, in her analysis of the Grail legend, Jessie Weston traces its provenance to the nature rite of Adonis and other such cults – further evidence of The Infinite Rehearsal’s orchestration of overlain traditions.

¹⁰ Harris's "impossible quest for wholeness" as articulated via Robin – the pursuit of an always incomplete total perspective on global relations – can be read in relation to Fredric Jameson's stress on the importance of "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping" as "an integral part of any socialist political project" in its contribution to the exposure of structurally occulted global power relations (*Postmodernism* 416).

¹¹ In addition to the general Third World perspective embodied by Robin, his situation in the Old New Forest (of Guyana) means that he also reflects, more specifically, features of Guyanese history following Independence in 1966, and in particular the corruption and violence that attended the rule of Forbes Burnham.

¹² It is interesting to note some of the similarities between Harris's vision, particularly his stress on the need to uncover mutualities between cultures and for the divestment of an "illusion of strength" (*ES* 9), and Amin's proposals with regard to replacing the capitalist world order. Speaking of the challenge of ending the domination of the 'peripheries' by the powerful 'centres', Amin argues that "it is a matter of forcing the world system to adapt: not only of imposing a vision of adjustment within stagnation, but also of replacing the concept of unilateral adjustment (from the weakest to the strongest) by the concept of mutual adjustment" (40). He goes on to add that "the project requires a different world political order from the one that prevails currently, an order based on the democratisation of all societies and the articulation of their interdependence with mutual respect for diversity" (42).

Conclusion

¹ On this point, see Milne (68).

² The actions of the slave could also be read in relation to certain rites practiced by the Spiritual Baptists. At one point in the novel, the slave, having become comfortable in the darkness of the forest since it facilitates his 'degrading' plunge into the depths of his suppressed subjectivity, blindfolds himself to keep out the light of dawn and continue his descent. In the Spiritual Baptists' ceremony of initiation and baptism the candidates are subjected to sensory deprivation before their immersion in the waters, during which time they 'travel' spiritually as a prelude to rebirth. George Eaton Simpson describes one such rite he witnessed thus:

After some preliminary singing and praying, bands were placed over the eyes of the three candidates. [. . .] The blindfolded candidates were then whirled around and around by the male officiants and pushed back and forth to disorient them. [. . .] Chalk marks were made on the foreheads and in the hair of the candidates [. . .]. Lines drawn around the ears and the top of the head are said to help a candidate hear and remember. Circles around the eyes [. . .] enable him to 'see' when he travels spiritually. (145)

The combination of a degradation of external senses, the awakening of internal sight, and a body born again into the community parallels the experience of the old man in Chamoiseau's novel, blindfolded and travelling towards his own interior vision.

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