

REWRITING HISTORY IN ALEJO CARPENTIER'S *THE KINGDOM OF THIS*
WORLD AND MICHELLE CLIFF'S *ABENG*

by

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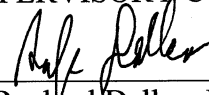
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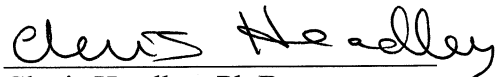
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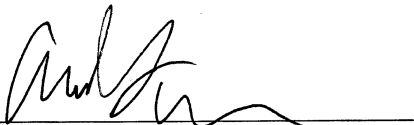
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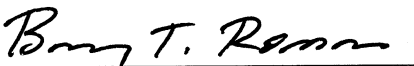
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ABSTRACT

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Traditional Caribbean history has been directed by and focused upon the conquerors who came to the region to colonize and seek profitable resources. Native Caribbean peoples and African slaves used to work the land have been silenced by traditional history so that it has become necessary for modern Caribbean thinkers to challenge that history and recreate it. Alejo Carpentier and Michelle Cliff challenge traditional Caribbean history in their texts, *The Kingdom of This World* and *Abeng*, respectively. Each of these texts rewrites traditional history to include the perspectives of natives and the slaves of Haiti and Jamaica. Traditional history is challenged by the inclusion of these perspectives, thus providing a rewritten, revised history.

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my mother, Marjorie Beckford, who always encouraged my pursuit of knowledge, and my sons, Christian and Cameron, who are the light of my world. I also dedicate this work to my late friend, Lois Gresham, who did not live to see me make this accomplishment, but believed wholeheartedly in my ability to do so.

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WORLD* AND MICHELLE CLIFF'S *ABENG*

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INTRODUCTION

We have come to see ourselves as creatures of history.
Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason*

Caribbean literature and Caribbean historiography are inexorably entwined. Inasmuch as the literature of the Caribbean motions toward creating or describing a cultural identity, historiography is a necessary component, one that, in the case of the Caribbean, must be investigated, navigated, and/or completely dismantled and rebuilt. The historiography of the Caribbean is troubled mainly by the fact that the region's first historiographers travelled to the Caribbean with a colonialist agenda coloring their view of the landscape and the native peoples. The colonial project in the Caribbean was one of domination, which required first and foremost the dehumanizing of both the native peoples and the African slaves later transported to the region for the purpose of becoming tools in the project, tools listed among the resources mined for economic profit, as well as for social and political dominance. For native Caribbean peoples as well as the transported Africans, this entailed not only disenfranchisement of their land, but also of a self-articulated culture, identity, and history. Representations of native Caribbean peoples were, from the inception of Caribbean historiography, skewed to suit the colonialist objective, or are incomplete, told from the colonizer's perspective. That

perspective would later transfer to the African slaves from whom much of the Caribbean's population descends.

Since "These early attempts to write the New World into existence must be central to any analysis of the literatures of the Americas," this discussion will, in its attempt to analyze the historical fiction of Alejo Carpentier and Michelle Cliff, address the centrality of early historiography of the Caribbean (Dash 23). Caribbean writers such as Carpentier and Cliff, in their attempts to create a more inclusive history, are challenged by the representations put in place by traditional history. It is those representations, which deny the humanity and agency of Caribbean peoples, that must be confronted and challenged. This thesis will examine the methods by which Carpentier and Cliff challenge traditional history's representation of the Caribbean and its peoples.

A brief, detailed examination of Columbus's writings, as well as the writings of other early historians of the Caribbean, will expose the effects of the colonial perspective upon representations of Caribbean natives and later, African slaves. These representations would later be (and still are) challenged by modern Caribbean thinkers, artists, and creative writers. At the very least, modern Caribbean writers' task is to investigate and perhaps alter early historical representations of the Caribbean and its peoples; at most, the task is to "transcend the unrelieved gloom of the region's traditional historiography" (Dash 1). Such is the work of Michelle Cliff and Alejo Carpentier, whose texts, *Abeng* and *The Kingdom of This World*, respectively, are the focus of this discussion. Both authors confront and challenge traditional Caribbean historiography, begun by Christopher Columbus, the first historian of the Caribbean.

According to Elsa V. Goveia, "...the first colonizers of the Caribbean area were Spaniards, and it is to Spain...that we stand indebted for the early historical accounts of the West Indian islands. In these works, writers for the first time recorded the voyages of Christopher Columbus, the contacts with the aborigines and their conquest..." (11). With Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the New World, the earliest histories were recordings of what was present—native inhabitants and the abundant resources yielded by the land—and Europe's colonial actions, namely, the evaluation, possession, and utilization of the peoples and landscapes he encountered. Gordon Brotherston, in *The Image of the New World*, states that "Once discovered, [the Caribbean's] terrain, climates, flora and fauna had to be reconciled with the known world. And above all the 'Indians'...had to be fitted in with the scheme of things" (13). Columbus fits the natives into 'the scheme of things' largely by ignoring them as human beings; the earliest of his recordings yield little in their consideration of the natives, save the brief acknowledgment of their abundance and how easily they were possessed. There is no consideration given to their cultures, languages, habits, or traditions; regarded simply as possessions of Spain, the natives are, from the first, objectified, dehumanized, positioned for dominance. Columbus's *Letter to Luis de Santangel Regarding the First Voyage* illustrates this: "...I found very many islands with people innumerable, and of them all I have taken possession for their highnesses...and no opposition was offered to me" (11). Traveling further, Columbus's scouts, three men sent to search another island, "found an infinity of small hamlets and people without number, but nothing of importance" (11). The people, evaluated as "innumerable," "without number," and "nothing of importance," are easily

possessed for Spain, with “no opposition”. Whether one believes that there was no opposition or not, Columbus, with this description—or, rather, the lack thereof—clearly begins to establish Europe’s dehumanizing vision of the Caribbean’s native peoples.

Further, of necessity to Europe’s project of possession and domination, native peoples in Columbus’s writings are counted along with the resources of the landscape, a part of it, rather than viewed as its stewards, with their own claims of possession: “This island and all the others are very fertile to a limitless degree... In it are marvelous pine groves, and there are very large tracts of cultivatable lands, and there is honey, and there are birds of many kinds and fruits in great diversity. In the interior are mines of metal, and the population without number” (12). Counted lastly among the island resources, the people, again, are only described as numerous, without even the admiring descriptors afforded the land itself. When he claims the power to choose names for the islands, Columbus finalizes Spain’s possession of the Caribbean, as well as solidifies the natives’ lack of claim to their lands: “To the first island which I found I gave the name *San Salvador*...the Indians call it ‘Guanahani.’ To the second I gave the name *Isla de Santa Maria de Concepcion*; to the third, *Fernandina*; to the fourth, *Isabella*, and so to each one I gave new name” (11). What the ‘Indians’ have named their landscapes and themselves is clearly of no consequence, for in Columbus’s view, the land is “marvelously bestowed” upon Spain by “the Divine Majesty,” and its natives have no claim to it. Ultimately, historiographically, the Caribbean is posited by Columbus as a mine of useable goods belonging to Spain rather than a landscape containing its own peoples, with their own cultures, languages, religious practices, traditions, and histories.

Columbus's accounts, being the first, set the tone for other accounts of Europe's encounters with the Caribbean. As Goveia states, "The value of these early accounts is great; their influence upon the later historiography of the area is almost inestimable." Fernando Colon (Columbus's son), for example, "...chronicled the achievements of a venerable father," while G.F. Oviedo is noted as "...the official historian of the glories of Spain in the New World" (11). Like their predecessor, these historians disregarded humanity for the "glory" of domination, focusing strictly on the Caribbean as it pertained to the expansion of Spain's empire in their writings. According to Nana Wilson-Tagoe, "They were men, making and writing history, and their narratives of Spanish voyages and conquests, of aboriginal Indians and of the European creation of a new society in the Caribbean, established the point of view which has consistently underlain historical writing in the area" (16). Importantly, this perspective, its dehumanizing view of the natives, sets the stage for enslavement and abuse as well as the desecration of natives' and later, Africans', cultures and identities.

Given that Columbus and his successors consistently objectify and dehumanize the natives in their initial assessments, it comes as no surprise that Bartolomé de Las Casas's encounter with the colonial project in progress is one that finds the natives being grossly abused by the Spaniards who follow Columbus and put the colonial project into action. When he wrote that "It was the general rule among Spaniards to be cruel, not just cruel, but extraordinarily cruel so that harsh and bitter treatment would prevent Indians from daring to think of themselves as human beings," Las Casas was the first European historian of the Caribbean to imagine the natives as something other than tools of Spanish

conquest (15). Las Casas's assertion that Caribbean natives were "human beings," along with his penchant for recording detailed descriptions of brutal physical abuses committed against the natives, called the conquistadors' methodology of brutality into question, and "could be taken as the historical basis for...questioning the legitimacy of the Spanish colonial rule in America..." (Benitez-Rojo, 86). Las Casas's writings criticized Spain's colonial project as it was being carried out by the conquistadors in the Caribbean, decrying their greed, religious hypocrisy, and grossly inhumane treatment of Caribbean natives. Whereas Columbus counted and described resources, Las Casas counted and described abuses, disrupting the glorified nature of the histories written by Columbus and his successors.

Las Casas wrote extensive accounts and histories regarding Spanish colonial activity in the Americas, using them as political activist texts directed at legislative reform. Although some reforms were forthcoming, they were largely unsuccessful in terms of ending the brutality by which the conquistadors ruled in the Caribbean. Las Casas, unlike Columbus, while he championed the human rights of the natives as well as their natural sovereignty over the land, regarded them as Spanish subjects who had given up that sovereignty. As Anthony Pagden states in his introduction to Las Casas's *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, "Las Casas never once denied...that the Spanish Crown was the legitimate ruler of the Americas and he persisted until his death in the belief that the indigenous peoples had, in ignorance but in good faith, voluntarily surrendered their natural sovereignty to the King of Spain" (xvi). Ultimately, Las

Casas's representations of the natives, like those of Columbus before him, deny them any cultural identity, objectifying and subjugating them to Spanish domination.

In spite of being far more complex than those of Columbus, Las Casas's representations of the natives are equally problematic, if not more so. In *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, Las Casas writes an extensive description of the natives, describing them as "open and innocent," "the simplest people in the world—unassuming, long-suffering, unassertive, and submissive," "utterly faithful and obedient"; in effect, Las Casas describes the perfect colonial subjects, "gentle lambs...neither ambitious nor greedy...totally uninterested in worldly power" and for whom "notions of revenge, rancour, and hatred are quite foreign" (11). "Uninterested in worldly power," from the conqueror's perspective, is translatable as "powerless," while the natives' lack of vengeance and hatred means that they will not fight domination. Ultimately, Las Casas expounds upon Columbus's picture of the natives; as they are "unassertive," "submissive," and "obedient," Caribbean natives are easily possessed and dominated for the good of Spain's colonial project, albeit, in the case of Las Casas, under the guise of Spanish subjecthood.

Las Casas's essentialist representations of Caribbean natives include images of victims who, although Las Casas views this as justified, when they *do* fight back, are weakly ineffective, their warfare compared to children's games. He writes: "Their weapons...were flimsy...both in attack and in defense (and, indeed, war in the Americas is no more deadly than our jousting, or than many European children's games)" (14-15). Unable to defend or protect themselves, the natives are represented as victims in need of

a “defender,” the moniker (Las Casas came to be known as the “Defender and Apostle to the Indians”) and role afforded Las Casas by the Spanish religious community. By writing extensive, hyperbolic descriptions of atrocities committed against the Indians, Las Casas vividly represents them as victims while, often writing of himself in the third person, representing himself as their champion, patronizing the natives and exalting himself. Furthermore, a Catholic priest of the Dominican Order, Las Casas had a dominating agenda of his own, that of spreading Christianity through the conversion of the natives. He states that the natives are “particularly receptive to learning and understanding the truths of our Catholic faith and to be instructed in virtue” and would be, according to many who were “struck by the natural goodness that shines through these people,” “...the most blessed people on earth if only they were given the chance to convert to Christianity” (10-11). Without regard or respect to any religious practice already in place among the natives, Las Casas determines, rather paternalistically, that they should be Christian. Even as he decries the physical abuses the natives suffer, he is inculcating his religious viewpoint, stating that the Spanish “have had as little concern for their [the natives’] souls as for their bodies, all the millions that have perished having gone to their deaths with no knowledge of God and without the benefit of the Sacraments”(13). Further, according to Las Casas, the murdered natives are an “infinite number of human souls despatched to Hell” (6). Here, Las Casas views natives through the scope of Christianity, representing them, again, as victims whose souls need saving. Ultimately, native Caribbean peoples are represented in one of two ways by these early historians, as objects to be possessed and used, or as victims to be saved and patronized.

Both representations deny power, agency, and autonomy, leaving natives open to subjugation and domination.

Las Casas's role in the creation of Caribbean historiography is further complicated by the charge that it was he who first suggested the importation of African slaves to the Caribbean. He did, in fact, make that suggestion, though he was neither the first nor the only one to have done so. Las Casas estimated that approximately fifteen million natives had lost their lives over the course of the Spanish conquest and feared that the "pitiful peoples [would be] wiped from the face of the earth" (12). In his fervor to protect natives from genocide, Las Casas "suggested importing some black and white slaves from Castile," where he had witnessed a very different kind of slavery than would develop in the Caribbean (Clayton 1527). According to Clayton, the African slaves that Las Casas "was acquainted with when he suggested importing more slaves to the islands of the Caribbean in 1516...were rarely used in agriculture or plantation slavery," and were "not particularly deprived, oppressed, or stripped of much of their humanity...they were well acculturated into early modern Hispanic society" (1527). Las Casas's failure to fully understand the nature of colonial conquest in the Caribbean, his blind fear for the lives of the natives, as well as a failure to question the origins and conditions of slavery as he knew it in Spain, led him, perhaps, to believe that African slavery would not differ in the Caribbean from what he knew of it in Spain. But, as Clayton states, "Las Casas was later sorry for all of this. The Indians he meant to save remained 'in captivity until there were none left to kill,' and black slavery spread like a stain across the New World" (1529). Las Casas had been mistaken, and himself had begun to "conflate the Indian

experience with slavery with the African one” (Clayton 1533). Black slaves, in fact, simply replaced the natives, who had been objects and/or victims; all that had been achieved by his suggestion was the replacement of the lost bodies of the natives. What is important here is that replacing the objectified/victimized natives with African slaves meant that the African slaves were then themselves objectified/victimized; the previous representations afforded the natives by colonial conquest was now projected onto the Africans, who ‘were enslaved unjustly, tyrannically, right from the start, *exactly as the Indians had been*’ (Clayton, from Las Casas 1533). Ultimately, the Spanish conquest of the Caribbean meant that Caribbean peoples, both past and present, would be continuously viewed through the lens of that conquest, left forever to grapple with a brutal history that defines their culture and identity.

Given that history, as it was posited by Europe, problematizes culture and identity in the Caribbean, history is of necessity the point at which the endeavor of restructuring an idea of Caribbean culture and identity must begin. Paget Henry, in *Caliban’s Reason*, discusses the significant correlation between historicism and ontology for the Caribbean thinker:

Historicism has been one of the important generative ontological constructs of modern Caribbean thought. It has provided the philosophical foundations for much of the economic, political, sociological, and literary work undertaken by regional scholars. More than science, historicism has been the discourse through which our consciousness has established itself...The positing of this modern historicist ontology was a discursive response to the radical historicization of our existence that accompanied colonization...After these experiences, we have come to see ourselves as creatures of history. (49)

Indeed, as Caribbean scholars and artists investigate the postcolonial condition of Caribbean peoples, they must first reckon with and respond to its history, one rife with the erasures, gaps, inconsistencies, and representations that were the result of the area's colonization and enslavement. The aim of postcolonial Caribbean writers and thinkers, then, would seem to be a transcendence of the colonial project, the production of a body of texts that moves beyond the known history of the Caribbean toward a more accurate and inclusive representation of Caribbean culture and identity, defined by the peoples of the Caribbean themselves. Further, the creation of a self-articulated culture and identity is not an end in itself, for "a certain measure of cultural identity is crucial for true political freedom" (Wilson-Tagoe 29). There is much at stake as Caribbean peoples endeavor to transcend a history described at turns as "nightmarish," "tragic," and "burdensome" by various authors; along with what Wilson-Tagoe terms "true political freedom," Sherlock and Bennett state in their modern history text, *The Story of the Jamaican People*, that "the teaching of history is an opportunity to build up a basic nationalism and patriotism...The African-Jamaican people left to their children, and their children's children, a great heritage. The challenge is to use that heritage for building self-worth and for national unity and achievement" (8). By these accounts, the present and future national, social, and political well-being of Caribbean nations depends heavily on their ability to transcend their past histories. This very heavy responsibility is, of course, not without its problems.

According to Dash, "The binary categories of civilized and primitive haunt the representation of the Americas by not only European writers but the very inhabitants of

these lands” (23). What Dash’s statement alludes to is the problem of the internalization, after centuries of colonial rule over the Caribbean, of the representations of Caribbean peoples set down by Europe in the minds of the Caribbean peoples themselves. These representations, in other words, have become ingrained in the consciousness of many Caribbean peoples, having been inscribed, reinscribed, and perpetuated through European institutions that continued to prevail beyond the end slavery. The British system of education in Jamaica is a particularly potent vehicle through which binaries of civilized/primitive, white/black (or light/dark), superior/inferior, etc. have been perpetuated. For example, as late as 1958, Jamaica’s government archivist and author of *History of Jamaica*, a school history text, Clinton V. Black wrote that “the first Jamaicans [were] a peaceful, *primitive* people, still in the Stone Age of development as the fifteenth century AD drew to its close. Meanwhile...*civilised* man in Europe was even then entering a new and wonderful era of development...” (18 my emphasis). The text was “updated” in 1983, with the above text remaining intact. Paget Henry explains that even the intelligentsia, in presenting arguments *against* dichotomous constructs of Europe and the Caribbean, are so bound by “the language of Prospero,” that their arguments are sometimes counterproductive.

...the impact of colonization on the communicative media was such that Caribbean thinkers had to make their responses in signifying systems that had been semiolinguistically reorganized and deeply influenced by the imperial relationship with European culture. Consequently...the production of counterstatements took place in hybridized signifying systems. This hybridity, as Homi Bhaba has pointed out, is the source of structural or systemic ambivalences because it enmeshes the anticolonial thinker in imperial meanings and values that operate below his or her awareness and volition...this enmeshment is not primarily linguistic...but also has equally deep social and psychological roots. The contradictory

ambivalences that result from the hybrid nature of colonial languages and other signifying systems have left traces all over the Afro-Caribbean historicist tradition. Some of these traces are embarrassing because they contradict the explicit goals of the authors. (49)

Clinton V. Black, it would seem, grapples with Henry's "linguistic enmeshment," and is reiterating internalized beliefs; unfortunately, as a government archivist and writer of history, thereby a teacher of history as well, Black is in a unique position that affords him the power to counter the dichotomous constructs of European domination, but instead perpetuates them. Certainly, then, one could argue that his is the problem of the "deep social and psychological roots" of which Henry speaks. Fortunately, however, also according to Henry, "In spite of their enmeshment, Afro-Caribbean thinkers have effectively countered the arguments that legitimated colonialism and African slavery." This critique of racism and slavery has been sharp and runs consistently through the Afro-Caribbean tradition" (49). The problems that Caribbean thinkers face—the internalization of European colonial belief systems and enmeshment in European languages used to counter those belief systems—are neither hopeless nor insurmountable, particularly in the hands of the Caribbean creative writer.

Nana Wilson-Tageo, author of *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature*, asserts that "The leeway provided by an imaginative interpretation of history opens up possibilities for producing meanings, for investing the past with figurative meanings, for extending the connotations of history in the region [the West Indies], and for evolving new modes of representing them in fiction, poetry, and drama" (9). Unlike the historian, who is "bound by a particular space and time and by a

constant need to be truthful to fact and evidence” and is “limited by his or her motif or by the demands of the historical discipline,” the imaginative writer is free to move beyond the boundaries of historiography to reimagine, refute, and/or redefine Caribbean history and its impact on the lives of Caribbean peoples.

Transcendence, then, lies in the imagination, not in the facts of history. In spite of the creative writer’s freedom, however, he or she faces difficulties similar to other Caribbean thinkers. Wilson-Tague states that

For the imaginative writer history can be both a nightmare and a challenge; a nightmare if his or her relation to it remains imprisoned in the fixed relations and attitudes of the region’s linear past; a challenge if he or she exploits the artist’s freedom to endow history and experience with figurative meanings and explores other areas of experience beyond the rational order...the history of slavery and colonialism conceived in... linear terms inevitably presents an image of the West Indian as a victim rather than a creator of history, and invariably writers have either had to struggle to transcend “history” and reconstruct new identities or accept the despairing conclusion that displacement and violation have been historically determined and are therefore unconquerable. (4)

Creative writers must mediate between “enmeshment” and the exploitation of the freedom that imaginative writing allows; in the quest for transcendence, though able to move more freely than historians, creative writers must struggle to create balance within that freedom.

Authors Alejo Carpentier and Michelle Cliff confront traditional Caribbean historiography in their texts. Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World*, with its shape shifting revolutionary, Macandal, is a magical realist text revisioning the history of Haiti’s revolution. According to Zamora and Faris, “In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as

a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted causality, materiality, motivation” (3). In the case of Carpentier’s text, “history” is easily added to the preceding list of what readers are required to scrutinize.

As Cliff writes her personal history in the autobiographical text, *Abeng*, she is concurrently restoring and restructuring the known history of Jamaica, thereby constructing a cultural viewpoint and identity countering those posited by traditional historiography. Cliff’s text seems to seek an assessment of the impact of an alternate history’s erasure from the consciousness of the peoples of Jamaica, and attempts to restore it while criticizing the British political, government, education, and religious institutions upon which modern Jamaica relies for a cultural identity.

Whereas traditional history is portrayed through the colonizer’s perspective, Carpentier and Cliff retell history through the perspective of the enslaved and their descendants. That perspective highlights areas of history that are elided from traditional history, such as the violence and horror of slavery, and the will of the enslaved to be freed from those horrors. Both texts place rebellion at the forefront of Caribbean history and deny traditional history’s contention that slaves lacked the agency and will to defy slavery.

CHAPTER ONE

At best, history is a story about power, a story about those who won.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real?

Alejo Carpentier, *On the Marvelous Real in America*

Alejo Carpentier, in his text, *The Kingdom of This World*, confronts traditional European historiography. Focusing on the Haitian Revolution, Carpentier's narrative is told primarily through the eyes of a slave named Ti Noël who participates in revolutionary activity and observes the turbulent cycles of freedom and enslavement that ensue. Telling the tale through a slave's point of view gives voice to the slave rebel traditionally silenced by European history and challenges representations of slaves and Europeans found in traditional history. Carpentier also privileges African belief systems and religious practice, thereby empowering both the slaves and their beliefs throughout the narrative. Furthermore, though Carpentier claims to have relied heavily on historical documents in writing the text, much of the narrative's action occurs within the creative space of what he calls *lo real maravilloso* or marvelous real.¹ Carpentier's tale has taken liberties with the historical record, altering it to suit a marvelous real perspective and using his authority as a Caribbean creative writer to do what European historiographers

¹ Carpentier's claims to historical accuracy and his discussion of *lo real maravilloso* appear in his prologue to *The Kingdom of This World*.

have traditionally done; that is, presenting representations that are skewed to suit a particular perspective and silencing or erasing certain aspects of history while privileging and/or exalting others. This chapter will illuminate Carpentier's methods of refuting traditional history.

Critics of *The Kingdom of This World*, when assessing the historiographical merit of the text, fall into the categories of those who see Carpentier's text as historically accurate according to the traditional European historical record, those who see Carpentier's use of the historical record as a means of connecting history with the marvelous and thereby creating a counter history, and those who see Carpentier's manipulation of historical fact as denying any definitive narrative of history. Roberto González Echevarría, for example, believes that Carpentier closely follows the traditional historical record when emplotting the novel and compares several scenes from the text with the historical record, detailing the similarities.² As he states, "The history that [Carpentier] narrates is verifiable, documented, one could even say that it is merely repeated in his text" (135). Victor Figueroa, however, believes that Carpentier uses accurate, historical fact to illustrate a connection between history and the marvelous. Figueroa explains that

For Carpentier, Latin America is a continent of living cosmologies, where the marvelous realm of the sacred remains alive through the faith of its inhabitants, as opposed to Europe, where an arid rationalism has extinguished all magic and wonder. In order to illustrate his theory, Carpentier uses the device of systematically linking verifiable, historical events of the Haitian Revolution with supernatural explanations, usually related to voodoo and its vision of the world.
(1)

² According to Hayden White in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, "Providing the 'meaning' of a story by identifying the *kind of story* that has been told is called explanation by emplotment...Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind" (7).

In Figueroa's view, Carpentier's connection of the magical with the historical record not only establishes cultural difference between the slaves and Europeans, it also verifies the marvelous realist perspective of history. As Carpentier himself notes, "The marvelous real is found at every stage in the lives of men who inscribed dates in the history of the continent and who left the names that we still carry..." (87).

In contrast to these critics, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert questions current readings of *The Kingdom of This World* and Carpentier's claims to historical accuracy. Speaking of what she terms the "interstices and shadows" that Carpentier's emplotment leaves in the text, Paravisini-Gebert notes that "...these parts of the tale that Carpentier does not address...problematize Carpentier's presentation of history...undermining the 'truth' to which his claim to historical 'verifiability' aspires" (119). For Paravisini-Gebert, Carpentier's use of the historical record, in part because it elides the contributions of revolution leaders Toussaint and Dessalines, is problematic and undermines his authority as historian. However, the exclusion of Toussaint and Dessalines is a strategic emplotment of the text. Carpentier excludes Toussaint and Dessalines for the purpose of focusing on the marvelous real aspect of the revolution, which is represented by revolution leaders Macandal and Bouckman, both of whom relied heavily upon the slaves' belief in Vodou to lead them in rebellion. Further, as Figueroa makes clear, "As a defender of the ideals of the French Revolution, and as a devout Catholic who in fact forbids the popular practice of voodoo, Toussaint does not fit into Carpentier's magical presentation of history and the cosmos in his novel" (6). Dessalines, a follower of Toussaint, was dubbed the 'butcher of the Negroes' in the wake of insurrections in

response to the renewal of French rule and was “illiterate, despotic, and cruel” and therefore also fails to fit into Carpentier’s presentation, which focuses on the slave leaders who used Vodou to lead the slaves in rebellion (30)³. Like traditional historians, Carpentier carefully selects the facets of these historical events to focus upon and to exclude. Also, Paravisini-Gebert’s assessment of *The Kingdom of This World* as revealing “Carpentier’s hopelessness concerning the Haitian land and its people” can be read differently; the endless cycles of enslavement and freedom he writes about in the text may be assessed as a sign of relentlessness rather than hopelessness since each of the cycles of enslavement is eventually broken by the ardent faith of the slaves and their insistence upon challenging any who would oppress them.

I agree with Figueroa’s assessment of Carpentier’s use of the historical record and would add that Carpentier mimics the devices already in use in traditional historiography, for example eliding the European perspective in order to exalt the African-Haitian perspective. In omitting parts of the historical record, Carpentier is shaping his counter history in just the same way traditional historiography has shaped history. Traditional historiography privileged the European, colonial perspective; Carpentier privileges the marvelous real perspective. Further, as Gerard Aching states, Carpentier

make(s) imaginative and, therefore, political use of archival records on the Haitian Revolution (1791-1803) in order to make claims not only about the importance of that war of independence for Afro-Caribbean anticolonialism in the Americas but also and especially about...knowing and valorizing the Caribbean’s place and identity in the West. (103)

³ Dessalines: Emperor of Haiti, Marie V. Wood, *Negro History Bulletin*, 15: 2 (1951: Nov) pp. 30-37.

Carpentier's retelling of the Haitian Revolution is about more than creating another accounting of the facts of history. In fact, that it is based on historical events is only the foundation; Carpentier seeks to acknowledge an entirely different perspective than that of traditional history, and traditional history must be undermined in order for him to achieve that perspective. In his attempt to create an Afro Caribbean perspective of history, Carpentier chooses to emplot his narrative so that it focuses on the slave and the marvelous real world created by Vodou. Carpentier claims the authority of the creative writer over historical facts in order to create a history that is African-Caribbean centered rather than European centered.

HISTORY AND THE REVOLUTION

Traditional history's representation of the Haitian Revolution is inadequate for a number of reasons. One reason, according to Trouillot, is that "The Haitian Revolution ...entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened" (73). It is this characteristic that is at the root of historiography's silencing and suppression of the events that make up the Haitian Revolution. "If some events cannot be accepted even as they occur," Trouillot asks, "how can they be assessed later? In other words, can historical narratives convey plots that are unthinkable in the world in which these narratives take place? How does one write a history of the impossible?" (73). In answer, the history of the revolution in Haiti was largely silenced, erased, and/or speculated to be the responsibility of some entity other than the slaves. What little was

documented was written from the perspective of frightened Europeans. Sybille Fischer states that:

In the letters and reports of white settlers, the revolution is not a political and diplomatic issue; it is a matter of body counts, rape, material destruction, and infinite bloodshed. It is barbarism and unspeakable violence, outside the realm of civilization and beyond human language. It is an excessive event, and as such, it remained for the most part confined to the margins of history: to rumors, oral histories, confidential letters, and secret trials. (4)

Because the history of the Haitian Revolution was told from the European perspective, it focused on the violence of the events rather than on the slaves' reasons for rebelling. As was typical for European historiography, the voices of the slaves were silenced while they were represented as subhuman barbarians. Carpentier's rendering of the revolution never refutes its brutality and violence; rather, he presents it from the perspective of the slaves.

In addition to noting that traditional history of the revolution was told from the perspective of frightened Europeans, Sybille Fischer states that, "...the fear of repetition of the events in Haiti led to...the suppression of any information" about it (xi). The fear of repetition was only one among many reasons for what Fischer calls the "gaps and silences that punctuate the historical and cultural records" regarding the revolution (2). As Fischer also contends, "the suppression and disavowal of revolutionary antislavery and attendant cultures in the Caribbean was, among other things, a struggle over what would count as 'progress,' what was meant by 'liberty,' and how the two should relate" (xi). Slave rebellion in general and the Haitian Revolution in particular problematized

Western notions of progress and liberty because these ideas were typically reserved for Europeans while being violently denied slaves.

Regardless of the fear of repetition and the quandary of ideas such as progress and liberty, slave rebellions of all sorts have been routinely silenced simply because the official historical record traditionally suppresses the voices of the disenfranchised in order to dominate them while exalting Europe and the colonial enterprise. Giving voice to antislavery rebellion and its participants would have caused a shift in power that would undermine colonialism in the Caribbean. Any acknowledgement of slaves' desire for freedom would call into question the notion of them being less than human and possibly lead to inquiries regarding their human rights, both of which are antithetical to colonial domination.

The inclusion of slave rebels and rebellions in creative writers' histories of the Caribbean provides much of the material for texts that refute traditional Eurocentric histories. According to Adeeko,

No element of modern black history agitates the speculative faculty of writers trying to conceptualize the telos of black struggles more than episodes of historical slave rebellions...In these stories, the slave rebel embodies the manifestly unquestionable spirit of restorative justice which each writer's milieu is called upon directly or indirectly to reanimate. (1)

Exploring slave rebellion is an important component of countering history's erasures and suppressions for the Caribbean creative writer seeking to illuminate the slave perspective.

In *The Kingdom of This World*, Alejo Carpentier tells the story of the overthrow of colonial domination by the hands of slaves in Haiti. Carpentier challenges traditional history's silences by telling the tale from the slave's perspective. Further, Carpentier

relies on *lo real maravilloso*, a genre inspired by his visit to Haiti and the kingdom of Henri Christophe in 1943, to provide an African Caribbean perspective of the events making up the revolution. *Lo real maravilloso*, or marvelous real, is described by Carpentier as

[arising] from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state. (86)

In *The Kingdom of This World*, African belief systems and faith in Vodou symbolize that alteration of reality and unaccustomed insight Carpentier describes and provides the framework for the marvelous real. The marvelous real provides an African-Caribbean perspective of Carpentier's counter-history. This counter-history's focus is on the empowerment of the slaves and their struggle for liberation rather than the domination and colonization of the Caribbean that serves as traditional history's focus. The marvelous real acts as a vehicle by which this counter-history *becomes* counter-history. Within the realm of the marvelous real, slaves are empowered by their knowledge of Africa and the magic of Vodou. According to Adeeko,

Magical realism's main theme, as shown in *The Kingdom of This World*...is the freedom to experiment with varying forms of knowing for the sake of emancipating the slave's body and mind. Magical knowledge, principally codes of the secret articulations exclusive to slaves, saved the slaves and frightened the masters who are held in thrall for a long time by their enraged servants. (3)

Through the use of the marvelous real, Carpentier's counter-history provides the slaves with a powerful weapon by which to wage war and liberate themselves from slavery.

THE SLAVE'S PERSPECTIVE

Carpentier's characters in *The Kingdom of This World*, particularly Ti Noël, Macandal, and Bouckman, counter the object/victim representation of slaves in the Caribbean. Whereas traditional history presents slaves as objects and/or victims and Europeans as superior, Carpentier's text presents slaves who are rebellious and powerful and Europeans who are self-indulgent, cruel, cowardly, and unenlightened. Told from the perspective of the enslaved, Carpentier's history of the Haitian Revolution counters traditional history.

Ti Noël's character is described by critics as everything from passive to Christ figure. Critics do agree, however, that Ti Noël, as witness/protagonist, serves as the unifying force in a text that at first glance appears to be disjointed and chaotic. Ti Noël serves the purposes of countering object/victim representations of slaves, as well as providing the slave perspective and being the bearer and carrier of African historical and religious practice for future generations. The text both begins and ends with this important figure.

Ti Noël is immediately identifiable as a rebel. In the opening scene of the novel, we encounter him on an errand with his master and follow his thoughts as he gazes at shop windows. As he waits outside the barber shop, Ti Noël's thoughts reveal an ample disrespect for whites and their accoutrements. For example, as he gazes at the wax heads

adorned with wigs in the barber shop window, he compares them with the animal heads in the next window, imagining the heads of wigged white men prepared on platters and dressed for a feast:

...it amused Ti Noël to think that alongside the pale calves' heads, heads of white men were served on the same tablecloth. Just as fowl for a banquet are adorned with their feathers, so some experienced, macabre cook might have trimmed the heads with their best wigs. All that was lacking was a border of lettuce leaves or radishes cut in the shape of lilies. Moreover, the jars of gum Arabic, the bottles of lavender water, the boxes of rice powder, close neighbors to the kettles of tripe and the platters of kidneys, completed, with this coincidence of flasks and cruets, that picture of an abominable feast. (11)

Ti Noël's contempt for white men is clear in this passage and is extended by what follows. His thoughts extend from mild amusement to outright contempt as he begins to question the masculinity of white men; having been instructed by Macandal, a captive Mandingue, Ti Noël compares what he perceives of the white king and other men of distinction with what he has learned about African kings and warriors and arrives at the conclusion that white men are inferior to the men of Africa and thereby himself. Ti Noël asserts that the kings of Africa "...were kings, true kings, and not those sovereigns wigged in false hair who played at cup and ball and were gods only when they strutted the stage of their court theaters, effeminately pointing a leg in the measures of a rigadon" (14). This is revolutionary thinking for a slave, and over the course of the text Ti Noël will move from rebellious thought to rebellious action as he becomes an active participant in the planning and staging of Macandal's rebellion.

Macandal, the most important figure of rebellion in the text, is a Mandingue slave who brings with him from Africa tales of history, culture, and religious beliefs:

...the Mandingue Negro would tell of things that had happened in the great kingdoms of Popo, of Arada, of the Nagos, or the Fulah. He spoke of the great migrations of tribes, of age-long wars, of epic battles in which the animals had been allies of men. He knew the story of Adonhueso, of the King of Angola, of King Da, the incarnation of the Serpent, which is the eternal beginning, never ending, who took his pleasure mystically with a queen who was the Rainbow, patroness of the Waters and of all Bringing Forth. (13)

That he tells these stories is significant; in so doing, Macandal provides the slaves with an African identity that is empowering and becomes the foundation of Macandal's leadership in the rebellion. The sense of identity Macandal provides with his stories remains a source of power even beyond his death and lends the slaves the strength they need in order to continue their fight for freedom without him. Graciela Limón states that

Carpentier here focuses on the slave chieftain [Macandal] as the link between the land of captivity and Africa. Macandal speaks of the African rites of Rada, the great Allá, Damballah, Ogoun, and the Lord of Paths, and it is through Macandal's voice that the author affirms the substance of African origins and identity, thus negating the falsehood that the enslaved came to the islands empty of history, culture and religion. (196)

The figure of Macandal is one Carpentier uses to link the slaves to an African identity that refutes traditional history's assertion that slaves serve only as objects in and/or victims of colonization.

Macandal's rebellion begins with the loss of his arm in an accident. Placed in the pastures after the accident, Macandal begins to discover the properties of certain plants and stumbles upon the extremely poisonous fungus he will later refine and use in an attack against the whites. Carpentier begins to show that whites underestimate the power of a figure such as Macandal and all that he represents—the history, culture, and religious

practices of Africa and the identity this knowledge provides—when they fail to pursue Macandal after he runs away:

A one-armed slave was a trifling thing. Besides, it was common knowledge that every Mandingue was a potential fugitive. Mandingue was a synonym for intractable, rebellious, a devil. For that reason slaves from that kingdom brought a very poor price on the market. They all dreamed of taking to the hills. Anyway, with so many plantations on all sides, the crippled one would not get very far. When he was brought back, he would be tortured in front of the others to teach them a lesson. A one-armed man was nothing but a one-armed man. It would have been foolish to run the risk of losing a couple of good mastiffs whom Macandal might have tried to silence with his machete. (27)

Paradoxically and to their detriment, the whites have devalued Macandal for the very qualities that make him dangerous. Of less value than the dogs they would use to chase him, Macandal escapes, giving him the freedom to develop his plan to assault the whites and their livestock with poison. With the assistance of slaves on various plantations, the poisoning begins and is successful until the plan is revealed to the whites by one of the conspirators, the “bowlegged Fulah.” The Fulah discloses not Macandal’s physical location, but his position as leader of the slaves:

Macandal, the one-armed, now a *houngan* of the Rada rite, invested with superhuman powers as the result of his possession by the major gods on several occasions, was the Lord of Poison. Endowed with supreme authority by the Rulers of the Other Shore, he had proclaimed the crusade of extermination, chosen as he was to wipe out the whites and create a great empire of free Negroes in Santo Domingo. Thousands of slaves obeyed him blindly. (36)

Thus empowered, Macandal eludes captivity for four years, during which time the faith the slaves have in him grows. Macandal is imbued with greater power than before; he is lycanthropic and appears to them in the guises of different animals and insects and “ruled the whole island” (42). Macandal’s power and magic are not the product of delusions

and escapism for the slaves. Instead, they are concrete realities that move them toward revolution. The slaves have given Macandal, their example of successful rebellion, the power to do whatever is necessary to complete a full rebellion. As Adeeko states,

It should not really be surprising that the slaves invest Macandal, the agent of social transformation, with the power of literal transfiguration... However, the slaves do not believe the metamorphoses are ends in themselves, or marvels for their sake, but means of upholding the vitality of the liberation spirit let loose in the poison campaign. For the slaves, the transformations express Macandal's strategic elusiveness in a culturally sensible form and foreshadow the great historical metamorphosis that will turn slaves to citizens, property to humans, and beasts of burden to human agents. (116)

Carpentier's marvelous realism here is a practical matter of the slaves projecting their desire for escape onto the person who has accomplished an effective rebellion and then avoided detection. From Macandal the slaves have learned that they are and can be active agents in their liberation, that they are not simply objects and victims of colonization and slavery; they draw strength from his example. Macandal's "superhuman powers" are as plausible a thing to believe as believing that they can be liberated from oppression and slavery.

Macandal's return is met with ceremony during the Christmas season. While the whites prepare for their major religious holiday, the slaves conduct ceremonial drumming, dancing, and chanting at the feet of their savior, who has finally returned to them in "human guise". The slaves do not look to Macandal simply as a magician with superhuman powers. For them his power is inextricably tied to his leadership in rebellion. As they chant, the slaves extol their suffering under the oppression of slavery, asking how much longer they will have to bear it. According to Carpentier, the chanting is "As

though wrenched from their vitals...taking on, in chorus, the rending despair of peoples carried into captivity to build pyramids, towers, or endless walls” (48). The chants take on suffering even beyond those who are chanting; it is the sound of the suffering of slaves throughout time. Macandal is the leader, the savior to whom the slaves pour out this burden of timeless suffering. Clearly, Carpentier’s representation of Macandal is far more complex than any object/victim representation traditional history might provide.

The chanting and drumming draw the attention of the whites and Macandal is captured and scheduled for execution. Carpentier’s omniscient narrator uses the execution scene to fashion “a very useful comparison of the freedom-seeking *marvelous reality* of the slaves and the macabre *unmarvelous reality* of their owners” (Adeeko 116). Through the use of an omniscient narrator, Carpentier is able to explore the conflicting points of view of whites and slaves and thereby challenge the white perspective of this event. The whites have prepared a spectacle by which to reassert their dominance over the slaves and disassemble the slaves’ hopes for freedom: “...the Negroes awaited the performance that had been prepared for them, a gala function for Negroes on whose splendor no expense had been spared. For this time the lesson was to be driven home with fire, not blood...” (50). The slaves, however, have come to the execution with the knowledge that Macandal will not die, and challenge the gazes of their masters with what appears to the whites as “spiteful indifference” (50). Instead of being frightened into submission, the slaves challenge white knowledge:

What did the whites know of Negro matters?... When the moment came, the bonds of the Mandingue, no longer possessing a body to bind, would trace the shape of a man in the air for a second before they slipped down the post. And Macandal, transformed into a buzzing mosquito, would

light on the very tricorne of the commander of the troops to laugh at the dismay of the whites. This was what their masters did not know. (51)

The slaves possess a knowledge that the masters do not, and this knowledge counters the domination intended by the ceremony surrounding the execution. The slaves' alternate way of knowing and experiencing reality is evident throughout the text and reveals a part of history to which Europeans do not have access. Everything that happens during the execution feeds the slaves' beliefs rather than dispelling them:

The fire began to rise toward the Mandingue, licking his legs. At that moment Macandal moved the stump of his arm, which they had been unable to tie up, in a threatening gesture which was none the less terrible for being partial, howling unknown spells and violently thrusting his torso forward. The bonds fell off and the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves. A single cry filled the square: "Macandal saved!" (52)

The movements and cries Macandal makes are seen as casting spells, and his being dislodged from the post is seen as a flight to freedom. From the slaves' perspective, Macandal has "transformed into a buzzing mosquito" and thus escaped the execution (51). Carpentier only spares one sentence to inform the reader that "...the noise and screaming and uproar were such that very few saw that Macandal, held by ten soldiers, had been thrust head first into the fire, and that a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry" (52). By giving that information in only one sentence, Carpentier has highlighted the importance of the slaves' perception over that of the whites. The slaves walk away from this experience feeling that "Macandal had kept his word, remaining in the Kingdom of This World. Once more the whites had been outwitted by the Mighty Powers of the Other Shore" (52). What was meant to frighten and dominate

the slaves has only reinforced their will; the slaves “continued in their reverence for Macandal” and believed that “he would return to this land when he was least expected” (63). Macandal is represented as more than a slave who led a rebellion; in fact, the text credits him with planting the seed of rebellion in the hearts of the slaves, a seed that takes root and grows throughout the text.

Like Macandal, Bouckman relies on the slaves’ belief in Vodou in order to lead them in rebellion. Bouckman is introduced in the chapter “The Solemn Pact” during a gathering of the slaves. The leader informs the slaves that

...something had happened in France, and that some very powerful gentlemen had declared that the Negroes should be given their freedom, but that the rich landowners of the Cap, who were all monarchist sons of bitches, had refused to obey them...he stated that a pact had been sealed between the initiated on this side of the water and the great Loas of Africa to begin the war when the auspices were favorable. (66)

Bouckman first discusses the politics of freedom and then turns to the force that most motivates the slaves to take action. He provides for them the license of the “the great Loas of Africa” to fight for their freedom. Bouckman tells them that “The white men’s God orders the crime. Our gods demand vengeance from us. They will guide our arms and give us help. Destroy the image of the white man’s God who thirsts for our tears; let us listen to the cry of freedom within ourselves” (67). Through Bouckman, Carpentier ties European and African religious belief to the issues of enslavement and freedom; the slaves are thus moved by the force of religious belief to rebel against their enslavement. Like Macandal before him, Bouckman is a powerful leader; he relies on the faith that Macandal has instilled in the slaves in order to lead them in rebellion.

Unlike Macandal's rebellion, however, Bouckman's rebellion does not rely on stealth. It is an overwhelming call to brutal violence to which the slaves answer by bursting into the homes of the slave owners with weapons, murdering and raping whites and destroying and burning property. Building upon the foundation laid by Macandal's rebellion and relying upon the failure of the whites to recognize the will of the slaves to be free by any means, Bouckman raises the stakes with this violent revolution. From the perspective of the enslaved, violent revolution is the only means by which to end oppression and slavery.

EUROPEAN REPRESENTATIONS

Carpentier's representations of Europeans in *The Kingdom of This World* also counter those of traditional history. Beginning in Chapter One with Ti Noël questioning the leadership practices and masculinity of white men in power, Carpentier consistently views white men and women in a harsh light. M. Lenormand de Mézy, Ti Noël's master, is depicted as hypocritical, cruel, self-indulgent, and immoral:

...M. Lenormand de Mézy had become cranky and drank heavily. He suffered from a perpetual erotomania that kept him panting after adolescent slave girls, the smell of whose skin drove him out of his mind. He multiplied the corporal punishments meted out to the men, especially those guilty of fornication outside the marriage bed. (60)

This depiction of de Mézy illustrates the corruptive power of slavery on the white enslavers. In their treatment of slaves as animals, the masters themselves are barbaric. Also, suffering from a sense of superiority, white men in the text—de Mézy in

particular— are initially foolishly ignorant of the power of the slaves’ cultural and religious practices:

The slaves evidently had a secret religion that upheld and united them in their revolts. Possibly they had been carrying on the rites of this religion under his very nose for years and years, talking with one another on the festival drums without his suspecting a thing. But could a civilized person have been expected to concern himself with the savage beliefs of people who worshipped a snake? (79)

The civilized/savage dichotomy here is a detriment to the white slave owners as it leaves them ignorant of the slaves’ humanity and will to be free. White women are also depicted as less than superior in the text; white women are inconsequential, as are de Mézy’s wives, or are shallow and attention seeking, as are Mlle. Floridor and Pauline Bonaparte.

Of Mlle. Floridor, Carpentier states that she was: “a lush Flemish beauty...a graceless interpreter of the role of confidante, whose name always appeared at the end of the cast, but who was uniquely gifted in the phallic arts” (59). The failed actress whose only valuable trait is in the “phallic arts” is a comfort to de Mézy after the death of his second wife. She eventually travels to Haiti to live with de Mézy on the plantation, where she,

faded and gnawed by malaria, avenged her artistic failure on the Negresses who bathed her and combed her hair, ordering them whipped on the slightest pretext. There were nights when she took to the bottle. It was not unusual on such occasions for her to order all the slaves to turn out, and under the full moon, between belches of malmsey to declaim before her captive audience the great roles she had never been allowed to interpret. (60)

This representation of whiteness points again to excess, cruelty, self-indulgence, and failure rather than superiority, and it illustrates the corrupting power of slaveholding upon the slaveholders. Raped and murdered by Ti Noël during the revolution, Mlle. Floridor's fate is emblematic of the expendability of most of the white women in the text. The exception to this is Pauline Bonaparte, to which nearly a full chapter of the text is devoted.

The inclusion of an extended portrayal of Pauline Bonaparte in a text about the Haitian Revolution that elides major figures such as Dessalines and Toussaint raises questions about the purpose of such a portrayal. Critics Victor Figueroa and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert have differing views of Pauline's purpose in the text. Figueroa contends that

...for Carpentier, Pauline's life of hedonist pleasures and remorseless privilege perfectly embodied the hypocrisy that soon came to permeate the ideals of the so-called 'Age of Enlightenment.' Although herself a child of the Enlightenment, Pauline also ends up recurring to the magical remedies of her slave Soliman when her husband is sick; thus, she illustrates how underneath the ironic disbelief of Rationalism, subterranean forces of magic and religion remain always ready to come to the surface in moments of crisis. (4)

In Figueroa's view, Pauline serves as a representation of white decadence and hypocrisy. Paravisini-Gebert, on the other hand, sees Carpentier's portrayal of Pauline, particularly her conversion to Vodou, as undermining to his overall project of "privileging the connection between history and faith" (126). According to Paravisini-Gebert

This caricaturesque metamorphosis of Pauline into a Vodou *serviteur* is indeed more significant than her surrender to indolence and sensuality in the tropics. Inspired by terror and not by faith, it speaks of the practices of Vodou as superstitious mumbo jumbo, practiced—with positive results in as much as she survives—by a harebrained coquette and her manipulative servant. Pauline's scatty impersonation of Ezili Freda, the flirtatious light-skinned Creole

Iwa...subverts Carpentier's project. It inverts and subverts the alliance of Makandal, Boukman, Dessalines, and Henri Christophe with the Iwas...fetishizing the rituals of possession and communion with the gods into an inane version of a danse macabre. (126)

While it is true that her conversion is inspired by terror, and that she is symbolic of the decadence and hypocrisy of Europe, I contend that Pauline is a more complex character than either of these critics allow; though she has come to Haiti from Europe, she becomes an emblem of creolization, a symbol of a uniquely Caribbean entity. Pauline Bonaparte embodies the confrontation between Europe and Haiti. The result, like the Caribbean itself, is a character that is a mixture of some of the qualities of both places. She is European, and for Carpentier that means that she is hypocritical and self-indulgent. She is in Haiti, which means that African belief systems hold sway over those of Europe.

Chapter VI, "The Ship of Dogs" begins with a group of dogs "growling and slavering behind their muzzles" being shepherded onto a ship where they are going "To eat niggers" (89). Closely following this image is that of Pauline Bonaparte, who "felt a little like a queen" as she embarks upon the ship that will take her to Haiti (90). Carpentier juxtaposes the dogs and Pauline in order to draw a parallel between them. Pauline will hungrily consume the culture of the slaves when it becomes clear to her that European medicine will not serve her. According to Carpentier, the slaves' religious practices "stirred up in her the lees of old Corsican blood, which was more akin to the living cosmogony of the Negro than to the lies of the Directory, in whose disbelief she had grown up" (99). Because of her Corsican blood and her lack of faith in European religious practice, Pauline is open to the practice of Vodou and comes to rely on her

servant, Soliman, to perform the rituals that keep her from succumbing to the sickness that kills her husband. Vodou is thus not presented as “mumbo jumbo” as stated by Paravisini-Gebert, but is useful to anyone who is open to it. Pauline, like the other whites in the text, is not of favorable character. She is the ultimate symbol of white hypocrisy and self-indulgence. But she is not therefore to be easily dismissed as simply a symbol or subversion.

With his depiction of whiteness, Carpentier has effectively challenged the white perspective of Haiti, of slavery, and of revolution. Depicting whites as corrupted by the practice of slaveholding, cruel, and ignorant is a direct counter to traditional history’s depiction of whites as enlightened and superior to those enslaved by them.

THE COMPLEXITY OF FREEDOM

The final part of *The Kingdom of This World* begins with Ti Noël’s return to Haiti after buying his freedom from a Cuban master. Ti Noël seeks out de Mézy’s former plantation and finds it and much of the former landscape of European slavery in ruins, and therefore believes that he has “set foot on a land where slavery had been abolished forever” (108). However, Ti Noël is shocked to discover that Henri Christophe, Haiti’s first black king, has reenacted European traditions, including the enslavement of his countrymen. While critic Lorna V. Williams asserts that Carpentier’s representation of King Christophe lacks depth in comparison to Aimé Césaire’s representation, I argue that Carpentier’s representation is purposely shallow, as King Christophe is a symbol of the lasting effects of European domination and, ultimately, the ardent refusal of the people of

Haiti to be enslaved. Christophe's representation serves as a warning and a prediction for the future of Haiti in the wake of the revolution. Carpentier's warning is against leaders like King Christophe, who emulates European traditions and, most egregiously, eschews his belief in and understanding of Vodou in favor of traditional European religious practice. According to Carpentier, "King Christophe had always held himself aloof from the African mystique of the early leaders of Haitian independence, endeavoring to give his court a thoroughly European air" (146). In *The Kingdom of This World*, King Christophe embodies the internalization of European belief systems I discussed in the introduction. Carpentier problematizes post-revolutionary freedom by portraying the black leader as one who has internalized and perpetuates the same European methods of leadership that held sway before the revolution.

This has dire consequences for Christophe, who is acutely aware of the ill will of the slaves toward him as he attends a Christian Mass: "...the King felt himself surrounded by a hostile atmosphere. The populace that had hailed him on his arrival was sullen with evil intentions..." (136). From inside the church, he can hear "the beat of drums which he felt sure were not imploring a long life for him" (136). From then on, Christophe is repeatedly haunted by the sounds of drumming, the sound that precedes insurrection throughout the text. It is drumming, in fact, along with the realization that he has been "betrayed" by Christian faith and the approaching revolutionaries that drive Christophe to finally commit suicide. With the death of Christophe, Carpentier reinforces the significance of Vodou in the lives of the slaves; it is a unifying force that decries slavery in any form.

The end of *The Kingdom of This World* presents not a literal ending of the Haitian Revolution; rather, it portrays the cyclical nature of Haitian history and the processes of accepting the continued struggle for freedom through the eyes of a former slave. Here, Carpentier displays the complexity of a society of slaves who fought for and won their freedom. It is not a smooth transition, but one that is rife with difficulty, confusion, and problems.

THE DEATH OF TI NOËL

The novel ends with Ti Noël, who “had been among the ringleaders in the sack of the Palace of Sans Souci” (169). Having “bizarrely furnished” the ruins of de Mézy’s former manor house with items taken from Sans Souci, Ti Noël takes up residence there and lives out a fantasy of being a king in his own palace. Again, Carpentier complicates Ti Noël’s freedom with the introduction of mulatto land surveyors who come to analyze the property he lives on. Ti Noël soon notes that there are “Surveyors everywhere, and that mounted mulattoes, wearing shirts open at the throat, silk sashes, and military boots, [who] were directing vast operations of plowing and clearing carried out by hundreds of Negro prisoners” (176). With this, Ti Noël “began to lose heart at this endless return of chains, this rebirth of shackles, this proliferation of suffering, which the more resigned began to accept as proof of the uselessness of all revolt” (178). Remembering Macandal, Ti Noël escapes by lycanthropic disguise to live among different animals. Even among the animals, however, there is injustice, and Ti Noël comes to believe that “Macandal had disguised himself as an animal for years to serve men, not to abjure the world of men”

(184). At the moment he returns to human form, Ti Noël has “a supremely lucid moment. He lived, for the space of a heartbeat, the finest moments of his life; he glimpsed once more the heroes who had revealed to him the power and the fullness of his remote African forebears, making him believe in the possible germinations the future held” (184). Ultimately, Ti Noël returns to his belief in what Macandal has taught him of Africa and remains hopeful for the future, in spite of what seems like a never ending battle to be free. Still in this state of heightened awareness, Ti Noël

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

Having come to understand that his suffering is not empty and meaningless, that everyone must suffer for the good of others, Ti Noël dies a Christ figure with only a vulture’s “cross of feathers” remaining to mark his passing (186). Along with his death, the ruins of de Mézy’s house are destroyed, marking the end of the era of European slavery while the struggle for freedom remains.

CONCLUSION

Carpentier’s alternative view of the Haitian Revolution reveals the inadequacy of traditional history’s vision, which largely silences the slaves or otherwise represents them as objects in the colonial enterprise. The characters in *The Kingdom of This World* counter traditional representations of both slaves and Europeans. Whereas traditional

history draws slaves as objects and/or victims and Europeans as enlightened and superior, Carpentier's representations present slaves who are human beings with the power and the will to rebel against oppression. Europeans, on the other hand, are presented as hypocritical, self-indulgent, and cruel, thoroughly corrupted by the practice of slaveholding. Through these representations, Carpentier creates a counter-narrative of the history of the Haitian Revolution. Counter-narrative is also achieved by Carpentier's privileging of the slave perspective and the inclusion of a marvelous real perspective, symbolized by the practice of Vodou. The inclusion of Vodou and other African traditions is paramount to the rebelliousness of the slaves; it is their faith and belief in their African heritage that drives their will and their view of the world. Carpentier built his counter-narrative on the historical record, using the same tools that were used by traditional historians; he chose carefully which parts of the record to focus upon and which to elide. With his authority as a Caribbean creative writer, Carpentier switches the focus of traditional history from Europeans and colonialism to the slaves and the struggle for a complex freedom. In this retelling of history, the slaves are the heroes of the story. If, as Trouillot states, "...history is a story about power, a story about those who won," then the slaves in *The Kingdom of This World* have the power to win, and do so (5).

CHAPTER TWO

The colonial encounter...requires a reinvention of the colonized, the deliberate destruction of the past.
Robin D.G. Kelley, *A Poetics of Anticolonialism*

Most of my work has to do with revising: revising the written record, what passes as the official version of history, and inserting those lives that have been left out.

Michelle Cliff, *The Art of History: An Interview with Michelle Cliff*

As noted in the introduction, traditional Euro-centered history is problematic in its representations of Caribbean peoples as objects and/or victims. Michelle Cliff's novel, *Abeng*, counters traditional history and historical representations of Caribbean people, specifically Jamaicans. Most notably, Cliff counters traditional history by including stories of female resistance. Cliff's history employs multiple narrative strategies, intertwining history, current politics, myth, legend, fiction, and autobiography. As Cliff shifts between these differing modes of narration, she challenges traditional history's method of using a linear timeline. Cliff interrupts the linear flow of the current history of Clare Savage in 1958 with the past histories of female resisters centuries earlier. The text centers around the twelve-year-old protagonist, Clare Savage, and her search for identity in 1958 Jamaica, when "Independence-in-practically-name-only was four years away" (5). As Clare negotiates her mixed heritage and with it the accepted social norms of gender roles and social status, the reader has access to her historical counterparts, the

revolutionaries Nanny, Mma. Alli, and Inez. The myths, legends, and histories of Jamaica and these revolutionary women compose the outer layer of the text, creating a tension between itself and the autobiographical/fictional layer. This chapter will discuss some of the ways by which Cliff creates her counter-history.

Critics of *Abeng* focus on differing aspects of Cliff's revision of history. Kaisa Ilmonen, for example, illustrates how Cliff uses a series of counter-narratives to refute traditional history. She states that

Cliff rewrites Caribbean history by using various types of counter-narratives that contrast with Western historiography. It could be said that Cliff rewrites the history of the colonized Caribbean, and in so doing, reveals the exclusiveness of Western historiography by focusing on the gaps and blank spots in the colonial representation of history. Within the gaps she rediscovers a history scattered like 'potash in the canefields.' This hidden history is the history of resistance and violence—a history that contains not only African traditions and mythologies but also the horrors of slavery. In her novels Cliff also includes a strong feminist agenda. The ethnic Caribbean history is rewritten in feminist terms. She highlights the presence of Caribbean women in history and gives them an active role as subjects in history. This excluded history, or the 'lost memory of the colonized people,' is a path for questioning the colonial values and leads on further towards a new postcolonial identity. (110-111)

For Ilmonen, Cliff's rewriting of history includes the silenced history of female resistance and violence. These inclusions call the traditional historical record into question while helping to shape postcolonial identity, which, according to Ilmonen, is "shaped by the past, constructed from the pieces of the 'collected memory' of the past" (112). Along with the inclusion of feminine resistance, *Abeng* includes Amerindian stories of resistance and African tradition and history to help shape a Jamaican identity.

Critic Jennifer Thorington Springer focuses exclusively on "...how Cliff, in her mostly autobiographical novel *Abeng*, reconfigures Caribbean history to elucidate Caribbean women's active participation in building Caribbean nations as she articulates the multifaceted and often conflicting identities of these women" (44). Springer concludes that the rebellious women of *Abeng* rebel against more than slavery as they battle "traditional representations of womanhood, patriarchy, colonial culture, and homophobia" (43). The text of *Abeng* places a prominent focus on rebellious women who, through their rebellious actions, impact the history of Jamaica and forge a female identity of power and strength. Similarly, Adlai Murdoch states that

....through her reconfiguration of colonial and Caribbean history, Cliff not only elucidates Caribbean women's active participation in slave resistance, nation-building and identity-formation from the inception of colonial history, but illuminates the myriad ways in which women resisted the patterns of violence through which men sought to inscribe the practice of patriarchy by and through which the transethnic presumption of masculine pre-eminence had eventuated the hierarchical differentiations of Jamaica's social structure. (75)

Through the inclusion of Jamaican rebellious women, Cliff illuminates structures of not only colonial dominance and slavery, but gender and sexual oppression. Women in the text are shown to have suffered and fought against these additional dynamics of forced servitude. Cliff's inclusion of feminine resistance into Jamaica's colonial history is therefore a significant restructuring of traditional history, which has occluded any resistance, much less the specific challenges of women's resistance. This inclusion of feminine resistance is a means by which Cliff counters traditional history and thereby

creates a new Jamaican history and identity. Cliff also accesses a matrilineal heritage for Jamaica, and with this counters the patriarchal focus of traditional history.

H. Adlai Murdoch's discussion also explicates Cliff's disruption of "previously stable identity categories grounded in race, gender, and colonial history to reveal an alternative set of burgeoning identities whose inscription lies 'in-between' those fixed, earlier notions of being and belonging that were the heritage of the colonial encounter"(75). With the character of Clare Savage, Cliff creates an "in-between" identity that requires restructuring. Clare's biracial identity does not fit into the black/white dichotomy that is the product of colonialism; that dichotomy must be ruptured to create a new and meaningful means of self-identity for Clare. Along with her racial identity, Clare battles identity structures based on gender, sexuality, and social status as perpetuated by her parents and Jamaican society.

Addressing Cliff's narrative strategies, Belinda Edmondson notes that Cliff

rewrites white creole history of privilege and collaboration to integrate it with the unwritten black and Amerindian histories of suffering and resistance; her texts dismantle notions of 'official' history and the relation of that history to myth, myth to 'real life,' and 'real life' to fiction by conflating Jamaican legends and myths with ancient and contemporary histories, autobiographical anecdotes and among all of these, intertwining Clare Savage's personal journey. (185)

Cliff's complex narrative strategy serves to deepen and expand the understanding of Jamaican history and the multi-faceted and complicated structure of a history that includes other means of telling the story. History-making in *Abeng* is more complex than

that of traditional history, intertwining as it does commentary on contemporary history with past histories told through myth, legend, and autobiographical fiction.

I agree with these critics, for it is clear that Cliff is focused on empowering the female Jamaican identity and that she does so by challenging traditional history's "truths" and methods of relating history with her own intricate, multi-layered narrative technique. In addition to illuminating and empowering the female, Cliff counters traditional history by challenging the societal norms of contemporary Jamaica and relating them to the past. She also proves the overwhelming power of history to shape postcolonial identities. History surrounds these characters in the landscape, in their social structures, in names, and in ideas carried forward into the present.

CHALLENGING LINEAR HISTORY

In European history, time is normally conceived in linear terms, along a progressive, linear timeline. History tells us "what happened," how things progressed, over a period of time. As Nana Wilson-Tagoe states,

The dialectic of the known and the linear accepts the ordinarily linear quality of our experience of time and history, making a straightforward correlation between cause and effect and therefore between past, present, and future. In conformity with its assumptions, writers assume particular relationships to space and time. Time is conceived of as a linear movement, and history becomes a chronicle of progress and development in a particular space and time. (4)

A "chronicle of progress and development" is of particular concern to the historiographers of a conquest such as in the Caribbean because the historiographers are

also the conquerors. The conquerors, then, are invested in creating a history that chronicles their progress while silencing the disenfranchisement of the conquered. Wilson-Tagoe goes on: “the history of slavery and colonialism conceived in such linear terms inevitably presents an image of the West Indian as a victim rather than a creator of history....” (4). The disenfranchised are silenced, erased from the story. The writers of a linear history thus preserve the continuity of the linear model and direct the flow of history towards a natural end in which the conquerors have progressed and Caribbean people are trapped in representations of object and victim, dominated and silenced, left without an articulated history of their own. According to Trouillot, “The classification of all non-Westerners as fundamentally non-historical is tied also to the assumption that history requires a linear and cumulative sense of time that allows the observer to isolate the past as a distinct entity” (7). For Caribbean authors such as Michelle Cliff, it is necessary to challenge this conception of the past.

Caribbean writers such as Michelle Cliff seek to modify the traditional model of history by giving voice to those silenced by the linear model. According to Nana Wilson-Tagoe, “The assumptions of historicism and the misleading symmetry of linear history are now being challenged...Alternative historiographies recognize more than ever before those biases within metahistories that deflate or subvert the histories of the powerless” (37). Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* is a clear example of such a challenge. By the very structure of her novel, Cliff contests the traditional history of Jamaica, recreating erasures and writing over them a counter-history. Rather than move the narrative in a straight line with a beginning, middle, and end, Cliff interrupts Clare Savage’s story in order to

travel to the past and provide unrecognized (by traditional historiography) family and communal histories, myths, and legends of origin and resistance. By juxtaposing past and present, Cliff interrupts the flow of linear time and history and injects her creativity to give a different account of Jamaica's history.

In Chapter Two, Cliff begins her challenge of linear history by juxtaposing what is happening with the protagonist, Clare, and her family on a Sunday in 1958 with a brief, highly detailed introduction to Nanny, who died in 1733:

In 1733, Nanny, the sorceress, the *obeah* woman, was killed by a *quashee*—a slave faithful to the white planters—at the height of the War of the Maroons. Nanny, who could catch a bullet between her buttocks and render the bullet harmless, was from the empire of the Ashanti, and carried the secrets of her magic into slavery. She prepared amulets and oaths for her armies. Her Nanny Town, hidden in the crevices of the Blue Mountains, was the headquarters of the Windward Maroons—who held out against the forces of the white men longer than any rebel troops. The waged war from 1655-1740. Nanny was the magician of this revolution—she used her skill to unite her people and to consecrate their battles. There is absolutely no doubt that she actually existed. And the ruins of her Nanny Town remain difficult to reach. (14)

Cliff's interruption of Clare's story with this passage is a clear example of the novel's confrontation with linear history. She has moved backward through time to introduce the reader to the resistance leader whom she will follow in this way over the course of Clare's story. The authoritative voice of the historian is established by the use of factual details such as dates and the location of Nanny Town. Cliff's statement that "There is absolutely no doubt that she actually existed" is a solid challenge to traditional history, which has omitted Nanny, her magical powers, and her leadership of the Windward Maroons. Cliff has further countered the linear timeline by beginning Nanny's story with

her death and working backward over the course of the novel to discuss her life as a resistance leader. With this passage, Cliff has not only resisted the traditional linear model of history by interrupting the flow of the story to reach backward through time, she is also attacking the representations of slaves that are central to traditional history's ability to silence them. Nanny, as Cliff writes her story, is neither an object nor a victim, but a powerful "sorceress," healer, protector, and warrior doing battle against the oppressor. Significantly, the historical information Cliff provides in the gaps of Clare's story is only available to the reader. That the characters do not have access to this knowledge allows the reader to understand more clearly the impact not knowing one's history can have upon the daily lives of the contemporary characters. Though Nanny's story never becomes known to Clare in the way it is known to the reader, the historical figure of Nanny becomes emblematic of Clare's struggles with identity and self-knowledge.

FILLING IN HISTORY'S GAPS

Cliff challenges official history throughout the text of *Abeng*. According to Noraida Agosto, "Cliff develops her narrative by exposing the gaps and contradictions of official history" (20). Cliff not only exposes the gaps of official history, she fills them with a different accounting of history. For example, in the opening of Chapter Ten, Cliff discusses Christopher Columbus:

Christopher Columbus—whose statue stands in the town squares of so many countries of the New World—the Admiral of the Ocean Sea—the explorer whose body was buried four times: twice in the Americas, twice, and finally, in Spain—

may well have been a Jew himself. At least some scholars are convinced of this...This man, whose journeys had such a profound effect on the history and imagination of the western world, is a relatively mysterious figure in the records of western civilization. He left behind him a reputation for dead reckoning—was he in search of a safe place for Jews—a place out of the Diaspora? So many veils to be lifted. (67)

Remarking upon Columbus's notoriety, Cliff counters that he was actually a mysterious figure and suggests the possibility that there is something significant about him and his travels that is hidden. That Christopher Columbus may have been a Jew searching for a safe place for Jews is not the kind of information that appears in the historical record, which focuses on his conquest of the Caribbean. Also, Cliff concludes the discussion of Columbus by adding information about Black men who sailed with him and others of the major explorers of the day. With this, Cliff is countering history's silence regarding the role of Blacks in the shaping of history.

In her quest to reveal and fill in the gaps of history, Cliff's confronts the history that has been taught in Jamaica's British-controlled school system, which teaches history from the perspective of the colonizer. From this perspective "a sense of history was lost in romance," with the perspective of the enslaved and colonized marginalized (30). Of violence and rebellion, the school system teaches only that

...there had been a freedmen's uprising at Morant Bay in 1865, led by Paul Bogle; but that this rebellion had been unwarranted and of little consequence, and that Bogle had been rightfully executed by the governor...And a sense of history was lost in romance. This history was slight compared to the history of Empire. The politics of freedmen paled beside the politics of commonwealth. (30)

However, as Cliff's omniscient narrator comments, there was sustained and organized rebellion from the beginning of colonization and slavery:

...until freedom was obtained in 1834, there was armed, sustained guerrilla warfare against the forces of enslavement. A complex intelligence system between the rebels and the plantation slaves. A network of towns and farms and camps independent from the white planters. An army of thousands—literally thousands—called Maroons. (20)

Cliff supplies history that has been elided from the official record as presented by the British school system. In another instance of the school system's shortcomings regarding Jamaica's history, Clare, in spite of being taught that "Jamaica had been a slave society," never learns of the economic reasons for the end of slavery because her teachers sidestep the truth when they "hastened to say that England was the first country to free its slaves" (30). Clare does not learn

that one of the reasons the English Parliament and the Crown finally put an end to the slave trade was that because of the Victorian mania for cleanliness, manufacturers needed West African palm oil to make soap—soon the trade in palm oil became more profitable than the trade in men and women and the merchants shifted their investments. (18)

With this passage, Cliff counters the teachings of traditional history and its denial of the true reason for the end of slavery, which was not due to the general benevolence of Britain toward Jamaica, but was purely economic. In these and other passages throughout the text, Cliff refutes traditional history by providing information that traditional history has elided from the record.

A HISTORY OF REBELLIOUS WOMEN

In *The Art of History: An Interview with Michelle Cliff*, Cliff discusses the significance of resistance to the history of the Caribbean:

One of the really important things is teaching that there was resistance. That is equally as important to me as the atrocity part. It's like the Holocaust: people *did* fight back. Yet we're never told that in school. It was something that was done *to* Jews or done *to* blacks and they collaborated in their own oppression. That's not really the case. (Raikin 67)

In *Abeng*, Cliff's focus is on female resistance. The most prominent of Cliff's female resisters is the aforementioned Nanny. Through the inclusion of Nanny, Cliff counters traditional history; according to Springer

Cliff's inclusion of Nanny blatantly validates the resistance of colonized women and offers empowerment to female subjects who may challenge existing colonial cultural narratives by embracing ancestral histories. Nanny's presence in *Abeng* creates a counter-narrative. (46)

Cliff's counter-narrative contests traditional history's representation of slaves as objects and/or victims of colonialism and slavery. With the inclusion of Nanny, the text portrays slavery's resisters, who refused to be enslaved and protected their freedom with violence and subterfuge. Also, Nanny's power is directly linked to her African heritage, a motif we encountered in Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*, and which is erased from traditional history. According to Cliff, Nanny can cast spells on her enemies and "Calls on the goddesses of the Ashanti forest. Remembers the battle formations of the Dahomey Amazons" (19). Cliff, through Nanny, calls upon African heritage to help define Jamaican identity.

Whereas Nanny serves as a leader of war, Mma. Alli rebels within the confines of the Savage plantation. Continuing Nanny's tradition of rebellious leadership and African heritage, she describes herself as "a one-breasted warrior woman [who] represented a tradition which was older than the one which had enslaved them" (34). Mma. Alli

encourages and facilitates escape, and acts as a carrier of the knowledge of Africa, describing for the children “the places they had all come from, where one-breasted women were bred to fight” (34). With the character of Mma. Alli, who “had never lain with a man...she had only loved women that way,” Cliff adds the homosexual voice to her confrontation with history. Mma. Alli empowers women sexually, helping them “To keep their bodies as their own, even while they were made subject to the whimsical violence of the justice and his slavedrivers” (35). Of Mma. Alli and her sexual empowerment of the women on the plantation, Springer remarks that

Cliff’s Mma. Alli provides a safe community for women to learn about their bodies and to learn how to claim them through sensual touch. When women become familiar with their bodies, they are able to transform from victims to victors; their bodies are no longer simply sexualized objects to be exploited but become sites of pleasure...Thus, the same bodies that were subjected to abuse and violation will now become rightfully theirs and empower them to resist oppression. Their rebel spirits are being nurtured and tapped through Mma. Alli’s guidance, which initiated a much needed resistance. (49)

The path from sexual self-ownership to rebellion is most significantly expressed through Mma. Alli’s relationship with Inez.

While Mma. Alli maintains a strong bond with the men, women, and children on the plantation, her most significant relationship in the text is with Inez, whose heritage includes a “half-blood Miskito Indian” mother and a father who was “a Maroon, an Ashanti from the Gold Coast,” marking Inez as another of Cliff’s female rebels (36). Taken as a concubine and raped repeatedly by Judge Savage, Inez “had survived by planning her escape, waiting for emancipation, devising a way to avenge herself—all of these things. She had been taught the ways of her mother’s people and the ways of the

Maroons, and she made spells with feathers and stones and shells and tried to work her way out” (34). As part of her plan to escape, Inez seeks out Mma. Alli, who “taught her more about *obeah* and magic,” and with an erotic encounter, assists Inez in aborting a baby that was the result of being raped (34). After the encounter Inez returns to the great house “with a new-found power” which enables her to finally escape the judge (35). The lives of Nanny, Mma. Alli, and Inez forge counter-narratives against traditional history, which has silenced slave rebellion, the female voice, and the cultural traditions of Africa and Amerindians. Cliff’s inclusion of these rebel women whose lives run parallel to Clare’s illustrates that there is a history of female rebellion in Jamaica, a history from which Clare may draw strength as she progresses toward her own rebellion.

Clare Savage, as Springer puts it, “is indeed a rebel in her own right. She is aware of the constraints and limitations of class, race, gender, and sexuality, and with this realization she challenges these categories” (Springer 52). She does in fact progress toward rebellion over the course of the text. Clare comes to challenge traditional history and societal norms as taught by her parents and the British school system. Clare’s parents, Boy and Kitty Savage, are both of mixed heritage, but they configure a dichotomy that confuses Clare’s identity. Boy is a descendant of Judge Savage, the white owner of Paradise Plantation, and denies any African heritage. According to Cliff, “The definition of what a Savage was like was fixed by color, class, and religion, and over the years a carefully contrived mythology was constructed, which they used to protect their identities...They wanted to forget about Africa” (30). Boy strives to educate the light-skinned, green-eyed Clare about her whiteness and the “duty” she bears because of it:

Boy taught his eldest daughter that she came from his people—white people, he stressed—and he expected Clare to preserve his green eyes and light skin—those things she had been born with. And she had a duty to try to turn the green eyes blue, once and for all—and make the skin, now gold, become pale and subject to visible sunburn. These things she should pursue. (127)

Kitty's allegiance, on the other hand, lies with "darkness." Clare concludes that her mother "cherished darkness" because of "her actions—her private tears, her trips to distribute food and clothing, her attention to the ancient knowledge, and her belief in the power of this" (127). Kitty, however, deflects to Boy and what he wants to teach Clare and "wore her love for Black people—her people—in silence" (127). Kitty's silence leads Clare "to see how silence can become complicity" so that Kitty cannot stand as a counter to Boy's doctrine. Clare is thus denied her mother's black identity.

The Savage daughters are caught between these differing allegiances, which solidly define the identities of their parents. For Clare, this breeds confusion about her own "in-between" identity. According to Murdoch, "Clare is literally caught between these opposing avatars of ethnicity, culture and history embodied by her parents" (81). Clare's confusion is deepened by her lack of knowledge about both her parents' and Jamaica's history.

What Clare does not know—her family history as well as Jamaica's history—frustrates her attempts at self-identification, and this frustration is only expounded by her education. Clare's search for cultural and self-identity is frustrated by the school system's distortions of history because, according to H. Adlai Murdoch, "being denied such knowledge means being denied at least the basis for the articulation, validation, and valorization of identity" (78). Because of her frustrated attempts at self-identity, Clare

commits multiple acts of resistance that lead to a final violent rebellion. These acts of resistance progress from thought to violent action, solidifying Clare's connection to the historical female rebels whose stories run parallel to her own.

HISTORY AND IDENTITY

According to Ilmonen, "In postcolonial literature the question of identity and its constructedness is intertwined with the question of history" (110). This is certainly true of *Abeng*, wherein both the national identity of Jamaica and Clare Savage's self-identity are presented as fractured. For the characters of *Abeng*, it is clear that, as Alfred López states, "what the post-independence subject does not know or is not told—especially about whiteness and its imbrication within the nation's cultural history—can and does hurt them" (174). Cliff makes clear that a confrontation with history is necessary to the formation of a postcolonial Jamaican identity. This is illustrated by the Tabernacle and its churchgoers. The Tabernacle and its Christian belief system is a remnant of colonialism; in the Tabernacle there is a "white Jesus" whose worship does nothing to soothe the temptation that "could not be filled with hymn-singing or sermons..." (16). The long opening of Chapter Three provides for the reader the history that is kept from the congregation. The words "They did not know" are repeated throughout to emphasize the disconnect between the Jamaican people and the history that shapes their present:

The congregation did not know that African slaves had been primarily household servants...No one had told the people in the Tabernacle that of all the slave societies in the New World, Jamaica was considered among the most brutal. They did not know that the death rate of Africans in Jamaica under slavery exceeded the rate of birth...They did not know that some slaves worked with their

faces locked in masks of tin, so they would not eat the sugar cane as they cut. Or that there were very few white women on the island during slavery, and so the grandmothers of these people sitting on a church on a Sunday evening during mango season, had been violated again and again by the very men who whipped them. (18)

This passage achieves multiple ends; while it exposes a hidden history for the reader, it also illuminates the link between history and identity, past and present. Moving from the history of distant ancestors to ancestors seated among them in the church, Cliff has effectively shown the power of history to shape identities and the current social structure of Jamaica. Clare Savage is like other members of Jamaican society in that she has been denied knowledge of Jamaica's hidden history of violence and rebellion, African and Amerindian tradition, and the role of women in the shaping of Jamaica's national identity. Because of this lack of knowledge, Clare, like her unknown counterparts, must rebel in order to shape her identity. Clare stands as an example of the rebellious spirit of the past that must continue in the present if Jamaica is to have a full national identity. Cliff mediates past and present through Clare, who embodies the struggle for identity in the face of what traditional history has left behind. Though slavery is no longer an issue, Clare is left to rebel against dichotomies of black and white, rich and poor, male and female. In 1958, on the eve of Jamaica's independence from Britain, Clare's becomes a creator of a new chapter of Jamaican history.

Where the British school system fails to give Clare access to a full and meaningful history that includes slavery, rebellion, and in particular the rebellions of women in Jamaica, Clare's parents fail also to impart her family's history to her.

According to Ilmonen, “Clare’s father is the bearer of the hegemonic version of history. Boy’s reading of history is Eurocentric and colonial, like the history taught in school” (116). Boy continuously extols whiteness while occluding his family’s brutal history of slavery. Clare and Boy’s visit to the former great house of Paradise Plantation is an example of this; as they go from room to room inside the property, Boy tells Clare of the riches brought to the house from Europe, “describing, filling in the room(s) for his daughter” (25). In the backyard, where “the only signs of a former life were the foundation stones of some of the outbuildings, and faint gullies marking the earth where others had been,” Boy fails to tell Clare that “(t)hese buildings out back, only a few yards from the great house, had once contained molasses and rum and slaves—the points of conjunction of the system known as the Triangle Trade” (25). Contemplating the great house later, Clare experiences disappointment, sensing that the history she longed for had not been revealed to her: “The house was not at all what she had expected. It was as though she had wanted it to be a time machine rather than a relic. A novel rather than obituary. She wanted to know the people who had lived there...” (36). Significantly, Clare’s disappointment leads to rejection of the house and the disappointment it represents: “She had had expectations of the great house. Now—she wished that the fire in the canefields would spread to the house and that it would burn down to the ground” (37). In wishing for the great house to burn, Clare is rejecting her father’s values and rebelling against traditional history. Again interrupting the flow of Clare’s story, Cliff provides for the reader the true history of the plantation, in which Judge Savage burned his slaves, including Mma. Alli, alive rather than see them emancipated.

Clare further resists the suppression of historical knowledge by her teachers and her father when she reads Anne Frank's diary. Clare is compelled by the plight and death of Anne Frank, and seeks an explanation of the Holocaust from her teachers, whose evasive answers leave Clare with the impression that her educators see Jews as complicit in their own suffering:

When the teachers finally got around to the event known as the Holocaust, they became vague again—and their descriptions crystallized into one judgment: Jews were expected to suffer. It was a fate which had been meted out to them because of their recalcitrance in belief, their devotion to their own difference. (70)

Clare comes away from her teacher's explanation feeling confused and seeks answers from her father, who extends what Clare has heard from her teachers. According to Boy, "...Jews were smart people and should have known better than to antagonize Adolf Hitler...When Clare pressed him for more information, he reverted to Christian dogma that the Jews had willfully, his word, turned their backs on salvation" (72). Clare continues to press Boy, but is ultimately dissatisfied with his answers. She resists by forging her mother's name at the library in order to study books about the Holocaust. As Cliff states, "...this child became compelled by the life and death of Anne Frank. She was reaching, without knowing it, for an explanation of her own life" (72). Without the ability to discover her own history, Clare has turned to the history of the Jews as a surrogate.

In her search for identity, Clare has come to understand that she will not receive answers from her father or her education, as both suppress information and fail to provide her with the historical knowledge she seeks. Clare takes action against that suppression

by forging her mother's name at the library where she studies books on the Holocaust, taking her education and the gathering of knowledge into her own hands. As she studies, Clare expounds upon the parallel between herself and Anne Frank to parallel the lives of blacks and Jews: "Clare had learned that just as Jews were expected to suffer in a Christian world, so were dark people expected to suffer in a white one" (77). In this circuitous way, Clare has quenched her thirst for knowledge of the oppression and suffering of not only Anne Frank and the Jews, but also herself and the people of Jamaica. By taking her education into her own hands, Clare has circumvented oppression by her father and the British school system.

Clare's final and most dangerous act of rebellion comes in reaction to gender oppression. It is at the event of a hog killing that Clare witnesses a division of gender roles; Clare's male playmates and their father attend to the hog while Clare is ordered by her grandmother to stay in the house. Later, after the hog is killed, Clare overhears the boys planning to cook and eat the hog's penis. When she asks to participate, she is told that "Dis sint'ing no fe gal dem" (57). Clare feels "that keen pain that comes from exclusion" and bursts into tears, which both infuriates and motivates her to seek empowerment of the kind the boys are given simply because they are male. Clare plans, along with her female playmate and friend Zoe, to hunt and kill the legendary wild boar, Massa Cudjoe, which "(n)o one had ever been able to kill..." (112). With this, Cliff aligns Clare with the rebellious spirit of the Maroons, who "stalked and hunted (wild pigs) for food" (112). Springer discusses the significance of Clare's plan:

...Clare illustrates the rebellious disposition of women such as Nanny, who also hunted prey of her own, whether it was food for sustenance or members of the British army. She resists the confines of societal interpretations of femininity by planning to perform an act that is viewed as 'a man's t'ing.' In response to the boy cousins' hunt and their exclusion of her, Clare's hunt challenges gender prescriptions internalized by other women. If her hunt proved successful she would have proven her point that she will not be restricted by normative interpretations of what a woman's place should be. (53)

Clare takes a gun and ammunition and goes into the woods with Zoe, actions that solidify her position among the rebellious women in the text, particularly Nanny. In spite of the gaps and erasures of history Clare is faced with, she carries within her the spirit of resistance; like Nanny, Mma. Alli, and Inez, Clare does not accept her lot and rebels against it. Unfortunately for Clare, her plan fails; firing the gun toward a man who is ogling her and Zoe as they sunbathe naked, Clare shoots and kills her grandmother's bull. What Clare garners from this experience is that violence, which Cliff has illustrated is sometimes necessary to rebellion, is difficult to control and has steep consequences. Clare, who "had been caught in the rebellion," is forced to consider the depth and breadth of rebellion and what it entails (150). In spite of this failure, it is clear that Clare's search for identity is not complete; therefore, neither is her rebellion.

CONCLUSION

Cliff uses multiple strategies to counter traditional history. Chief among these is the inclusion of not only slavery's violent horrors, but also the violent and steadfast rebellion of the Maroons. This is symbolized by the inclusion of Nanny and other female rebels who are active participants in the shaping of Jamaica's national identity, which also includes African and Amerindian culture. Cliff challenges the method of telling

history in a linear fashion by juxtaposing past and present and illuminating the relationship between the two. Cliff's narrative acts as a corrective to traditional history, unearthing the hidden and unknown history of Jamaica and refuting what Britain teaches its colony about the politics of slavery and freedom.

Through the modern figures of 1958—Clare and her family—Cliff negotiates the effects of past history upon the present struggles of Jamaican people. Through the character of Clare and her struggles against traditional history and for self-identity, Cliff makes clear that rebellion is a necessary component to the creation of not only personal but national identity. Clare is a creator in the new chapter of Jamaica's history, wherein the struggle for identity requires a rebellion against not only traditional history's teachings, but also of its resulting social structures. Cliff's deconstruction of traditional history and her confrontation with its claims uncovers the multifaceted "true" history of Jamaica and its peoples.

CONCLUSION

The history of the Caribbean is at best complex in the extreme. It is complicated by conquest, colonization, and slavery, all brutally and violently carried out. From the “discovery” of the islands by Columbus, native Caribbeans were dehumanized and objectified in order that they be disenfranchised, conquered, and controlled. Later, African slaves came to the Caribbean to continue the work of colonization and suffered the same brutality and dehumanization as the natives who had been virtually wiped out by the Europeans who conquered the region.

At the end of slavery, the Caribbean was left with a historiography that was told from the perspective of the conquerors and which silenced the natives and the enslaved. This traditional historiography is incomplete, inadequate, and skewed to suit the vision of Europeans who colonized the Caribbean. Modern Caribbean peoples are left with the task of refuting the history that represents them as objects in the enterprise of colonization and denies them autonomy, power, and voice. This history must be transcended if the Caribbean is to have a cultural and sociopolitical identity.

Caribbean thinkers and artists face many struggles as they endeavor to pursue that identity. Chief among those is the internalization of the object/victim representations left by traditional history. Other obstacles include linguistic enmeshment and social

dichotomies that situate Caribbean peoples as inferior to Europeans. For the Caribbean artist, creative license is another issue; with this, the artist must strike a balance between creative license and exploitation. Caribbean creative writers, especially, face the difficulty of grappling with the history of the Caribbean as they seek to create Caribbean identities. Since history and identity are interrelated, it is with history that creative writers must first contend. In so doing, the creative writer confronts, challenges, and refutes traditional history's representations of Caribbean peoples.

Authors Alejo Carpentier and Michelle Cliff each take up the challenge of history in their novels, *The Kingdom of This World* and *Abeng*, respectively. Each of these authors contends with traditional history by including the slave perspective and slave rebellion. In *The Kingdom of This World*, Carpentier portrays the multiple rebellions making up the Haitian Revolution from the point of view of the slaves. He delves into the cultural and religious practices that inform the slave's will to be free of slavery and oppression. Likewise, Michelle Cliff illuminates the rebellions of the Windward Maroons, escaped slaves and natives who fought against slavery from the mountains of Jamaica.

Both texts also seek an African ancestry in uncovering the identity of the Caribbean. Carpentier's *Macandal* tells tales of African culture in order to inspire identification with a powerful culture among the enslaved. He speaks of African gods and goddesses and encourages the slaves to continue African religious belief systems. Though to a lesser degree, Cliff also harkens to an African ancestry with the characters of Nanny and Mma. Alli. Both are African, and like *Macandal*, tell stories of African

culture. In both texts, this inspires pride among the slaves and provides them with an identity as well as the will to be free.

However, the texts are focused on opposite genders. For example, Carpentier's text is male-centered, while Cliff's feminist text focuses on the female. Carpentier's focus is on male leaders Macandal and Bouckman, who use Vodou as a source of empowerment for the slaves. Cliff's text, however, focuses on female leadership. Nanny leads the Windward Maroons in rebellion against slavery, while Mma. Alli comforts and empowers the slaves on Paradise Plantation. Both of these female leaders serve as a source of power to Cliff's female protagonist as she struggles with self-identity and oppressive social structures regarding femininity. In her text, Cliff strives to give voice not only to the enslaved, but particularly to the female.

For Carpentier, the "facts" of traditional history are used to emplot the story, but he adds the perspective of the enslaved to those facts, as well as the marvelous real. Carpentier includes the religious practices and beliefs of the slaves and relates those to traditional history. Cliff, on the other hand, repeatedly counters the "facts" of history by adding hidden information to her story. Cliff counters history when she discusses the reasons for the end of slavery and the Maroon rebellions against slavery. With her fictional characters, Cliff explicates the brutality and horror of slavery practices, such as Judge Savage's burning of his slaves.

What is most important about these works of historical fiction is that they each confront and refute traditional history. Carpentier and Cliff each challenge traditional

history's gaps, erasures, and false representations by giving history a new perspective. There is, with the histories they provide, a fuller understanding of the history of the Caribbean. The silenced have been given a voice, and their stories have finally been told.

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