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The Present Impasse: Hemispheric American Modernism and the Poetics of History

By

Aristides Dimitriou

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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Marcial Gonzalez, Chair

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Professor Steven S. Lee

Professor Richard Cándida-Smith

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## Abstract

### The Present Impasse: Hemispheric American Modernism and the Poetics of History

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My dissertation, “The Present Impasse: Hemispheric American Modernism and the Poetics of History,” shows how U.S., Caribbean, and Latin American authors innovated with narrative to conceptualize the course of history as U.S. expansionism threatened to replace, rather than rout, French, Spanish, and British empires. Alejo Carpentier, John Rechy, and Zora Neale Hurston, I argue, experimented with temporal elements of narrative emplotment, such as order, duration, and frequency, to align the passage of time with the unfolding of history. In doing so, they mediated the collision of repeating and overlapping empires in the hemispheric American South: an experience rendered cyclical in narrative discourse and, as such, one that contests the linear progress most commonly associated with modernity. Their work, therefore, presents a new modernist understanding of historical time: one in which the expectation of social change collapses back onto the experience of the past and promises not a divergent future but rather an eternal return of the same. In this way, cyclical time marks an impasse in narrative chronology that parallels the “present impasse” from which history is perceived to encounter the antinomies of colonial Enlightenment and reproduce the racialized social relations of empire. In response to this impasse, each work introduces the need for an alternative temporality of “the untimely,” i.e., an iteration of the premodern past or the unmodern present that nonetheless highlights the conditions of possibility with which modernity may be reconstituted in the future.

Beyond my first chapter, which details the advent of U.S. intervention and expansion in what Édouard Glissant termed “the Other America,” my second chapter focuses on Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World* (1949) to showcase the untimely dimension of the marvelous real, or *lo real maravilloso*: a transatlantic aesthetic and philosophical treatise that introduced a “historical counterpoint” to U.S. empire in Cuba and Haiti. My second chapter shifts from the Caribbean to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands to examine how Rechy’s *City of Night* (1963) responds to successive waves of internal colonialism by fashioning an untimely temporality that attempts to envision a reparative experience beyond racial and sexual intersectionality. My fourth chapter demonstrates how Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) approaches the reemergence of empire with an affirmative concept of history that proposes a philosophy of self-determination and calls for decolonial change in the hemispheric South. This chapter is followed by a brief comparative coda that demonstrates how each author contributed to the emergence of what we could call, if only heuristically, a hemispheric American modernism: one

that distinguishes itself from European and Anglo-American modernism and illuminates the neo-imperial challenges against which the next generation of authors, amid U.S. Civil Rights and “Third-World” independence movements, would have to face.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: U.S. Empire and the Narrative Poetics of a Hemispheric Global Modernism

A Martinican political figure imagined as a bitter joke that in the year 2100, tourists would be invited by satellite advertisement to visit this island and gain firsthand knowledge of “what a colony was like in past centuries.” This bitter laughter disguises a widespread anxiety: an inability to escape the present impasse.<sup>1</sup>

Édouard Glissant begins *Caribbean Discourse* [*Le discours antillais*] with this anecdote to emphasize not the subject of his study but rather the “present impasse” that inspired it: an inability to overcome the “mirages of social and economic progress” that justify French departmentalization in a supposed post-colony.<sup>2</sup> This impasse, he adds, is “an inspired creation of the colonial structure,” and, as such, it is neither unique to Martinique nor to his own present.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it belongs to a history of empire in the U.S. South, the Caribbean, and Latin America: regions of the hemisphere to which Glissant refers collectively as “the Other America.”<sup>4</sup> This impasse, then, concerns a transnational phenomenon and one, moreover, that is introduced here by reference to a problem of historical time. After all, the presence of a “satellite advertisement” in “the year 2100” relies on a presupposition of linear chronology, but the telos of a future in which tourists “visit this island” to witness “a colony ... in past centuries” introduces a historical experience of non-linearity. The juxtaposition of these discrete temporalities suggests that the present can be understood only as a recurrence of the colonial past so long as the future remains unimaginable outside of empire’s return. Importantly, “a bitter joke” introduces this dual temporality, while its second iteration as “laughter,” modified by the same “bitter” adjective, generates a repetition that renders cause and effect, i.e., joke and laughter, semantically interchangeable. Far from being epiphenomenal, then, both temporalities are shown to constitute the impasse that is reconciled here only by the rhetorical effect of paradox—a conceptual coherence that nonetheless fails to reconcile the historical contradiction that gives it credence.

Glissant’s anecdote showcases a unique temporal experience endemic to the hemispheric American South: a recurring reproduction of imperial social relations, created by a “long succession of ... countless revolts since the eighteenth century,” each followed by “periods of [state] repression.”<sup>5</sup> As did many authors of the black radical tradition before him, Glissant points to the Haitian Revolution to exemplify how the potential for racial and political independence was tragically compromised when Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe adopted the same colonial hierarchies that they sought to abolish.<sup>6</sup> But Glissant alludes to the literary representation of this “tragic return” in what he calls “the novel of the ‘Other America’” by referencing a condition of “lived modernity” that, in another passage, he aligns obliquely with “the same phenomenon in the United States.”<sup>7</sup> Aside from comparing some of the contradictions of the Haitian Revolution to those of the American Revolution and, in shifting to his own present, denouncing the “strange barbarism” of U.S. enterprise in Liberia and Micronesia, Glissant does not expound further on the inter-American phenomenon of U.S. expansionism.<sup>8</sup> And yet, during the first half of the twentieth century, the global power of the United States grew steadily, expanding not only its geographical reach but also the extent to which it could mediate,

or interpose, the cultural production of the peripheral U.S. South and the Caribbean, i.e., of the “Other America” to which this reemergence of empire presented yet another impasse.

Between 1901 and 1954, the United States seized the economic and political infrastructure of Cuba; occupied and restored slave labor in Haiti; and mobilized segregationist policy to militarize the US-Mexico borderlands.<sup>9</sup> These interventions and expansions, however, not only presented new threats to national autonomy; they also reprised old ones. During the first half of the twentieth-century, the Caribbean and Latin America remained tied to dominant and residual structures of French, Spanish, and British empires. Already, therefore, these regions were bound to an inter-imperial nexus that threatened either the political sovereignty of new republics or the liberation movements seeking independence across the hemispheric South.<sup>10</sup> Within this context, the United States introduced a reemergence of empire under the pretense of foreign aid and stabilization, which manifested itself differently yet in similar function to imperial forces already governing these regions. While not usually thought to hold a colonial relationship to the United States, the incorporated regions of the U.S. South and Southwest also fall under this purview. Although they were brought into the Union after 1865, these distinct regions were governed by the policies of Jim Crow segregation, the influence of Reconstruction-era white supremacy, the unregulated violence of the Texas Rangers, and the militarization of the borderlands by the U.S. Army. Minority groups in these peripheral regions of the nation, therefore, were experiencing their own forms of internal colonialism,<sup>11</sup> holding a relation to the nation state analogous to that which colonial subjects hold to an imperial metropole. It is during the unfolding of this history that modernists, writing from these peripheral zones, began to understand modernity as a mode of experience that was not only introduced by empire in the late fifteenth century but also redefined in the twentieth century by empire’s “tragic return.”

This dissertation will take a closer look at a group of U.S. and Caribbean authors who, in sensing this reemergence of the imperial past, experimented with narrative discourse to conceptualize historical time as a structure capable of repeating itself.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, I examine the work of three authors that together offer a critical view not only of what Glissant termed “the novel of the Other America” but also the emergence of U.S. empire that I outline above. Alejo Carpentier, John Rechy, and Zora Neale Hurston, I argue, develop a *poetics*, or construction of narrative emplotment, that aligns the perceived course of history with the unfolding of collective experience across time. By employing elements of narrative discourse that structure the perception of temporality, such as order, duration, and frequency, these authors mediate the inter-American history of repeating and overlapping imperial hierarchies.<sup>13</sup> What emerges is a cyclical experience of historical time, underwritten by the inter-imperial collision of U.S. expansionism as it reproduces, rather than routs, French, Spanish, and British imperial orders in the Americas.

This experience of cyclicity marks the “present impasse” that ultimately contests the notion of linear, irreversible progress: the historical time that Koselleck and many others commonly ascribed to modernity. In doing so, they presented a new modernist relation to historical time: one in which the expectation of social change collapses back onto the experience of the past, promising not a divergent futurity but rather a return of the same. This confrontation

with a distinctly hemispheric American recurrence, however, gives rise not only to the mediation of history in narrative form but also to the call for history's radical reconfiguration. As such, each author introduces a second temporality: an *untimely* presence of the deep past, or an alternative present, which works upon the lived experience of time consciousness to imagine and even summon a divergent future.<sup>14</sup> The untimely, that is, appears in each text as a trace of the premodern past or the unmodern present, which nonetheless evinces the conditions of possibility with which a new modernity may be constituted. Forming a second temporality that is configured in narrative but also, as in Glissant's example above, represented conceptually, the untimely intercepts the first temporality of cyclical recurrence, and in doing so, it challenges the lived experience and time consciousness of the present. To write the untimely into being, as Elizabeth Grosz notes, "is precisely what it means to write for a future that the present cannot recognize."<sup>15</sup> It is no surprise, then, that the untimely challenges the realist mode of representation in similar ways across each individual text: an intrusion of the mythic, the marvelous, the surreal, the primitive—a destabilization of the semantic field beyond the rule of metaphor. As such, the untimely provides a trace of time's *other*, thereby imagining an alternative and divergent timeliness that is imperceptible yet palpably inviting all at once.

To demonstrate how the perception of imperial recurrence mediates these texts and how these texts, in turn, mediate the representation of recurrence using a narrative poetics of history that intersects timely and untimely temporalities, I turn to Paul Ricoeur's concept of emplotment. Following Ricoeur's early work, I take "temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal."<sup>16</sup> Ricoeur further developed this relationship between temporality and narrativity in *Time and Narrative* [*Temps et récit*] (1983) by rethinking Aristotle's *Poetics* to develop the concept of emplotment. This process of emplotment entails "the mediating operations between lived experience and discourse": those which produce "concordance over discordance," or give order to disorder, precisely by fashioning a "plot of lived temporal experience."<sup>17</sup> It is in this sense that, for Ricoeur, Aristotle's whole project relies on the crucial pairing of "emplotment (*muthos*) and mimetic activity (*mimesis*)," subsuming both under "the adjective 'poetic' (with its implied noun, 'art')." It alone puts the mark of production, construction, dynamism" on the resulting structures of emplotment.<sup>18</sup> This is why, for Ricoeur, Aristotle's *muthos*, or emplotment, must be understood to signify not a "system" but rather "the active sense of organizing the events into a system," i.e., "of composing plots."<sup>19</sup> In constituting "the activity that produces plots in relation to every sort of static structure [or] a-chronological paradigm," emplotment can be understood to encompass the literary and historical mediation that I have been discussing here.<sup>20</sup> In turn, we can understand this kind of mediation as one that enables what I will reference throughout this dissertation as a poetics of history.

The connection between narrative poetics and history itself, however, becomes clearer when considering how the former gives over to the latter a particular kind of conceptualization. Walter Benjamin's oft-quoted "On the Concept of History" ["*Über den Begriff der Geschichte*"] (1940), also translated as "Theses on the Philosophy of History," becomes useful to my purposes here. It does so not simply because it was written during the same time period on which my

study focuses, although surely its proximity to the works I am considering here merits further attention. Focusing on what decades later Hayden White termed “prefiguration,” or the constituting presuppositions of perception under which history is written, Benjamin criticized the Rankean conservatism of nineteenth-century historiographers. He reserved no higher estimation, however, for Germany’s Social Democratic Party of the 1920s and 1930s, especially for what he considered to be their abusive appropriation of historical materialism. It was not the political party but rather their idea of progress, i.e., of continuous, eternal, and inevitable social development guaranteed by the “‘laws’ of historical events” that constitutes the primary target of Benjamin’s critique—and one that others, following Benjamin have echoed in rejecting the “homogenous empty time” of other passive, unmediated concepts of history.<sup>21</sup>

As many have noted, Benjamin’s alternatives are aphoristic, thoroughly intertextual, and consequently enigmatic at times; nevertheless, they offer a view into the sense of urgency with which he imagined a more reparative concept of history. One of his many epigraphs, excised from Nietzsche’s *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*, states that “we need history, but our need differs from that of the jaded idlers in the garden of knowledge.”<sup>22</sup> If we consider Nietzsche’s own alternative, we get a clearer picture of Benjamin’s purpose: “We need history for life and action,” so concepts of history must be “untimely” because “they act against the age and so have an effect on the age to the advantage, it is to be hoped, of a coming age.”<sup>23</sup> History, then, by virtue of its potential non-identity with the present, can and must be put to use for practical, and not merely reflective, ends. And by the same logic, the present, although beholden to the unfixity of continual flux, must be configured to fashion a past whose official history may secure a future worth living. It is in this sense that Nietzsche’s “untimely” [*Unzeitgemässe*] offers Benjamin one of many intertextual mediations on the way to developing his notion of a messianic “Now-time” that removes flux from the notion of the present altogether.<sup>24</sup> Benjamin’s affinity for Nietzschean metaphysics, of course, does not eclipse his more radical, albeit seemingly contradictory, commitments. Through a heterodox combination of romantic, revolutionary, messianic, and Marxist approaches, Benjamin’s conceptualization of historical process, however marked by the negative polarity of the Frankfurt School, is driven by an affirmation of class struggle that locates in “the tradition of the oppressed” a valuable lesson: “that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that accords with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency.”<sup>25</sup> Benjamin demanded a kind of writing whose conception of history—itself an unavoidable component of prefiguration—offered a way to view the present with a terrible sense of urgency. With this hope, Benjamin turned away from the reified concept of progress to imagine how the past could offer a catalytic potential for transformation, precisely during a historical moment whose need for change paralleled the degree to which its own social conditions were most resistant to it.

More recently, in building on what Michael Oakeshott called the “practical past,” Hayden White remarked on a similar need to construe history in a manner that could lend greater urgency and plurality to questions of political change:

Even within the area of the past theorized as ‘history’ there are large parts of it that are not accessible by historiological methods or, as in the case of personal memories, do not count as parts of ‘the historical past.’ But these non-historical parts of the historical past—the contents of which are made up of individual and group memories—are actually more important for the production of the kind of knowledge that individuals and groups require for the solution of practical problems of judgment, choice, and decision about how to construe the historical present. Oakeshott calls this part of the past ‘the practical past’ to postulate a difference between the study of the past motivated by scientific or theoretical questions and that part of it motivated by ethical and political questions.<sup>26</sup>

These ethico-political motivations, largely registered by the very forms of memory and experience excluded from official history, give us cause for deliberation regarding how to construe the historical present. Moreover, they give us cause to extract unofficial histories from autobiographical literary narratives, such as Rechy’s *City of Night*; *roman à clefs*, such as Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; and historiographical narratives that retain a deep, homologous relationship to the author’s own contemporaneous history, such as Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World*. Much as Benjamin’s meditations “on the concept of history” largely correspond to the politicized geography of Nazi-occupied Europe and the direction in which history, as he saw it, appeared to be moving forward while failing to progress, the authors I examine here were writing amid their own politicized environments. Whether coming to grips with the United States’ occupation of Haiti, its interventions and expansions in Cuba, or its militarization of the borderlands, these authors rendered their own “present impasse” not an exception but the rule. And in doing so, they developed a narrative epistemology of historical recurrence through a form of emplotment mediated not only by empire but also by the need for a practical past with which to construe an untimely vision for a divergent history of the present.<sup>27</sup>

In my first chapter, “Different Substance, Different Form: Alejo Carpentier and the Narrative Poetics of Untimely Return,” I produce a new understanding of Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso*, or “marvelous real”: an epistemology that collapses physical and metaphysical dichotomies not merely to revise European surrealism but rather to offer an untimely concept of history that mediates Caribbean and Latin American anxieties over U.S. expansionism. Carpentier’s emplotment of cyclical recurrence aligns historical time with his own “present impasse” in the hemispheric American South. The narrative poetics that unfolds in the process, however, leverages the capacity of one temporality to make available an alternative one across multiple levels of narrative discourse. The untimely temporal dimension that emerges here, offered by the *muthos* and negative mimesis of what Carpentier termed the marvelous real, comes to reveal a deep past that, although rendered compromised by the present to which it led, discloses the conditions of intelligibility with which to rethink the course for a radically different future. Appearing after the *mundonovismo* movement [New Worldism] in Latin America yet retaining its search for a genuine inter-American identity, Carpentier’s untimely discourse reveals a troubled negotiation of a European continent ostensibly “in decline” and an American continent riven by the advent of U.S. empire. I concentrate on *The Kingdom of This World* [*El reino de este mundo*] (1949), while incorporating valuable considerations from other works, such as *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* (1933) and *The Lost Steps* [*Pasos perdidos*] (1953), to present an

understanding of time and history in Carpentier's work that is significant to every other text in my study: an effort to problematize and respond to the temporal dynamics of inter-imperial recurrence by forging a modernist epistemology of history that calls for a transformation of modernity itself.

My second chapter, "Outlaw Aesthetics: John Rechy and the Narrative Poetics of a Borderlands Modernism," shifts from Cuba to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands: a geography whose landscape and culture, together with Haiti's and Venezuela's, inspired Carpentier's "marvelous real" in the first place. From this site, Rechy composed *City of Night* (1963), an experimental Chicana novel whose innovations with time and history have received little to no attention. This novel foregrounds a phenomenology of time experience primarily to represent the recurrence of sexual repression. It does so, moreover, while demonstrating the active production of a U.S. national imaginary that attempts to subsume the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. But the importance of the borderlands to the novel's own recurring construction of symbolic and metonymic meaning generates a powerful tension in emplotment that aligns Rechy's own personal impasse, i.e., of acceptance and denial, with the "present impasse" of social mobility and stasis in the borderlands. Unlike Carpentier's attempt to leverage an untimely past against the reproduction of empire, Rechy endeavors to mobilize an untimely present, against which the reproduction of empire continually reemerges. That is, the internal colonialism of the present reprises the long history of inter-imperial governance rooted in the borderlands on which his narrative relies: from the conquest to the Mexican Revolution, to the Cristero War, to Operation Wetback—the last of which militarized a geography still reeling from the Great Depression and Jim Crow segregation in the Southwest. In this way, the U.S.-Mexico border marks a geographical point of origin and terminus, mediating the long history of colonialism in the United States through traces of migration and minoritarian intersectionality—traces that link the causation of sexual repression to the affective registers of race, class, and coloniality in the novel. As such, Rechy renders the presence of the borderlands ubiquitous, disclosing not only a dissolution of the national imaginary but also the imperial return that made it possible. Contrasting this recurrence is the vision of an untimely course rendered accessible only by an indeterminate temporality that the present, as the novel avowedly and expressly shows, cannot attain.

My third chapter, "Generative Catastrophe: Zora Neale Hurston and the Racial Discourse of a Primitivist Bildung," offers both a point and counterpoint to the other chapters in this project. Hurston shifts our attention not back to the Caribbean as with Carpentier or to the U.S. South as with Rechy but rather to a transnational space between and across both of them. Hurston's ethnographic study of U.S. Southern and Caribbean folklore not only informed *Tell My Horse* (1938) and *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) but also inspired *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), which was written in Haiti amid the fallout of a long and devastating period of U.S. occupation. Inspired by Franz Boas, Hurston's racial discourse mounts a significant opposition to biological determinism and internalized racism that draws from the social dynamics she witnessed while working as an ethnographer in Florida, Jamaica, and Haiti. This "hemispheric parallax," or cross-regional triangulation of racial consciousness, amounted to an innovative narrative poetics constituted by the intersection of cyclical and linear temporalities. As linear time progresses forward in her novel, so-called civilization dissolves, giving way to an untimely

past that is nonetheless oriented by a narrative progression into the future. This primitivist *Bildung* redeems a vision of renewal against the logic of universal history endemic not only to Eurocentric models of civilization but also to models of biological development that, as she witnessed, had been internalized by the black diaspora of the United States and the Caribbean. For Hurston, however, this dissolution of internal discord comes about by external conflict. Unlike Carpentier and Rechy, Hurston was at once critical and welcoming of U.S. intervention: a paradoxical orientation that nevertheless mobilized a conflict-driven, anti-colonial vision of national liberation through a political framework of generative catastrophe. In turn, this approach entails a deep affirmation of the historical past that allows us to revisit her creative work in surprisingly new ways. I follow this chapter with a brief comparative coda to take stock of the hemispheric global modernism that disclosed the inter-imperial challenges against which the next generation of authors and activists would emerge.

Together, these chapters offer a triangulation of transnational cultural production that gives legibility to a specific form of global modernism. Born of an inter-imperial past, within a peripheral geography, and from an early postcolonial perspective, this form of artistic expression aligns modernity not with the First World War, industrialization, or secularization, but rather with the reproduction of empire. Here modernist themes and literary devices take new forms, not the least of which is an entirely different relationship to realism driven by an entirely different relationship to modernity. But most prominent, I want to demonstrate, is a preoccupation with the antinomies of colonial enlightenment that, as Glissant's example shows, places a singular burden on the epistemology of a narrative poetics of history. Undoubtedly this burden is specific to "the Other America" that is only partially represented by the works that I examine here yet which points precisely to the literary-critical field of Hemispheric American Studies that has developed over the last decade. By illuminating a hemispheric poetics of history in the pages that follow, I hope to expand our understanding of a unique modernist mode of expression that critics have either elided or understood under separate, field-specific, nationally-oriented rubrics. This project, therefore, may form a focal point for strengthening the connection between U.S. minority, global Anglophone, and Caribbean Hispanophone literary production in modernist studies. For this reason, I employ a comparative and transnational approach to the mediation of literary form and history, between geographies and across periodic fields such as the twentieth-century interwar years—the study of which tends to adopt an internationalist framework—and the post-45 period, which in the United States remains monolithic and yet nationally-oriented at once. Among other ethnic comparativisms and transnational elaborations of cultural currents in global modernism, I make use of, yet attempt to think past, extra-literary intellectual discourses, biographies, and cross-cultural encounters to call attention to a unique mediation of history that is immanent to literary practice itself, thereby rethinking our contemporary approach to global modernist studies beyond the methods of empirical history and cultural materialism. In doing so, I hope to show how ethnic authors across national, political, and racial divides not only produced formal innovations that remain to be critically explored, but also engendered an epistemology of historical process that constitutes what we may begin to outline or prefigure, if only heuristically, as a hemispheric American modernism.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, long before Glissant's publication, many writers had turned to the Haitian Revolution, rendering it a salient object of artistic and historical representation during the twentieth century. In *The Tragedy of King Christophe* [*La Tragédie du Roi Christophe*] (1963), Aimé Césaire dramatized how the Revolution surrendered the potential for racial and national autonomy by adopting the same imperial system of governance and exploitation that it attempted to eradicate. Glissant's own concern underscores a second capitulation in which "the struggle for freedom [following] the 'liberation' of 1848," gave way "to the demand for citizenship" by those who were "greedy for honors and respectability ... posts and titles." Ibid., 7. This compromise echoes what Franz Fanon, writing with great urgency during the Algerian War, decried as a "failure of spontaneity," whereby "the militant who confronts the colonialist war machine ... realizes that while he is demolishing colonial oppression he is indirectly building another system of exploitation." Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 85–94. This reproduction of coloniality is reintroduced in C.L.R. James' 1963 revision of *The Black Jacobins*, which recasts the Haitian Revolution using a tragic emplotment that diverges from the romanticism of the original 1938 edition. As David Scott suggests, James' revision implies that after the mid-twentieth century it was no longer possible to speak of the Revolution's legacy in terms of triumph, reconciliation, or closure. David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). As we will see in the next chapter, Alejo Carpentier advanced a similar claim in his experimental novel *The Kingdom of This World* [*El reino de este mundo*] (1949) in a way that loosely paralleled James' shift from romance to tragedy.

<sup>7</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 147–48, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>9</sup> During this period, the United States also occupied the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, and Panama, among many other territories of the non-Western world—some of which are still unincorporated territories, such as Guam and Puerto Rico, which could be included here. In this introduction, however, I emphasize Cuba, Haiti, and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands because these are the geographies with which my selected authors were most concerned.

<sup>10</sup> The term "inter-imperiality," which I employ here and elsewhere throughout my dissertation, was coined by Laura Doyle in "Inter-Imperiality: Dialectics in a Postcolonial World History," *Interventions* 16, no. 2 (March 4, 2014): 159–96. Although she is mainly concerned with the "material, political, and cultural fields" that "pre-date and prepare western European states' entry into an Afro-Eurasian world-system," Doyle leverages this theoretical framework to better understand a phenomenon that is present in all time periods. Inter-imperiality, as she puts it, "names a political and historical set of conditions created by the violent histories of plural interacting empires." This "reoriented political imaginary, which is in effect an enlarged postcolonial imaginary," seeks to register a "global horizon of political manoeuvres among contemporaneous empires and all kinds of other states, and of these with a range of subordinated and dissident populations." In doing so, the inter-imperial framework seeks to "reveal a dialectic of historical materialism encompassing multi-directional interactions over a very *longue durée*: dynamic and uneven, yet systemic and accretive." Reconsidering the field of modernism within this complex set of relations,

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the inter-imperial collisions and articulations that I will draw out here assess not merely a literary phenomenon that represents “several empires operating simultaneously” but rather the global modernism that was fashioned in their wake (159-161).

<sup>11</sup> The concept of “internal colonialism,” which appeared for the first time in Leo Marquard, “South Africa’s Colonial Policy” (Johannesburg: Institute of Race Relations, 1957) and then expanded in Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, “Internal Colonialism and National Development,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 1, no. 4 (April 1, 1965): 27–37, has come to denote a set of racial, political, and economic inequalities that structure exploitative relations between core and peripheral regions *within* a nation-state. This form of governance, although varied in respect to its particular geographical instance, is said to resemble the differential of power between metropolises and colonies in more traditional models of imperialism. For individual examples, see Anders Gary, “The Internal Colonization of Cherokee Native Americans,” *Development and Change* 10, no. 1 (October 22, 2008): 41–55; Lionel A. Maldonado, “Internal Colonialism and Triangulation: A Research Example,” *Social Service Review* 53, no. 3 (September 1, 1979): 464–73; Bruce London, “Internal Colonialism in Thailand: Primate City Parasitism Reconsidered,” *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (June 1, 1979): 485–513; John Levering, “The Theory of the ‘Internal Colony’ and the Political Economy of Wales,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 10, no. 3 (October 1, 1978): 55–67; Mitra Das, “Internal Colonialism and the Movement for Bangladesh,” in *Contributions to Asian Studies*, ed. K. Ishwaran (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> In speaking of “historical time,” I reference the work of Reinhart Koselleck, which describes a shift during the eighteenth century in the understanding of time as cyclical and eternal to an understanding that is linear and discontinuous with a self-same past. It is in this sense that, for Koselleck, time ceases to hold a transhistorical quality and becomes “historical.” This historicity, by virtue of the greater horizon that linear temporality affords, is characterized by a broadening gap between experience and expectation. This gap is underwritten by the Enlightenment philosophy of historical progress, in which the future gains less predictability and the past becomes less familiar. With historical time, in fact, the past becomes sufficiently *othered*. In this sense, the present—unfixed and ever-changing yet categorically distinct in that it negotiates the “experience” of the past with the “expectation” of the future—forms its own mediational site, even if it is always in flux. The present, that is, comes to offer an affective key or register, an attunement to, within the context of the “present impasse” that I reference here, a phenomenon of imperial recurrence that collapses the linear relationship between past and future and, together with it, the very promise of progress. See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Zammito John, “Koselleck’s Philosophy of Historical Time(s) and the Practice of History,” *History and Theory* 43, no. 1 (January 26, 2004): 124–35.

<sup>13</sup> While literature is a medium of communication and, in that sense, produces a form of transmission, what it transmits is always already mediated, thereby rendering any instance of mediation a form of *remediation*: that which it already was. Remediation as such is not legible, however, until mediation itself is recognized *as* a process, rather than a passive “medium” through which the act of transmission occurs. It is, in fact, a constituting act that may be thought to occupy—especially in cultural production—the myriad of stages interposing the process between intentionality and realization. As such, the recognition of mediation, or of mediation as remediation, removes all possibility of immediacy. The latter, after all, would require an impossible decoupling of subject and object, or a radical splitting of *something* from the very process by which it was created. In this sense, mediation is the negation of immediacy, and as such not only refers to a process of transmission but also to a process of making within a context that leaves its mark on what is being made. My own usage here employs both senses of the term, i.e., on the one hand, the transmission of a phenomenology of time experience and the epistemology of history that it makes available, and, on the other hand, a making of narrative emplotment that builds into narrative structure the perceived structure of history. With it, moreover, comes the perceived structure of an inter-imperial modernity: a form of literary structuration that not only adds meaning to literary representation but also ascribes to that representation a homologous relationship to historical being and becoming. Of course, the very concept of mediation is inseparable from Aristotle’s distinction in *Poetics* between life and the representation of life as mimesis, as an illusion of immediacy which takes for granted the non-identity of presentation and re-presentation. In this sense, the concept of mediation cannot be separated from the Hegelian-Marxian tradition that—long before Marshall McLuhan famously postulated that “the medium is the message”—sought to show the logic of mediation in contrast to Kant’s

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immediacy of intuition. As a determinate negation of immediacy, Hegel's use of mediation involved the synthesizing, or sublating, of universal and particular: a process of making that yields a "concrete universal," or a particular that is constituted by, and therefore immanently contains, the universal that is essential to its determination. This inherent yet unrepresentable totality Marx would later ascribe to the mediating function of labor between use value and exchange value: a mediating function that, in the capitalist mode of production, would find expression not merely as labor but also, in social relations, as capital. For a conceptual history of mediation, see John Guillory, "Genesis of the Media Concept," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (January 1, 2010): 321–62. For individual examples and alternative approaches see G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1972); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1978); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> This concept of the "untimely" is borrowed from Nietzsche's own usage in *Untimely Meditations* [*Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*], a collection of essays written between 1873 and 1876. As a term that possesses a great degree of capaciousness, and undoubtedly used by Nietzsche for that very reason among others, *Unzeitgemässe* was first translated as "Unfashionable" (Mencken 1908), followed by "Out of Season" (Ludovici, 1909), "Untimely" (Kaufmann, 1968; Hayman, 1980), and more recently as "Unmodern" (Arrowsmith, 2011). I use "untimely" (in the diminutive) not only because it has become the most popular translation of *Unzeitgemässe* and that which most accords with the subject of temporality undergirding Nietzsche's usage, but also because—as I will demonstrate in the next chapter—this translation is the one most commonly employed by my critical and theoretical interlocutors. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004); Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Grosz, *The Nick of Time*, 117.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 169.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1984), 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 31–32.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History,'" in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings, and Gary Smith, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 401, 395.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings, and Gary Smith, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 398.

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," in *Unfashionable Observations* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998), 83–168.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 396.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Doran, *Philosophy of History After Hayden White* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 210.

<sup>27</sup> Granted, it seems contradictory, if not entirely unsatisfactory, to postulate a “poetics of history” that appears to recycle the treatment of history as a “concept.” After the poststructuralist turn, philosophical approaches to history largely fell into disrepute for a reason. Hayden White highlights precisely the kind of analytic conflation inherent to any philosophy of history: “concepts are related to one another by the logical categories of contrariety, contradiction, and implication, while time-and-space-specific events,” i.e., historical events, “are related to one another by cause and effect, by genetic affiliation, by similarity and contiguity, and by a host of other possibilities, including contingency. It is only by construing events and things as concepts or as being related to one another in the way that concepts are related that one can even imagine a philosophy of history.”<sup>27</sup> Inherent to any concept of history, then, is an egregious conflation between what it is to *think* history and what it is to *live* it. The categorical negation of historical excess, i.e., of contingency, randomness, divergence, difference, etc., endemic to any prefiguration of History (with a capital H) is perhaps the greatest problem here—even if such negation helped generate the dialectical turn to micro-historical area studies. It is with this problem in mind, after all, that Glissant establishes the “Quarrel with History” that is so common to Caribbean discourse. Of course, the meta-historical and even the macro-historical have their own place in intellectual history and were widely debated across the Atlantic, especially after the *Annales* school introduced an entirely different scale and temporality with which to conceive of history and after the poststructuralist turn gave way to the micro-historical turn. I do not intend to deploy my own speculative concept of history but rather examine the various poetics of narrative emplotment that approach the history by which they are irrevocably mediated. And with this endeavor in mind, it becomes all the more important to point out that the dichotomization of macro-histories and micro-histories, together with the latter’s widespread adoption in the wake of postmodernism, is capable of creating its own negation of excess, ignoring the possible confluence or concordance achieved by upholding the interrelationality—and even possibly the inadequacy—of both. After all, micro-historical narratives may contain their own meta-historical projections and prefigurations of macro-historical processes, i.e., their own ideations of and assumptions about how history *works*: their own concepts of history.

## Chapter 2

### Different Substance, Different Form: Alejo Carpentier and the Untimely Return of the Marvelous Real

What matters for the dialectician is having the wind of world history in his sails.  
Thinking for him means: to set the sails. It is the way they are set that matters.  
Words are his sails. The way they are set turns them into concepts.<sup>1</sup>

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

And everything appeared so new, so unknown, so different from what, until now,  
I would have contemplated, that, beholding this America whose essence I was  
suddenly provoked to understand, I felt like a man who is all too cognizant of his  
ignorance.... Begin. Yes, but where to begin? At the beginning? And where is the  
beginning? Where to seek and find the waters of Heraclitus? In the pre-Socratic  
stream or in the Hegelian estuary? In the enunciated precursor, practically an  
apologue, of a single autogenetic cell made already explicit, or in the monumental  
development, the universal expansion of a crushing dialectic?<sup>2</sup>

Alejo Carpentier, *The Rites of Spring*

In many ways, to begin with Alejo Carpentier is to begin with the contents of Benjamin's quotation above: a dialectical worldview, an attempted attunement to "the wind of world history," and a poetics of narrative expression that generates a concept of history. But to begin with Carpentier is also to begin with the subject of *beginning*, that is, with origins that, for the hemispheric Americas especially, are inextricable from the founding act of conquest. Carpentier searched for a fundamentally autochthonous source with which to explore an alternative to the imposition of Western imperialism in the Americas: a geography whose deep cultural history was lost to the creative destruction of colonial expansion. This search for lost origins is the focus of Carpentier's most widely read novel *The Lost Steps* [*Los pasos perdidos*] (1953), in which a semi-autobiographical protagonist is imagined to reach an indigenous prehistoric past yet is brought back to the same recursive process from which he must recommence his futile search. The problem of origins, as Glissant famously explored, is the driving force behind many works in the Caribbean and Latin America.<sup>3</sup> Although Carpentier was not a descendant of the African diaspora and therefore was not approaching this problem in the same recuperative sense as Glissant, it runs through his entire oeuvre in one form or another. In fact, Carpentier's whole career can be seen as a life-long struggle not only to locate origins but also to utilize, question, and ultimately problematize them, together with any promises of potentiality they may have held for a uniquely hemispheric American consciousness.

But before questioning the legitimacy of his indigenous and folkloric sources in *The Lost Steps*—and abandoning them altogether in *Explosion in a Cathedral* [*El siglo de las luces*] (1962)—Carpentier found it necessary to utilize them when attempting to establish social and

political distinctions between the hemispheric North and the Caribbean and Latin Americas. There's a reason why so much criticism approaches Carpentier's search with the now tired question of "Latin American identity" and a variety of its stock answers, e.g., "the universal in the local, the mestizo continent, crossroads of great cultures and races of the world"; as Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría has noted, "all these answers spring from a denial of Western tradition and a desire to found an autonomous Latin American tradition—modernity's cry for new beginnings."<sup>4</sup> But, he adds, "as Carpentier and modern Latin American writers denounced Western tradition, their search for a Latin American consciousness and mode of expression became, paradoxically, more European."<sup>5</sup> Echevarría is specifically referring to a multi-national literary endeavor in the twentieth century that marks a *second* beginning for the Latin American canon, the first of which encountered the same problems in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Initial attempts to enact or found cultural authenticity, for example, in what Doris Sommer called the "foundational fictions" of Domingo Sarmiento, José Enrique Rodó, and Juan Zorrilla de San Martín, among many others, ultimately reproduced the conventions of either a "bourgeois realism" or, in an effort to found a national literature, a "master's romanticism" of the Western canon.<sup>6</sup> Carpentier's own "neo-baroque" prose,<sup>7</sup> which leverages a proliferation of rhetorical excess to allay the anxiety he described as "a horror of the vacuum," was unable to fully evade this problem of cultural origins.<sup>8</sup> But his determination to do so by claiming and redefining the *marvelous* for the global South—a term then associated with André Breton's surrealist *merveilleux*—yielded a uniquely Caribbean and Latin American form of representation.

Carpentier's concept of "the marvelous real" [*lo real maravilloso*] revived an earlier form of *mundonovismo*, or New Worldism, in Latin America by reassigning to the continent an inherent ontological difference in contrapuntal distinction to Europe: the perception being that the former was blossoming and flourishing, while the latter was maturing and declining. The marvelous real was first defined in the prologue to *The Kingdom of This World* [*El reino de este mundo*] (1949), considered by many to be an Americanist manifesto, a declaration of independence from Europe's aesthetic forms, and a founding document of what later became magical realism. Carpentier's efforts to claim a "dramatic singularity" for the Americas, however, mobilized a form of essentialism that reified African folklore and myth to renew the value of and hasten a new historical stage for the hemispheric American South.<sup>9</sup> As several critics have noted, Carpentier's approach is not without its own problems, not the least of which is an undercurrent of vitalism that threatens to subsume history to the domain of nature, thereby undermining the historical agency of the black, native, and *mestizo* communities that he believed to be empowering.<sup>10</sup> Moreover—as in the work of many anti-colonial nationalists of the early and mid-twentieth century, Carpentier adopts contradictory binaries that ignore their own dependence on continental philosophy and art—undoubtedly a product of Carpentier's own double-consciousness, which becomes the subject of his last novel *The Harp and the Shadow* [*El harpa y la sombra*] (1978). As such, the prologue to *Kingdom* may be said to fail as a manifesto of the marvelous real by eliding its own fetishistic assumptions, while postulating ontological distinctions that are speculative at best.

This chapter, however, argues that *The Kingdom of This World* becomes all the more important not due to its failures—which have already been well documented—but rather due to

the unexplored historical problematic that the novel underscores while attempting to fashion a reparative global modernism in the mid-twentieth century. In a way that is curiously echoed over a decade later by C.L.R. James' revision of *The Black Jacobins*,<sup>11</sup> Carpentier used a form of tragic emplotment to narrate the Haitian Revolution after employing a deeply romantic—and even fetishistic—supernaturalism in his previous novel *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* (1933) to endorse Afro-Cuban syncretism against U.S. empire. Carpentier's use of tragedy, like James', also suggests that by the mid-century, the expectations associated with the romance genre, i.e., the self-fashioning of agency and the heroic overcoming of obstacles, could not adequately serve a revolutionary past that preserved the antinomies of autonomy and dependence, emancipation and bondage, progress and regress—the same antinomies that Glissant associates with “the present impasse” in the hemispheric American South. But unlike James' work, which is read within the black radical tradition, Carpentier's approach must be viewed in relation to the geopolitical preconditions of the Latin American boom period, i.e., in relation to the rise of a U.S. interventionism that threatened the political and economic autonomy of the Caribbean and Latin America in the twentieth century. As such, the question of origins in the novel becomes less about pre-Columbian ontogenetic substance and more about what, in lieu of cultural foundations, is constituted by the legacy of a *founding* inter-imperial history that he perceived to be repeating itself.

For Carpentier, I argue, the rise of U.S. empire prompted the need to rethink the phenomenon of imperial recurrence through a narrative poetics that could enable a search of the past for an alternative to the present. What Carpentier understood in 1941 as an inevitable “decline of the West,” underwritten by Oswald Spengler's historical morphology, inspired a utopian push for Pan-American racial and political uplift. But by 1949, his treatment of the Haitian Revolution disclosed an anxiety about the course of history that cannot be separated from his encounter with U.S. empire. What Carpentier once perceived as a distinctly European “decline,” mobilized by the rise of fascism, was suddenly befalling “the Other America” in its own ways. He calls attention to this transmission and reproduction of empire by narrating a logic of history that—as we witnessed in the introduction with the example of Glissant's anecdote—mobilizes a dual narrative temporality. The difference in Carpentier's approach, however, is crucial, given that a second temporality is not contradictory but rather reparative in relation to the first. The dominant narrative in his novel conveys an experience of recurrence: an emplotment of the Haitian Revolution that stresses how the pre-revolutionary colonial order in Saint-Domingue was strengthened by the anti-colonial attempt to destroy it. Responding to this revolving function of revolution, a second temporal logic emerges from within the first, yet it calls for radical change from without. This alternative temporality emerges from Carpentier's aesthetic invention of “the marvelous real” [*lo real maravilloso*], which imagines an interruption of the present from an “untimely” past that proposes the possibility of a divergent future.

Carpentier's mediation of historical time, combined with his vision for an alternative temporality, foregrounds another duality represented in his epigraph above: Where *do* we begin? And if we attempt to name a beginning from which history should run its course, should it proceed from the pre-Columbian myth of autogenesis or from a totalizing Hegelian dialectic that runs over and crushes [*dialéctica arrolladora*] the American continent? The dichotomy of premodern and modern in this question is important: the transition to the latter brings America

under the domain of competing, overlapping, and proliferating empires, exposing the former as a viable option with which to imagine an alternative. From this historical imagination, then, the marvelous real demonstrates, more than anything else, a desire to affect an untimely dimension whereby the deep past can provide a way to step out of the present entirely for the purpose of securing a radically divergent future. This utopian push for continental uplift sought independence from the very same colonial powers that each Latin American “beginning” wanted to abandon: beginnings beholden not only to preexisting cultural forms but also to racial and socioeconomic forms of colonial governance, structured in the past by Europe and reconsolidated in the present by the United States.

In this way, Carpentier searched for an untimely antidote to a present whose timely unfolding made imperial recurrence definitive of modern experience in the inter-American South. His work, therefore, presents an important attempt in the twentieth century to think hemispherically through a poetics of narrative form and, in doing so, pose a historical problem for which a radically new modernity was needed. This experimental reconsideration of “the Other America,” written just before a wave of liberation movements emerged in the global South, lays bare a little-discussed problematic about the overlapping and recurring imperial formations that are intimately linked to an equally under-studied relation between *literary form* and the perceived *form of history*. In proposing an alternative relation to the historical time of modernity, Carpentier asks us to rethink modernism through the global register of the hemispheric American South, if only to reconsider how modernity itself might be reconstituted for and from the periphery.

### **Race, Geography, and the Promise of European Decline**

In 1927 Carpentier co-founded *Revista de avance*, a vanguardist publication emerging from the dissolution of the first Communist Party of Cuba. This journal introduced artists such as Pablo Picasso, Diego Rivera, and José Clemente Orozco to Caribbean readers, while encouraging students and intellectuals to oppose the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado in Cuba.<sup>12</sup> Alongside other members of the group, Carpentier signed the “Manifiesto del Grupo Minorista” to denounce Machado’s endorsement of U.S. expansionism on the island. But his support “for [the] economic independence of Cuba ... against Yankee imperialism ... for the betterment of the Cuban farmer and worker ... for Latin American cordiality and union” confirmed him as a “communist threat” to the Machado regime.<sup>13</sup> As a result, he was imprisoned in 1927. But in 1928 he managed to escape the island using the documents of a new acquaintance he met in Havana at a journalism convention: Robert Desnos, the French surrealist poet, whose affiliation with André Breton in Paris would bring Carpentier face to face with the interwar European avant garde. Carpentier would not return to Cuba until 1939, but during his eleven-year exile in France, he found himself immersed in the aesthetics and politics of surrealism. Although he later rejected the movement outright, as an exile, Carpentier learned to adopt yet significantly revise many surrealist techniques—not the least of which was Breton’s own use of the *merveilleux*—to develop what would later become *lo real maravilloso*, or “the marvelous real.” This literary technique and historical worldview inspired a new form of self-understanding for Caribbean and Latin American authors, ultimately giving way to the founding of magical realism.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, Carpentier broke with Breton and surrealism as a whole, but this movement—with its emphasis on the instinctual, the irrational, and the supernatural—reinforced his investment in primitivism: a philosophical inclination already thriving in the Cuban *negrismo* movement back home. Carpentier's first novel *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* (1933), which reads like an “experiment in avant-garde fragmentation and elemental expressions of otherness,”<sup>15</sup> attributed to the Afro-Cuban population an inherent capacity for resistance to U.S. imperialism:

The Cuban countryside already showed pictures of foreign fruits, ripening in soda-pop commercials! Orange Crush became the instrument of Yankee imperialism, like the memory of Roosevelt or Lindbergh's airplane.... Only the blacks ... preserved an Antillean character and tradition. The bongó was the antidote to Wall-Street! The Holy Ghost worshiped by the Cués did not allow hot dogs on its sacred bread! ... No hot dogs for Mayeya's saints!”<sup>16</sup>

Here Carpentier indicts Theodore Roosevelt, who formed a militia of Rough Riders to advance the annexation of Cuba, together with Charles Lindbergh, who prompted an influx of U.S. investment capital into Latin America and the Caribbean with his flight documentary *The Spirit of St. Louis*. But Carpentier's critique of U.S. expansionism juxtaposes a white secular world of instrumental rationality and commercial enterprise with a black spiritual world outside of, and resistant to, this new imperialism. Note how “Orange Crush” is likened not directly to an earlier form of interventionism but rather to its “memory”—that which requires a proper history. Afro-Cubans, it seemed, could leverage the ahistorical mystique of Yoruba and the metaphysical syncretism of Santería to keep imperialism at bay. As such, they could re-sacralize a time and space that had been rendered profane by the reemergence of colonial modernity and, in doing so, offer a vital counterpoint to the false idols of U.S.-owned sugar mills on the island. To be sure, the antithesis created here appears to be nothing other than the product of an exoticizing gaze, absorbed by Carpentier during his exile from the same surrealists that he rejected, and refashioned for the *Afrocubanista* movement among white and mixed-race authors in the 1920s and 30s.

But blackness in the Caribbean, together with *mestizaje* in Latin America, received a utopian dimension from an especially unlikely source. Philosopher José Ortega y Gasset held considerable sway over many intellectuals of the *vanguardista*, and his fondness for Oswald Spengler introduced *The Decline of the West* to a Cuban readership all too eager to welcome the waning of European global power. Ortega y Gasset was known not only for founding *Revista de Occidente* in 1923 and thereby introducing German thinkers such as Hegel, Weber, Scheler, and Nietzsche to new readerships in Latin America, but also for constructing a “pragmatist metaphysics”: a philosophy of life largely motivated by an ethical interest in historicism and hermeneutics, together with the influence of William James' pragmatism and Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method. By this genealogy alone we can already begin to see how Ortega y Gasset's philosophy helped inspire the “marvelous real.” Carpentier openly expressed his fondness for Ortega y Gasset, but his essays of the 1940s owe their greatest debt to Spengler's philosophy of history. By the time he returned to Cuba in 1939, Carpentier had amassed and synthesized a number of political philosophies. He went from being a student involved in

grassroots socialism to an exile interested in Marxian and Hegelian models of historical development, and finally to a writer and journalist intrigued by a Spenglerian understanding of cyclical historical change: a morphological organicism whose own inconsistencies introduced the influences of German Romanticism and Nietzschean vitalism to Carpentier's thinking.<sup>17</sup> Carpentier and many other *mundonovistas* that visited Europe during the interwar years returned to Latin America at the start of the Second World War. The mechanized efficiency and instrumental rationality with which an unprecedented form of racialized genocide was justified in Nazi-occupied Europe called for an anti-rationalist, anti-mechanistic, source of knowledge, power, and ethics. Closer to home, Spengler's organicist brand of irrationalism was well suited to oppose the same kind of mechanization that U.S. interests were using to displace laborers and develop a profitable model of foreign dependency and indebtedness in the global South; as such, a degree of irrationalism served to provide a useful platform on which to claim an oppositional identity for the Americas. That it should arrive from the writings of Spengler posed its own contradictions—although admittedly it occurred before many authors encountered the true racialism and pro-imperialism of Spengler's thinking in the *Hour of Decision*.

*The Decline of the West*, Spengler's colossal work of speculative history, proposed that European decline was immanent and that the seat of global power could not only be supplanted by any one peripheral nation but rather by several nations simultaneously. Spengler rejected the entire enlightenment tradition of scientific positivism, to which he ascribed an epistemological understanding of the "World as Nature," i.e., the world understood mechanistically and ordered by scientific laws. Instead, he proposed a view of the "World as History," understood organically and driven by a symbolic order. The former approach, he believed, was preoccupied with the domain of space, i.e., with what has "become," whereas the latter approach that he endorsed was carefully attuned to the dimension of time, i.e., what is "becoming." From these postulations, Spengler crafted an organicist philosophy of history to posit a specific form of historical directionality and meaning. History, that is, passes through cyclical periods of youth, maturity, and decay. But for Spengler the directional course of history is believed to occur in eight "Cultures" that develop separately across the globe, a model that "admits no sort of privileged position to the Classical or the Western Cultures as against the Cultures of India, Babylon, China, Egypt, the Arabs, and Mexico—separate worlds of dynamic being which ... count for just as much in the general picture of history as the Classical, while frequently surpassing it in point of spiritual greatness and soaring power."<sup>18</sup> Each is capable of thriving *as* a flourishing Culture, capable of seeing the "World as History," that is, until each one reaches its respective stage of "Civilization" and thereafter can only intellectually and self-reflexively understand the "World as Nature." This stage marks a long period of gradual decline:

At last, in the gray dawn of Civilization the fire in the Soul dies down. The dwindling powers rise to one more, half-successful, effort of creation, and produce the Classicism that is common to all dying Cultures. The *soul* thinks once again, and in Romanticism looks back piteously to its childhood; then finally, weary, reluctant, cold, it loses its desire to be, and, as in Imperial Rome, wishes itself out of the overlong daylight and back in the darkness of protomysticism in the womb of the mother in the grave.<sup>19</sup>

Note, however, that this supposed proto-mystical womb, while receiving the detritus of an old Civilization that is never reborn, also provides the vessel from which a new Culture is born elsewhere:

The first comprehension of depth is an act of birth—the spiritual complement of the bodily. In it the Culture is born out of its mother-landscape, and the act is repeated by every one of its individual souls throughout its life-course.<sup>20</sup>

Spengler's aim was to posit this kind of historical directionality precisely as it concerns a Western Culture whose "world-feeling" can only be characterized as "Faustian": one which ultimately achieves its destiny once it has burgeoned as a Culture, moved past the point of "High Civilization," and fallen to the trappings of "unbridled decadence." Goethe's *Faust* emblemizes this Western historical directionality because the "Faustian Spirit," as it is understood by Spengler, is driven by a telos of infinite knowledge, a future without horizon, whose limits would ideally dissolve by the advance of natural philosophy and the progress of reason.

Understandably, for writers in the global South who possessed very different anxieties than Spengler yet opposed the technological determinism and evolutionary biologism of colonial ideologies in the West, Spengler's cyclical understanding of history held great promise. It provided one of the only transnational perspectives of History (with a capital H) during the interwar years and—although it was rejected by mainstream German historians—found praise in anthropological circles that approved of its cultural pluralism and its attribution of agency to other continents such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Indeed, the noted ethnographer R. Schlubach in a letter to Spengler spells out precisely what was so promising not only for European ethnographers but also for authors writing from the global periphery:

I frankly admit that much of what you prophesied has taken place. The decline of the West seems at hand, and still I do not believe in the end of the world, only in an entire change in our circumstances. Why should not quite new cultures arise in the open spaces in the interior of Brazil, in the interior of Africa, or particularly in the huge unsettled areas of Siberia?<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, this dramatic "change in circumstances" seemed to be well underway, making Spengler's specious doctrine appear to be more than apt. *Decline* was published in 1918 with the close of WWI: an event that confirmed, in Schlubach's words, what Spengler appeared to have "prophesied" in the book. By his logic, then, an ascension of power for territories in the global South—some of which, for example, still formed uncontracted tribal societies in the forested areas of South America, Central Africa, and New Guinea—seemed just as imminent. In fact, during the historical juncture that informed Carpentier's thought, in fact, Spengler's morphology and cyclical concept of history—for better or worse—found a strong following in many other authors of the hemispheric Americas, such as José Vasconcelos in Mexico, Luis Pelés-Matos in Puerto Rico, Aimé Césaire in Martinique, Léopold Sédar Senghor in Senegal, and Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, among others facing either the threat of an advancing U.S. imperial footing or the reinforced foothold of European departmentalization.<sup>22</sup> For artists writing from the global

South—a position outside of and subordinate to the Eurocentric concept of “universal history”—Spengler offered an opportunity to stake a claim in historical becoming: one that could empower any given culture in the Americas alongside, and not subordinate to, other “Cultures,” each of which could have their own developmental course, i.e., their own inevitable “Destiny.”

And yet from Spengler there came an even greater source of hope for authors writing outside of European metropolises, one that justified the utopian impulse with which to appraise newly-discovered myths in Latin America. What was especially promising in Spengler’s work was that, in contrast to Western decline, “Mexican Culture,” given his schemata, was in fact still vitally engaged in the self-directed growth of Culture. For “Mexico,” his catch-all term for the whole of the hemispheric American South, Spengler reserved a special place in his work that—while actually contradicting the strict determinism of his entire project—gave the Americas a most promising advantage over other territories in line for a new “life-course.”<sup>23</sup> “Mexico,” as Anke Birkenmaier explains, “was an exception [to Spengler’s paradigm], as it had been destroyed at the height of its development, and he termed the encounter between the Spaniards and the Mexicans therefore a tragic one.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, the second volume of *The Decline* asserted that “Mexico,” all of Latin America, was superior to the West:

This is the one example of a Culture ended by violent death. It was not starved, suppressed, or thwarted, but murdered in the full glory of its unfolding, destroyed like a sunflower whose head is struck off by one passing. All [of Mexico’s] states ... with an extent and resources far superior to those of the Greek and Roman states of Hannibal’s day; with a comprehensive policy, a carefully ordered financial system, and a highly developed legislation; with administrative ideas and economic tradition such as the ministers of Charles V could never have imagined; with a wealth of literature in several languages, an intellectually brilliant and polite society in great cities to which the West could not show one single parallel—all this was not broken down in some desperate war, but washed out by a handful of bandits in a few years, and so entirely that the relics of the population retained not even a memory of it all.... The most appalling feature of the tragedy was that it was not in the least a necessity of the Western Culture that it should happen. It was a private affair of adventurers, and at the time no one in Germany, France, or England had any idea of what was taking place.<sup>25</sup>

Exalted to this level, Mexico appears to be the rightful heir of universal history: a complex, thriving “Culture” destroyed before its time. If the conquest of Mexico was considered a tragedy for Spengler, then the Spanish empire—part of the Western Culture in decline—was simply not deserving of the land it conquered. To be sure, Spengler’s praises for Mexico ultimately reflected nothing more than his own anxieties concerning the “decline” of Western Europe during the First World War. As such, the Latin American, Caribbean, and African authors that found inspiration, however loosely, in *The Decline of the West* did so with an eye to their own anxieties concerning Western encroachment in the global South. But as an opportunity to adopt a symbolism and historical morphology advantageous to the Americas, authors such as Carpentier found in Spengler’s ideas a most opportune cosmogony.

And certainly, despite it lacking any kind of origination in the Americas, Spengler's thought was put to use. In the summer and fall of 1941, Carpentier wrote a series of six articles for *Carteles* titled "El Ocaso de Europa," or "The Decline [or Dusk] of Europe," which postulated a Spenglerian thesis of decline in relation to Paris, the supposed center of global culture, which suddenly found itself overrun by the Vichy government. What Carpentier saw as France's swift and unconditional surrender to the Nazi regime he understood to be "the failure of the Enlightenment project and its faith in the progress of reason."<sup>26</sup> Certainly, given that 1941 was a particularly dismal year for Europe, Spengler's theories made all the more sense. The Spanish word *ocaso* in the recurring title of Carpentier's articles denotes both "decline" and "dusk," naturalizing the former by way of the latter and calling attention to the inevitability—as inevitable as the earth orbiting the sun—of the dawn that symbolically promises to racially and economically redeem the hemispheric American South. Embodying his role as an art journalist, Carpentier used these articles to offer a symptomatic reading of a European surrealism largely determined by inevitable decline: "artists, looking for ways of evasion, took refuge in the realm of dreams and pure imagination, creating one of the few Idealist schools to have flourished in those dark years: Surrealism! All mates in the same shipwreck!" By contrast, "our entire Continent," he added, "is characterized by an unlimited faith in itself. We know that we have done very little and everything remains to be done."<sup>27</sup> This bifurcated world view renders the antithesis that we saw in *j'Écoute*—between black syncretism and white imperialism—into a vast negation of transatlantic proportions, the outcome of which could guarantee the dissolution of U.S. empire as assuredly as it guaranteed the fall of Europe.

With this hope, Carpentier contributed widely to the larger revival of Latin American *mundonovismo*, or New Worldism, during the late 1930s and early 1940s. This Adamist approach marked a distinct effort to distinguish the hemispheric global South from the U.S. and Europe. Influenced by nineteenth century pioneers, such as José Enrique Rodó and José Martí, *mundonovismo* served to form, in the words of Francisco García Godoy in 1917, "an artistic creed of notable flexibility, that would reflect with characteristic intensity all that is entailed by and conjoins our American soul ... coherent and progressive ... distinctive and autonomous." In this way, Godoy believed, "Americanism [could] provide a necessary intellectual and artistic unity to the cultural life of Hispanic America."<sup>28</sup> New Worldism, as George B. Handley makes clear, "was instrumental in shifting the focus away from the metropolitan centers of Europe and in establishing at least a rhetorical cultural autonomy that would be repeatedly invoked to defend Latin America against the advances of the United States"—a process through which "modernists became less interested in the abstractions of symbolism and yearned for a more telluric and genuinely American form of expression."<sup>29</sup> For Carpentier's circum-Caribbean world, a landscape stripped of autochthonous origins and ravaged by slavery for over four-hundred years, a "telluric" and "genuine" art would have to turn once again to the representation of syncretism in black culture: a synthesis of the imperial collision between Yoruba and Catholic traditions. But if it was to thrive as a rejection of European cultural forms *and* as a form of resistance to U.S. interventionism, this art would have to summon the greatest example of black liberation in the history of the hemisphere: the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804.

### ***The Kingdom of This World and the Temporality of Empire***

After the Second World War, however, an important change in geopolitical circumstances finds expression in the narrative poetics of Carpentier's account of the Revolution in his second novel *The Kingdom of This World*. In his 1949 prologue to the novel, Carpentier insists that his version of the Revolution is "based on an extremely rigorous documentation which not only respects the historical truth of the events ... but which hides under its apparently non-chronological façade a minute collation of dates and chronologies."<sup>30</sup> This statement distinguishes two temporalities at work in the novel, recalling the historical tension of Glissant's "present impasse." To this end, the prologue prepares the reader to encounter a "non-chronological façade," or non-linear emplotment, that nevertheless represents a "historical truth." Whereas at the start of World War II Spengler provided a distinctly cyclical model of history, after the war Carpentier applied the logic of decline, ostensibly reserved for the West, to the historical unfolding of the Haitian Revolution itself.

*Kingdom* achieves this figuration of cyclical decline by modulating the *duration* of narrative time to establish coherence between distant events. The novel's narrative structure, divided into four parts that each present a different cycle of historical time, demonstrates this difference between discourse-time and story-time. The *first part* introduces us to the slave Ti Noël and his master Lenormand de Mézy, together with Mackandal, a maroon leader in Saint-Domingue, whose legacy provided a powerful mythology in 1758 that slaves would invoke decades later to launch the Haitian Revolution. The *second part* compresses time by over three decades to narrate the start of the Revolution in 1791, followed by the violent counterstrike of the French army, Pauline Bonaparte's escape from the island, and Lenormand de Mézy's migration to Cuba with Ti Noël. The *third part* opens nearly twenty years later when Ti Noël returns to Haiti and is surprisingly forced back into slave labor by black masters under new the reign of King Henri Christophe. The *fourth part*, which opens after Christophe's suicide, locates Ti Noël squatting among the ruins of de Mézy's former plantation, as the land surveyors of Jean-Pierre Boyer—of the Revolution's leaders and the next President of Haiti—arrive to dispossess him of the few goods he managed to acquire with his newfound freedom. Each of these four parts has its own narrative arc, and each arc entails a rise in fortune for the slaves of Haiti, followed by a tragic fall that forfeits most of their initial gains. Jumping as far as thirty-three years between parts, narrative time hastens to generate the effect of poetic *anaphora* on a large scale; in this way, chronological ellipses in duration produce a repetitive renewal of decline with the start of each new cycle.

And here narrative *order* aligns this decline with a return to empire's racialized and exploitive social relations. That is, the novel's structural organization mediates how the structural division of slave labor established by imperial metropolises is transferred onto, rather than destroyed by, the victors of the Haitian Revolution. The initial uprising manages to disrupt French colonial rule, but when Haiti is declared a black sovereign state, Napoleon's artillery retaliates to reinstate slavery. Although the French fail, Henri Christophe—who fought against the reinstitution of slavery, but later needed to keep the island profitable in accordance with the

export contracts of the colonial plantation economy—tragically restores slavery anyway. Finally, the slave revolt that overthrows Christophe leads to a new regime ruled by Boyer, whose invasion and annexation of Santo Domingo imposes a new wave of colorism, mass dispossession, and increased rural poverty. Time after time, the Revolution manages to secure liberation, but only for a select few; white metropolitan monarchs and nobles are replaced with black creole monarchs and nobles, while the majority of freed slaves are conscripted anew to the exploitive demands of imperial enterprise. *Kingdom* closes with Ti Noël's "declaration of war," followed by a portentous "smoke of fires" that signals revolutionary change, but after the preceding events this gesture cannot guarantee a futurity free from the eternal return of empire.<sup>31</sup> In its careful division of parts, the novel's emplotment articulates narrative duration and narrative order to synthesize the very *process* of historical recurrence: a temporality that finds no form of progress which is not also bound to the vicissitudes of regress.

This narrative temporality is aligned with the course of history not simply because it represents a nonfictional event. Carpentier flattens and recasts important historical figures against the greater social forces that constitute their shared context. Rejecting what he pejoratively called "the little psychological novel," he foregoes the interiority of consciousness for the exteriority of "big themes"; therefore, as recurrence unfolds, the reader's attention is redirected outward to witness how "the revolution eats its own children."<sup>32</sup> Even when Ti Noël is re-enslaved by Christophe—a shocking experience of *anagnorisis* (or recognition), followed by *peripeteia* (or reversal)—interior monologue is quickly traded for exterior representation: "The Negro began to think that the chamber-music orchestras of *Sans Souci*, the splendor of the uniforms, and the statues of naked white women ... were the product of a slavery as abominable as that which he had known on the plantation of M. Lenormand de Mézy."<sup>33</sup> Any attempt "to think," as in this example, triggers a shift in narrative point of view, which funnels out from Ti Noël's impression, to the objects of his vision, to an abstract totality of social relations.

This externalization serves to complement the narrative's emplotment by reconciling a cyclical experience of time with a cyclical course of history. When Ti Noël focalizes the "crowned phoenix" in Christophe's new "coat of arms," he synthesizes the lived experience of history with a perverse regeneration of coloniality after a revolutionary razing that, as it turns out, could not rid itself of the French empire's "shining uniforms, with ... embroidered collars, thickly fringed galloons, and hussar's boots."<sup>34</sup> Any *expectation* of futurity is not only prefigured by the *experience* of the past but also robbed of the contingency with which to differentiate experience from the expectation of a divergent future: Ti Noël begins 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."<sup>35</sup> Even at the sentence level, anaphoric repetitions, provided by the demonstrative pronoun "this" in the example above, render collective experience oppressively cyclical, thereby attributing the logic of temporal recurrence to history itself.

Why would Carpentier retell the story of the first and only successful all-black revolution using a narrative discourse that showcases its failures rather than its successes? Clearly, Spengler's philosophy of history had once become politically necessary *vis-à-vis* the rise of U.S. expansionism. But the U.S. consolidation of power in Cuba during the Second World War came

to problematize even the most utopian perception of Spengler's paradigm, while validating the historical *form* of its determinism. As we have seen, Carpentier finds great significance in a revolutionary history that managed to reinstate the colonial hegemony of France: the imperial metropole from which Haiti, then Saint-Domingue, was attempting to free itself in the first place.

Importantly, the history of Cuba's war for independence against Spain—much closer to Carpentier's present—introduced a similar reversal of fortune in analogical form. In this case, however, the reproduction of the colonial relations of production did not reinstate Spain's infrastructure but rather introduced that of the United States. In 1898, the U.S. intervened in the Cuban War of Independence by occupying the island in what came to be known as the Spanish-American War. After helping Cuba win independence, the U.S. proclaimed itself the sole guarantor of freedom and declared interventionism a heroic force for the new republic. What followed was a prolonged U.S. occupation of Cuba, which would not end until the new nation agreed to incorporate the Platt Amendment into its 1901 Constitution. The terms of the Amendment, which Carpentier's *Écue-Yamba-Ó!* explicitly condemned as “the instrument[s] of Yankee imperialism,” was devastating for a nation in such a nascent stage of development.<sup>36</sup> It codified U.S. power on the island, giving Cuba only “a limited right to conduct its own foreign policy and debt policy,” while granting the U.S. permission to “intervene militarily at any time” and demand the sale of any “lands necessary for coaling or naval states.”<sup>37</sup> Between 1928, when Carpentier escaped political imprisonment in Cuba for being a “communist threat” to the Machado regime, and 1939, when he returned to Cuba to escape fascism in Europe, his homeland had been ravaged by several staged coups and political appointments sponsored by the U.S., precisely against new “communist threats.”<sup>38</sup> This personal experience of cyclical return intensified when the U.S., seeking to protect their investments in the sugar trade after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, pressured Cuba to enter the Second World War. By the time Carpentier published *Kingdom* in 1949, the United States—which had sought to annex Cuba in 1808 and again in 1898—exercised more control over the nation's economy and commercial trade policy than ever before. Even as Theodore Roosevelt's Platt Amendment was annulled in 1934, the war enabled Franklin D. Roosevelt—the harbinger of yet another uncanny return—to leverage new policy after 1941 to develop infrastructure and build air and naval bases on the island.<sup>39</sup> And with this firm footing in Cuba, a recurrence of what José Martí initially decried as the “circuitous ways of North American expansionism,”<sup>40</sup> the U.S. emerged from the Second World War as a military and economic superpower. As in Carpentier's narrative of the Haitian Revolution, Cuba's “life-course” appeared to possess a historical logic of recurrence.

But Carpentier's Caribbean world experienced an even greater form of cyclical “decline,” and one directly related to the story he chose to narrate in *Kingdom*. In July of 1915, the United States occupied Haiti after the assassination of Haitian president Guillaume Sam to provide “stabilization” and “preserve peace” on the island: reasons nearly identical to those used when the U.S. occupied Cuba. But this occupation mobilized plans that Woodrow Wilson conceived over a year before the assassination of Sam.<sup>41</sup> The U.S. military would remain in Haiti for the next three decades, clearing the way for U.S. finance capital to take over the island's economic and political infrastructure. During this time, Haiti's own institutions were dissolved and the Haitian army was replaced by a U.S.-run gendarmerie that threatened, coerced, and killed thousands of Haitians.<sup>42</sup>

The National City Bank of New York—which today goes by the name of Citigroup—financed much of the occupation to help secure railroad and commercial development contracts for the recently acquired *Banque Nationale d’Haiti*, whose debt they serviced while diverting most of the national revenue away from the public sector.<sup>43</sup> To build the infrastructure required by their own occupation, U.S. forces demanded a nationwide conscription of unpaid laborers—an exploitive undertaking that amounted to the reinstitution of slavery and colonial violence. In Cuba, even conservative newspapers reported headlines such as “2,500 Haitians Dead Since the American Occupation” [*2,500 Haitianos muertos desde la ocupación americana*].<sup>44</sup> During these years, Carpentier noted a major influx of dispossessed Haitians attempting to flee U.S. imperialism: an event that recalled a similar migration to Santiago de Cuba after the Haitian Revolution.

This displacement from Haiti to Cuba constitutes an especially significant form of recurrence. All of Carpentier’s fiction set in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries looks to the same source: an influential study by Ramon Guerra y Sánchez titled *Sugar and Society in the Caribbean* [*Azúcar y población en las antillas*] (1927), which outlined the social and economic implications of the sugar industry in Cuba and its surrounding islands.<sup>45</sup> As with the U.S. occupation of Haiti in Carpentier’s own time, Guerra y Sánchez identifies how the anti-colonial revolution in Haiti intensified colonial slavery in Spanish Cuba. The abrupt and total destruction of the sugar industry in Haiti produced a surplus in global demand that pressured Cuba to fill the deficiency in supply. With Haiti no longer contributing to the transatlantic slave trade, the number of Africans brought to Cuba in the forty years following the Haitian Revolution more than doubled. Cuba, which held significantly fewer slaves, absorbed the role that Haiti once occupied on the global market as the most productive sugar colony in the world. Carpentier’s sources clearly portrayed how the fate of Haiti and Cuba were linked, together with other islands such as Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, which also saw major changes in the quality of life for black communities, even well after the abolition of slavery in 1861. Making matters worse, the First World War created a sugar boom that demanded a major increase in the production of U.S.-owned *centrales* (sugar factories) on the island. This escalation not only kept displaced African communities from neighboring islands fragmented and alienated; it also immiserated local black communities in Cuba by introducing to the nation’s domestic economy a sizable surplus of labor, which the United States readily employed by mechanizing mills, while lowering the standard of living for people of color and working-class creoles across the island. With the rise of U.S. empire in Carpentier’s present-day Haiti, the inter-imperial dislocations and migrations that once resulted from the Haitian Revolution were repeating in ways that were tragically uncanny.

Given the consolidation of U.S. global power, even long after its first interventions in the hemispheric South, it is no surprise that by 1945 the *mundonovismo* movement started to lose steam and even turn to self-critique in the Caribbean and Latin America.<sup>46</sup> By 1949 when *Kingdom* was published, Carpentier had written several short stories, the most popular being “Journey Back to the Source” [*Viaje a la semilla*] and “Manhunt” [*El acoso*], which were noticeably stripped of his earlier primitivist devices. The self-critical reevaluation of African folkloric sources that he portrays in *The Lost Steps* [*Los pasos perdidos*] (1953), therefore, had already begun before the writing of *Kingdom*.<sup>47</sup> This questioning brought with it a deep meditation on the temporal nature of Carpentier’s “life-long and most obsessive theme—the eternal return.”<sup>48</sup>

But also, and especially in “Manhunt,” it contained a questioning of the U.S.-sponsored violence in the 1940s that Carpentier witnessed in Havana.<sup>49</sup> Overrun with failed insurrection and corruption, Cuba’s immediate postwar landscape forced a recognition that the Spenglerian thesis of Western decline also threatened decline for the hemispheric South—a geography formerly ravaged by Europe and, more recently, the United States: a geography whose “Destiny,” now more than ever, appeared to be inextricable from the creative destruction of Europe *and* the neo-imperialism of the United States. After all, the historical narrative of the Haitian Revolution in *Kingdom* does not depict a thriving Caribbean “Culture” on the rise. Rather, it demonstrates an important, collective push for racial and national liberation that nonetheless reinstates what Carpentier understood to be a historical form of cyclical “decline.”

This sobering shift in Carpentier’s philosophical and methodological approach, born of a more intimate experience with his own present impasse, impelled him to leverage a cyclical and deterministic narrative emplotment in *Kingdom* to pose a problem of *history* in terms of *form*: “the substance was different but the forms were the same.”<sup>50</sup> This observation by Ti Noël toward the end of the novel crystallizes the argument behind Carpentier’s historiography—one that poses the problem of form in relation to the substance that historically inherits it. As such, *Kingdom*’s cyclical narrative temporality challenges its audience to rethink how recurring social forms of empire can ever be destroyed given a history in which every attempt to destroy recurrence paradoxically strengthens it. If Carpentier believes that “in the Americas,” as we saw earlier, “everything remains to be done,”<sup>51</sup> then what do we make of the fact that, in the novel, Christophe is dethroned yet his body sinks into the “fresh-mixed mortar intended for yet unfinished works?”<sup>52</sup> How is such a discrepancy to avoid transmitting and transferring the vestige of empire to a new, anti-imperial social order? As the substance of Christophe’s body becomes one with the form of his imperial undertakings, “the example set almost thirty years earlier by the idealists of the French Revolution was vividly recalled by [Christophe’s] men, [and] all was lost.”<sup>53</sup> With this diegetic recognition of recurrence, the novel asks: If an event as important as the Haitian Revolution reproduces the same European “decadence” for which the West was ostensibly in decline, and this much is ensured by Christophe, “Regenerator and Benefactor of the Haitian Nation, Creator of its Moral, Political, and Military Institutions, First Crowned Monarch of the New World, Defender of the Faith,”<sup>54</sup> how can any new endeavor against the forces of empire hope to escape the same fate in the hemispheric American South?

### **The Marvelous Real: Primitivism and New-World Historicity of the “Unthinkable”**

If every attempt to destroy the form of empire from within ultimately reinforces it, then the question becomes one of how to change it from without. For Carpentier, the answer arrives not by way of intervention from yet another imperial force; in fact, intervention, as we will see, is understood not spatially but temporally. This idea is nowhere explicit yet thoroughly present in the prologue to *Kingdom*, which emphasizes spatiality rather than temporality to show how Carpentier revised Breton’s surrealist *merveilleux*, while retaining Spengler’s organicist morphology, to create *lo real maravilloso*, or “the marvelous real”: a literary technique and worldview that claimed a “dramatic singularity” for the Caribbean and Latin America.<sup>55</sup> As it was

first defined in the prologue to *The Kingdom of This World*, the marvelous real mobilized a declaration of independence from European cultural forms and, as such, marked a renewed interest in *mundonovismo*, i.e., New Worldism, against not only the residuals of French and Spanish colonial governance but also the emerging imperial order threatened by the rise of the United States.

Carpentier's long-awaited return to Cuba, followed by subsequent journeys across the Caribbean and Latin America, prompted a revaluation of the cultural history of the hemispheric South, which he had taken for granted in his youth yet rediscovered in light of its absence in Europe. Upon returning to Cuba in 1939, Carpentier met with violent political conditions on the island, as detailed in "Manhunt," which appeared to be even more dangerous than those from which he escaped eleven years earlier. The silencing of student movements, which promoted "resistance to one corrupt government after another," compelled Carpentier to leave once more in 1945, this time to Venezuela, where he would write *The Kingdom of this World*.<sup>56</sup> But before moving, Carpentier sought work in México, where he found inspiration for his contribution to the "neo-baroque" turn in Latin American letters. In Mexico, Carpentier came upon the "great heads of Quetzalcóatl at Teotihuacán," the "Nahuatl poetry [of] first-rate pre-Conquest poets," and the "temple at Mitla, near Oaxaca."<sup>57</sup> His appreciation for these "inherently baroque" American art forms, as he understood them, redoubled when, after México, he visited Haiti and encountered in its contemporary cultural production the affective presence of the Haitian Revolution—a historic counterpoint to the Columbian conquest that reclaimed a radical form of autonomy in the hemispheric South for the first time since 1492.

It was here, after traveling from Cuba to México and then back to Venezuela, that Carpentier first detected, in the inter-imperial relationship between France and Haiti, a condition endemic to the history of "all the Americas." This history would call for a new critique of European cultural forms within the contextual horizon of new imperial interventions:

Toward the end of 1943, I was fortunate to visit the kingdom of Henri Christophe—the ruins, so poetic, of Sans-Souci; the bulk of the Citadel of La Ferrière, imposingly intact in spite of thunderbolts and earthquakes.... After feeling the genuine enchantment of this Haitian earth, after discovering magic portents on the red paths of the Central Plateau, after hearing the drums of Petro and Rada, I was moved to compare the marvelous reality I had just experienced with that exhaustingly vain attempt to invoke the marvelous, which characterized certain European literatures in the last thirty years ... the marvelous of surrealist exhibitions, produced by illusory means, bringing together objects which would never normally meet: the old and dishonest (his)story of a chance encounter between an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table, which spawned ermine spoons, snails in a rainy taxi, a lion's head on a widow's pelvis.<sup>58</sup>

Here we can see how Carpentier's primitivist gaze attributes an ontological property of "genuine enchantment" to the hemispheric South by establishing a contradistinction between a failed European art and an autochthonous art that, consequently, shares some form of onto-genetic coextension with the geography that inspires it. Carpentier's implicit jab at Meret Oppenheim,

Salvador Dalí, and Georges Hugnet is not to be missed; indeed, his derision is anything but subtle in later passages when he denounces surrealists for “attempting to arouse the marvelous at all costs” by invoking cliché “formulas that make certain paintings into a monotonous mess of molasses covered clocks, of seamstress’ dummies, of vague phallic monuments”—techniques that *leave behind* the marvelous in “the umbrella, the lobster, the sewing machine, wherever, on an operating table, within a sad room, a stony desert.”<sup>59</sup> Carpentier’s aversion to European surrealism, aside from the philosophical idealism and universalism that influenced the movement, arises from what he believes are the inauthentic and ahistorical stories that surrealist works construct. His rejection of surrealist collage, however, does not amount to an endorsement of realism; his critique is meant “not to concede the argument to those who advocate “a return to the real,” that is, those who would violate their “commitment” by adhering to a *littérature engagée* that, while understandably suitable to a postwar Europe, would reinstate the same conventions in the hemispheric South from which Caribbean and Latin American writers wanted to escape.<sup>60</sup> For Carpentier, a telluric historical form needed to account for the historicity of what he believed he witnessed in Haiti: the “genuine enchantment,” the “magic portents,” indeed the “marvelous reality” of “*las tierras de Haiti*.” The ethnographic gaze propelling this sense of wonder, surely borrowed from the same surrealists he was criticizing, merits the critical reproach of fetishism and contradiction. And we may learn all the more from it by acknowledging that its use against the mandates of Sartrean engagement becomes the only way, in his view, to prevent not only a “return to the real” in literary practice but also, and more importantly, a return to the real social conditions that—as we have seen—threaten to impose their own form of historical return.

Indeed, as the marvelous real essentializes, it also historicizes, producing a paradoxical aesthetics of historicity, which requires lived experience precisely in order to abstract from the concrete particulars of everyday life and mobilize a hemispheric historical imagination. If we look simply to the narrative of *Kingdom*, which Carpentier uses as an example of “extraordinary events” from which “the marvelous ... flows freely,”<sup>61</sup> we witness uncanny transmutations, such as the metamorphosis of Macandal, who “entered the mysterious world of insects” and grew “several feet, four wings,” and even “long antennae.”<sup>62</sup> From this example we can assume, especially as a precursor to magical realism, that “the marvelous real” refers to a literary admixture of fantasy and realism: an adherence to things “the way they really are” but with sudden, unexpected alterations of physical law—precisely as we’ve seen in so many works of the Latin American boom period.<sup>63</sup> Such is the case, moreover, when we look at Carpentier’s first definition of the marvelous in his prologue, intended to stand in contradistinction to the work of artists in the hemispheric North:

The marvelous begins to be marvelous in an unequivocal way when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (a miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, from an illumination that is either unusual or singularly favorable to the unnoticed riches of reality, from an amplification of the scale and categories of reality perceived with particular intensity ... [as in the art of] a painter from America, the Cuban Wifredo Lam, who showed us the magic of tropical vegetation, the uncontrolled Creation of Forms in our nature—with all its metamorphosis and symbiosis—in monumental paintings whose expression is unique in contemporary art.<sup>64</sup>

At first glance, there is little to convince us that Carpentier's own approach is any less ahistorical or transcendental than that of the surrealists from which he wants to distinguish himself. Here *revelation* and *illumination* seem to effect the same phenomenological perception privileged by Breton's manifesto. Carpentier's emphasis on Lam's own "revelation of reality," moreover, emerges as the vitalist product of a collusion between the artist and the telluric ontological properties of "our nature" given to facilitate "metamorphosis and symbiosis" itself. Here it seems Carpentier had not overcome nineteenth-century realism but rather returned—with a heavier dose of mysticism—to an earlier, Romantic tradition of nation-building in Latin America. Wifredo Lam, a Cuban Chinese-African primitivist whose plastic arts contributed to the *negrismo* movement, exemplified this "Creation of Forms": a neo-baroque representation of the telluric *elan*, which takes personification to literal extremes of metamorphosis and transmutation (Figure 1.1). But Lam's art, as much as Carpentier's novel, does not intend to promote mere fantasy. The prepositional phrase "of reality" occurs four times in this short passage for a reason. The marvelous can alter, reveal, illuminate, amplify, and exalt—all the functions that Carpentier ascribes to ontological properties of "scale and categories" in the passage above—only by recourse to an encounter with, or lived experience of, historicity.

It is, after all, a significant confrontation with history that, for Carpentier, reveals the process through which the real becomes the marvelous:

In Haiti ... I found myself in daily contact with something we could call *the marvelous real*. I was treading earth where thousands of men eager for liberty believed in Macandal's lycanthropic powers, to the point that their collective faith produced a miracle the day of his execution.... I breathed the atmosphere created by Henri Christophe, monarch of incredible undertakings, much more surprising than all the cruel kinds invented by the surrealists, who are very fond of imaginary, though never suffered, tyrannies."<sup>65</sup>

In this passage, the emphasis on contact, on treading, on breathing in, and finally, on the impact of surprise *vis à vis* the material history of “suffered tyrannies” gives us a better understanding of that which the marvelous real requires: the authentication of lived experience through which, in this case, a “suffered tyranny” is rooted in the past yet remains undeniably present. As such, it entails accessing the past from the present through a communion with place, with the locus of a history that happened to be unthinkable, especially from a European perspective, and yet something wholly marvelous onto itself. After all, what gave life to the marvelous real for Carpentier was a history that was itself marvelous, or “extraordinary,” due to the incongruity produced by contextual, and not artificial, juxtapositions that mark a collision between the forces of empire and a “New World”: the former “palace of Pauline Bonaparte”—Napoleon’s sister—situated *in* “the kingdom of Henri Christophe,” the first black “emperor” of Haiti that emerged from the revolution;<sup>66</sup> the ruins of his palace, whose concrete Christophe ordered to be “mixed with the blood of hundreds of bulls for fortification,” so that “his fortress [may] have walls capable of resisting attacks by the Europeans”;<sup>67</sup> a concrete that houses the very body of Christophe to this day; a kingdom that, according to Carpentier’s own rhetorical choices above, still exists and can be visited in the present, even as Bonaparte’s reign remains “former,” a thing of the past; the mass of ruins that impose the importance of history over and above the ontic phenomena of “thunderbolts and earthquakes” that would have otherwise destroyed them; ruins that deliver the residual presence of a history whose main events enable physical contact with the past in the present. It becomes clear that *the marvelous* cannot generate an “illumination” of reality—whatever that may be—via the plastic and literary arts without a process of world disclosure through which a “strange and extraordinary” collision of disparate geographies renders the past present to the artist.<sup>68</sup>

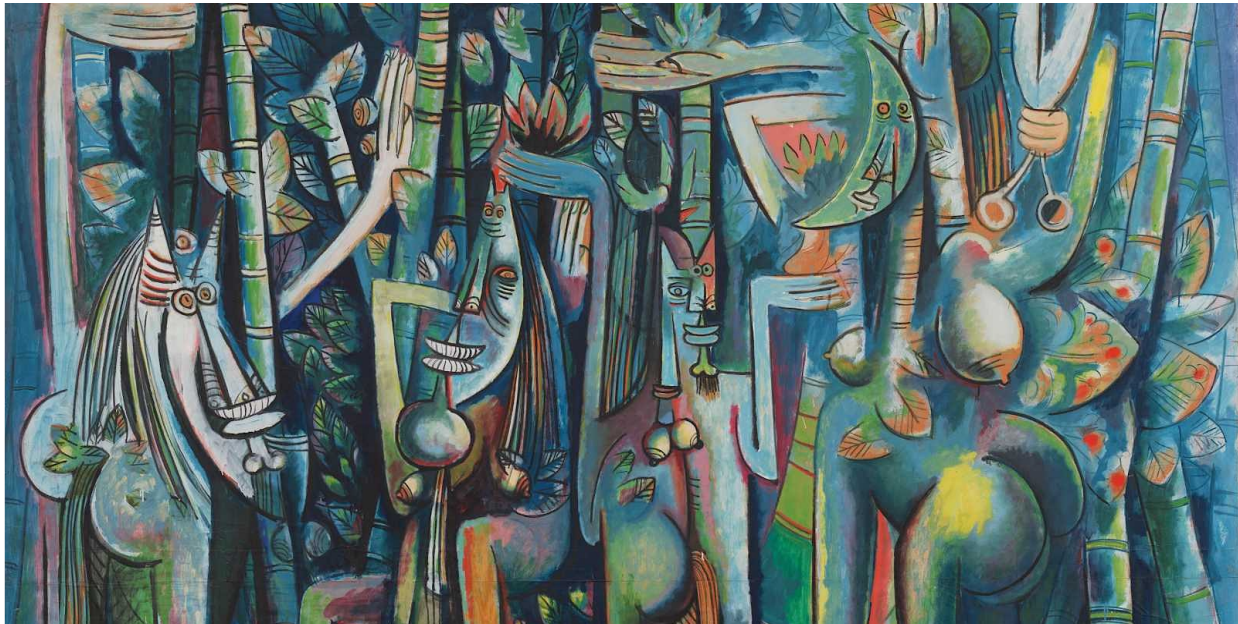


Figure 1.1: Wifredo Lam, *The Jungle* (1943)

But a new problem presents itself here, especially when considering the seemingly anti-realist representational choices made for *Kingdom*. In accounting for Carpentier's aversion, on the one hand, to "bourgeois realism" and, on the other hand, to "illusory," "imaginary," or idealist forms of "manufactured mystery,"<sup>69</sup> what do we make of the aesthetic experimentation of the marvelous? How do we reconcile an explicit call for historical consciousness with the ahistorical elements of vitalism that become equally constitutive of Carpentier's problematic primitivism? How does Carpentier reconcile the timelessness of "magic portents" attributed to "this Haitian earth" with the lived experience of temporality through which historical change is to be realistically authenticated? Clearly, as a historical novel *Kingdom* depends on facticity, rather than fantasy, especially in order to generate its very own hemispheric concept of history. To bridge this divide, Carpentier calls upon the epistemic role of faith *in* history:

The marvelous presupposes a faith.... Certain remarks about men being transformed into wolves made by the character Rutilio in Cervantes's *Toils of Persiles and Segismunda* are entirely trustworthy because in Cervantes' day, it was believed people could be afflicted with lupine mania.... Marco Polo accepted that certain birds could fly carrying elephants in their claws, and Luther came face to face with the devil, and even hurled an inkwell at his head.... Thus the idea of the marvelous invoked in the context of *disbelief*—which is what the surrealists did for so many years—was never anything but a literary ruse, and a boring one at that.<sup>70</sup>

Clearly, what is marvelous here does not entail a rupture from the real, but rather a closer engagement with the hermeneutics that gives it credence. Unlike the surrealists, who privilege "psychic automatism" as a "superior reality" where "disinterested plays of thought" and forms of "automatic writing" attempt to unify dreaming and waking states through *disbelief*, Carpentier wants to privilege faith as a deeply significant historical occurrence that prompted an unprecedented revolution through *belief*.<sup>71</sup> To be sure, he is not necessarily referring to religious faith. As it appears here—inspired by the pragmatist philosophy of José Ortega y Gasset—faith is valued for its practical function and receives validation for its contextual epistemic value: a leap *to* faith that at once produces a faith *in* action and, consequently, a leap *to* action—a logic whereby sheer belief in potentiality inspires the kinesis with which to achieve actualization. The kind of belief that appears here concerns *collective* faith, which in turn presupposes a faith in collectivity, and therefore a faith in the alternative forms of existence that such a collectivity may realize. This is what Carpentier is considering when he mentions the "thousands of men eager for liberty" whose "collective faith produced a miracle the day of [Macandal's] execution." It was not a miracle that produced faith retroactively; rather it was a presupposition of faith that produced a miracle proactively. What becomes a settled matter, then, in the case of Haiti's historicity is that Macandal's extraordinary capacity for teleportation and metamorphosis were real, *not* because he possessed supernatural powers but rather because his status as a powerful vodou practitioner during the Haitian revolution grew to legendary proportions that were, in fact, real—and real enough to catalyze the first and only successful all-black revolution. As Carpentier makes clear, it was "the faith of [Macandal's] contemporaries" that allowed such "magic to inspire one of the most dramatic and strange uprisings in History,"<sup>72</sup> i.e., the Haitian Revolution, a marvelous event *unthinkable* to the West.

Carpentier's emphasis here anticipates what becomes an important consideration in Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past*, a study that is primarily concerned with the ways in which the writing of history may silence the past in attempting to reconstruct it. Trouillot's main objective is to show how not only the "corpus" of received history but also the mode of narration, the creation of archives, and even the making of sources may ultimately silence the very same past that they attempt to represent. Using one example of historiographical "silencing," Trouillot shows how prefigurational biases also function to silence the past. In reporting and describing the Haitian Revolution, as it unfolded in the late-eighteenth century, Western European powers were unable to ascribe equal epistemological and ontological status to a race scientifically rationalized as subhuman. "The Haitian revolution was unthinkable in its time," Trouillot explains, because "it challenged the very framework within which proponents and opponents had examined race, colonialism, and slavery in the Americas."<sup>73</sup> Even as the revolution was well underway, "the long list of pamphlets on Saint-Domingue published in France from 1790 to 1804, reveal the incapacity of most contemporaries to understand the ongoing revolution" outside their own "ready-made categories" with which to "conceive [a] range of possible alternatives," i.e., outside the Western onto-epistemological limits that could not permit a reality in which black slaves had the capacity not only to think through and strategize a revolution, but also to enact it successfully.<sup>74</sup> Trouillot's study asked a question that was significant to Carpentier's own present: "If some events cannot be accepted even as they occur, how can they be assessed later?"<sup>75</sup> In offering what could be a potential answer to this question long before it was asked, Carpentier assesses what was in fact deemed possible, or *thinkable*, on his side of the hemispheric divide: not the magical as such but rather faith *as* the magical, precisely as his own hemispheric imaginary validates it by reference to the example of Haiti.

Given the epigraph to Carpentier's prologue, which directly cites *The Toils of Persiles and Segismunda* mentioned in the passage above to emphasize "what we are to understand in this matter of metamorphosis," Carpentier emphasizes not what we are to take at face value but rather "what we are to understand" was taken at face value according to his sources, which cited the

connection between syncretic African folklore and the revolution.<sup>76</sup> In this case, even as the archive fetishized and misrepresented aspects of Haitian culture—and Carpentier naively followed suit—the supernatural is taken to be perfectly natural as a phenomenon of epistemological history that validates, according to Carpentier’s own research, the geographical specificity for which the marvelous is conceived and to which it is ascribed. The prologue then historicizes what, in the late eighteenth century, became an epistemic investment in the possibility of a symbiosis between essence and existence, idealism and materialism, naturalism and supernaturalism—a collapsing of dichotomies that, oddly enough, are used by Carpentier to erect new ones across the hemispheric divide. It is in this sense that Carpentier’s New-Worldism, which he termed a “neo-baroque,”<sup>77</sup> after the counter-reformation, draws significantly from one of Carpentier’s greatest formal inspirations: Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (Figure 1.2).<sup>78</sup> The deliberate conflation of physical and metaphysical dichotomies here, by virtue of the material actualization of faith itself, entails for the sculpture precisely what it entails for Carpentier: a simultaneous adherence to, and rejection of, the real. And this relationship, according to the prologue to *Kingdom*, “was not a privilege unique to Haiti but the patrimony of all the Americas.”<sup>79</sup> As such, it extends to Carpentier’s approach the collapsing of yet another dichotomy: the particular and the universal with which what is immanent to Haiti transcends the nation and bestows onto the Caribbean and Latin American regions their own capacity for the marvelous. As such, the purpose behind Carpentier’s emphasis on the telluric, the mythical, the syncretic, etc., becomes as strategic as it is problematic. It is in the “inscribed ... history of the Continent,” he wants to stress, that “the marvelous real is found.”<sup>80</sup> That is, the geographical domain of the marvelous is not limited to Haiti. Rather, as with the wide view of Carpentier’s “big themes,” this historical imagination expands to transnational proportions and, as such, inspires hope for and from the possibility of other mythologically-motivated social transformations.

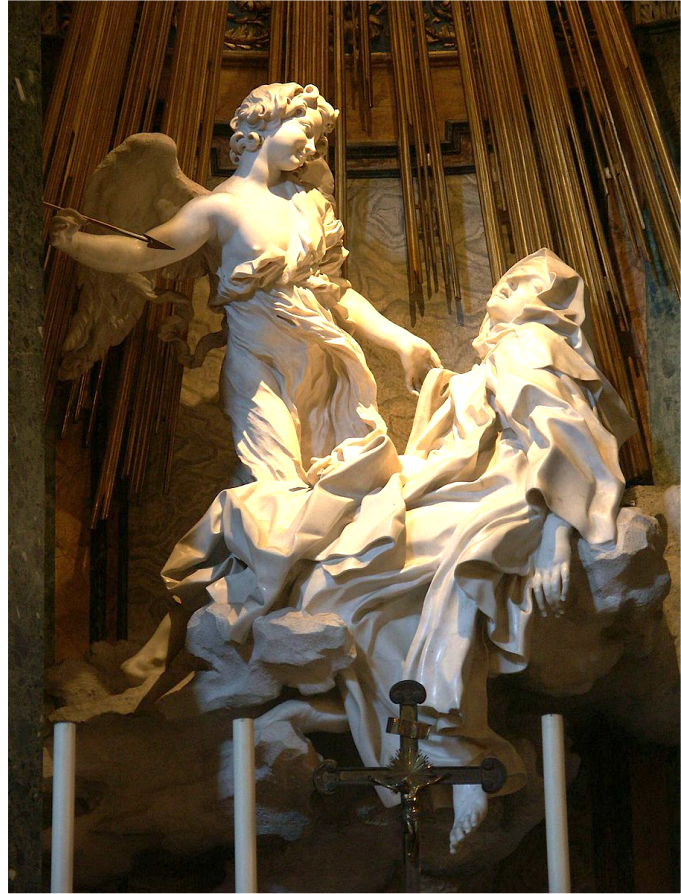


Figure 1.2: Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1652)

## The Untimely: An Alternative Temporality

For Carpentier, then, the marvelous real furnishes a cultural response to the phenomenon by which, as we saw earlier, “the substance was different but the forms [remained] the same.”<sup>81</sup> His emphasis on the spatial reach of the marvelous, however, has led critics to elide the distinctly temporal mode with which the “history of the Continent” makes the past available to the present—that which enables the epistemic, aesthetic, and political functions of the marvelous in the first place. In fact, Carpentier’s largely spatialized delineation of the marvelous real, replete with geographical referents, includes an implicit rejection of the present. After all, its “dramatic singularity” is constituted not merely by the collision of empires in Haiti but also by the way in which that very collision was made possible by the collapsing of physical and metaphysical divides, i.e., by access to a deep past rife with the mythic potency to enact “real” self-actualization. The present hope for an autogenetic break with European forms, precisely by reference to a radical break with colonial “substance” in the past, is underwritten by access to a deeper, mythological past. As such, it calls for a radical break with the temporality of the present by reference to a deep past that Carpentier’s present-day impasse, as in the case of the Haitian Revolution, may make available. This straddling of past and present explains the strange, critically unacknowledged incongruity between the narrative’s pessimistic cyclicity and the prologue’s optimistic linear telos. In this sense, the potential to change the “substance” while also constituting a different “form,” then, emerges with the proposal of an alternative temporality: one that can enable a rethinking of the possibility of transformation even within the entrenched structures of empire. And given that colonial enterprise established the advent modernity, a telluric historical time *outside* of modernity was needed: a pre-Columbian, and therefore *untimely*, point of departure that facilitates an answer to Carpentier’s question, “Where to begin?”

It is when the marvelous real enters narrative time, i.e., when it is mobilized and given purpose, that it begins to communicate its own cross-temporal function for cultural and historical mythopoetic making. It is no coincidence, after all, that in *Kingdom* the first plantation owner poisoned by “the marvelous reality” of Mackandal’s communion with nature “dropped dead ... dragging down in his fall the clock he was winding.”<sup>82</sup> This literalized representation of clock-time threatens to *wind up* and restart the next cycle of oppression, and so, even in Carpentier’s syntax, the clock’s “winding,” more so than the clock’s possessor, receives the emphatic fall. Once the winding stalls, time itself is liberated: a subtle transformation that enables the more overt experimentalism of “the marvelous real” to emerge. At this point, the poison is personified not merely by the practice of literary convention but rather by Mackandal’s marvelous communion with nature. As such, the poison comes to possess the agency with which to literally, rather than figuratively, “creep into medicine bottles, bread, wine, food, salt”: all the products of slave labor and commercial trade meant to sustain the planter class’s hold over futurity. This image breaks from the realist mode of representation to introduce a zero-degree time that conceptually lies both inside and outside of history: one that allows the Revolution to begin in earnest, even amid recurring cycles of counter-revolution. In this way, an alternative temporality ruptures out from within cyclical time. And this temporality necessarily arrives from outside of the present to recast the premodern past against the historical time of modernity.

What Carpentier invokes in response to historical recurrence—that is, when facing this Marxian historiography of tragedy and farce, this perversion of Bergsonian *durée*, this failure of *difference* between experience and expectation that Koselleck called “historical time”—is the Nietzschean concept of the *untimely*. Albeit, Carpentier’s use of the untimely is implicit and, moreover, deployed in a Benjaminian register of messianic time that departs from Nietzsche’s usage of the term. However, a strong correlation here makes all the more sense, given that Carpentier’s worldview remained largely influenced by Spengler, and Spengler’s greatest influence, aside from Goethe, was indeed Nietzsche (see fn. 17). Understanding himself as “a student of more ancient times,” Nietzsche perceived an important relationship between ancient texts and historical change: “I have no idea what the significance of classical philology would be in our age, if not to have an untimely effect—that is to work against the time and thereby have an effect upon it, hopefully for the benefit of a future time.”<sup>83</sup> In distilling Nietzsche’s concept, Idelber Avelar describes “this untimely effect” as “that which has failed in history but without which no history as such could have been constituted.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, the untimely may provide the trace of an irretrievable past that nevertheless highlights the conditions of possibility with which a new history can be made. To this end, Elizabeth Grosz explains the importance of the untimely as a temporal mode that, for our purposes, provides an answer to Carpentier’s question of resistance to self-same forms:

What history gives us is the possibility of being untimely, of placing ourselves outside the constraints, the limitations and blinkers of the present. This is precisely what it means to write for a future that the present cannot recognize.... The [untimely] can come only from the past and a certain uncomfortableness, a dis-ease, in the present.... The untimely is that which is strong enough, active enough, to withstand the drive of the present to similarity, resemblance, or recognition, for the untimely brings with it the difference that portends the future.<sup>85</sup>

Carpentier endorses this possibility of being untimely, of answering the call from a divergent future that arrives through a past that is equally, if not more, radically divergent. This temporality holds a capacity to combat the “similarity, resemblance, or recognition” that Ti Noël experiences and that Carpentier came to experience as the inter-imperiality of Haiti *vis-à-vis* France; of Cuba *vis-à-vis* Spain and the U.S.; and finally, of Cuba and Haiti *vis-à-vis* the U.S. To be sure, the untimely does not amount to an ahistorical negation of time. In Carpentier’s work, it does depend on the utopian imagination that drives the marvelous real, and, as we saw, this function relies on the zero-degree time of myth, but it does so only insofar as mythic time can pragmatically change the future by influencing the present. Importantly, this implicit temporal purpose to think beyond the “blinkers of the present” gives new meaning to Carpentier’s claim that “the presence and authority of the marvelous real is not a privilege unique to Haiti but the patrimony of all the Americas, where a census of cosmogonies is still to be established.”<sup>86</sup> Here, he stresses, Mackandal has “left behind an entire mythology, accompanied by magical hymns, preserved by an entire people,” a legacy whose practical efficacy is anything but mythical.<sup>87</sup> After all, the faith that motivates it, as we learned, was powerful enough to impel the “unthinkable”: the Haitian Revolution itself.

It is with this capacity for pragmatic self-actualization, undoubtedly also motivated by Ortega y Gasset's "pragmatist metaphysics," that Carpentier envisions the hemispheric American South as a geography that is "far from having drained its well of mythologies."<sup>88</sup> A testament to the political possibilities of untimely "cosmogonies," after all, was the recent re-discovery in 1941 of the *Popul Voh*, a corpus of mytho-historical narratives produced by the K'iche' kingdom in Guatemala's western highlands, originally found and transcribed in 1701 by missionary Francisco Ximénez and reappearing—to the surprise and wonder of Carpentier—just before travelling to Mexico and Haiti where his notions of the marvelous real would coalesce. That same year, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México edited Antonio Mediz Bolio's first complete Spanish translation of *Chilam Balam*, the sacred books of the Maya of Yucatán, in which, together with the *Book of Cachikeles*, Carpentier found much inspiration.<sup>89</sup> After 1941, Carpentier cites these texts in relation to the capacity of mythopoetic narrative to raise racial consciousness, transnational solidarity, and decolonial resistance. Clearly, as he was setting down to write *Kingdom*, new discoveries were reintroducing the ability to contest "cosmogonic" conceptions of the "New World" and, with them, imagine new forms of life that the act of creation—in any historical capacity—may be able to afford. If, in other words, the physical causes of the universe are still under contestation, then so are its effects. What this means for Carpentier is that, unlike the disinterested universalism by which European art was judged, a genuinely Caribbean and Latin American cultural production that holds a dialectical relationship to historicity itself, in turn, may affect the future by qualitatively changing what history makes available to the present. In this way, the marvelous real can be considered less an aesthetic doctrine and more so an onto-epistemological *occurrence* whereby the historicity endemic to the hemispheric Americas imputes the capacity to collapse, within the present impasse, the dichotomy between the textual and the con-textual. As such, or so he imagined, it could inspire the potentiality for a radically new history, in the broadest sense of the term. It is with this untimely hope that we may fully understand what Carpentier meant when he ended his prologue with the question, "What is a history of all the Americas but a *chronicle* of the marvelous real?"<sup>90</sup>

With this understanding, we are better prepared to witness precisely how an untimely temporality interrupts the main narrative of *Kingdom* and subtly introduces an alternative relation not only to the past but also to an epistemic break with the present through which to fashion a divergent future. The novel's opening chapter builds a mythopoetic re-construction of pre-modernity through the viewpoint of the slave Ti Noël, whose focalization abstracts from the cyclical, rotating function of the sugar mill to Mackandal's deep history of the African diaspora. This alternative temporality first emerges when Ti Noël peers into a book store and eyes "the latest prints received from Paris," which display "the face of the King of France in a border of suns," juxtaposed with "a copper engraving [that] represented a kind of French admiral or ambassador being received by a Negro [who was] framed by feather fans and seated upon a throne."<sup>91</sup> This supplementary image, which holds no constituent relation to the novel's emplotment, provides the unfolding of a failed premodern past without which the present could not exist, yet with which the future could be reparatively reconstituted:

"What kind of people are those?" [Ti Noël] boldly inquired of the bookseller, who was lighting a long clay pipe in the doorway of his shop.

“That is a king of your country.”

This confirmation ... was hardly necessary, for the young slave recalled those tales Macandal sing-songed in the sugar mill while the oldest horse on the Lenormand de Mézy plantation turned the cylinders. With deliberately languid tone, the better to secure certain effects, 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....

They were kings, true kings, and not those sovereigns wigged in false hair who played at cup and ball and were gods only when they strutted the stage of their court theatres.... Although Ti Noël had little learning, he had been instructed in these truths by the deep wisdom of Macandal. In Africa the king was warrior, hunter, judge, and priest. In France, in Spain, the king sent his generals to fight in his stead; he was incompetent.... Whereas Back There were princes as hard as anvils, and princes who were leopards, and princes who knew the language of the forest, and princes who ruled the four points of the compass, lords of the clouds, of the seed, of bronze, of fire.<sup>92</sup>

With this passage, *Kingdom* introduces an alternative relation to the present by using a layered narrative texture that formally mediates the logic of vertical depth through which it reaches back into the deep past. That is, Mackandal’s testimony of the “things that happened ... Back There” presents a narrative within a narrative: a nested oral transmission that casts a very different past than the present which governs the written frame narrative. Importantly, this narrative is delivered contrapuntally, intercepting the representation of a present characterized by the “turn[ing] of the cylinders ... [of] the sugar mill” on the plantation: the engine of empire, itself emblemized here by a circular object of cyclical rotation. Superseding the discursive space occupied by this timely symbol of imperial recurrence, Mackandal’s mythologized oral history showcases historically-specific, pre-colonial African states and dynasties, constituted by multiple kingdoms that overlapped diachronically. The West African kingdoms of Popo and Arada, which formed part of the Ivory Coast, supplied Saint-Domingue with thousands of slaves between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The Fulah kingdom mainly supplied the British empire, and the Nagos supplied over eighty percent of slaves during the last two decades of the slave trade—figures provided by Carpentier’s novelistic research.<sup>93</sup> These geographical markers “Back There” serve to give slaves, such as Ti Noël, not only a chronotropic sense of historical origin but also a tragic sense of historical loss. Mackandal aggrandizes these other-worldly rulers and gives them supernatural powers to contrast the present French, Spanish, and British empires with the superior-yet-fallen civilizations of their royal African counterparts. It is this oral narrative transmission of the past that the slaves honor in order to mobilize their faith in the capacity of, and potentiality for, significant social change. This untimely emergence of the deep past demonstrates—both to the protagonist and to the reader across diegetic levels of narrative—the causal determinants that are central to the history of the Haitian Revolution. After all, Mackandal is able to “secure certain effects” by way of rhetorical “tone,” and his “languid” pacing serves to

impart understanding and memorization: precisely what is needed to found a lasting faith in empowering cosmogonies that can speak to “these truths” for revolutionary ends yet to come.

Considering how this narrative of an empowered, autonomous, premodern past provided the necessary epistemology with which to mobilize the Haitian Revolution, the stark contrast it produces alongside the dominant narrative of imperial recurrence is not to be taken lightly. This alternative temporality of untimely possibility is conceived as a powerful counter-narrative of the past, which radically transformed Ti Noël’s present in a way that was thought impossible. As such, it could be seen to hold a similar relationship to the “present impasse” of Carpentier’s day. After all, for his contemporaneous readers, the untimely is embedded in Carpentier’s experimental text, as much as for Ti Noël it was embedded in the oral prehistory of the revolution. And as in Ti Noël’s experience, the contemporaneous reader encounters in *Kingdom* a narrative that defamiliarizes the present by reference to a past that attempts to serve the future. While the micro-narrative that inspired the Revolution contained the self-same forms of empire, e.g., “they were kings, true kings,” the novel’s macro-narrative exposes the tragic end to which these forms were put to use. In doing so, *Kingdom* highlights Carpentier’s present-day logic of history as a state of emergency that becomes the rule, rather than the exception. This perspective becomes a way, among what seemed to be a total absence of ways, to leverage cultural production against U.S. intervention as it threatened to *wind-up* the recurrence of empire once again.

As such, the untimely represents, through its own cosmogonic offering, a counter-narrative that could be used to inspire the hemispheric American South against the forces of empire, not despite, but precisely due to, the compromises of the Haitian Revolution. In this way, the dissonance between the prologue and the narrative render the former the solution to the latter—and in that temporal order. That is, the untimely mobilizes mythopoesis from an anterior direction to annul the cyclical temporality of the present. It is with this hope that Carpentier departed from the realist tradition of Latin American letters to offer a nascent form of magical realism *as* an untimely form of experimental transformation. Such is the context in which Mackandal entered “the mysterious world of insects” to grow “several feet, four wings,” and “long antennae,”<sup>94</sup> ensuring that his substance, i.e., his identity and purpose, remained the same, even as his form underwent radical change. By articulating aesthetics and politics in this way, Carpentier staged a unique representation of literal transformation, i.e., the transmutation of Mackandal, to figuratively imagine a reversal of self-same political forms, while in fact generating a form of narrative innovation that gave way to its own history of literary-cultural transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Carpentier’s attempt to think hemispherically in and through a poetics of history, demonstrates the inter-imperial problematic informing global modernism in the postwar period: a moment caught, as we see here, between the need to historicize the present and the need to produce a radically divergent future.

Over the course of his next two major novels, Carpentier turned away from experimental literary form, arriving instead at a sobering recognition of the potential compromises that could befall the aftermath of yet another political *and* cultural revolution. In fact, in the decades following *Kingdom*, Carpentier came to remove the prologue altogether from future publications of the novel, and even vaguely recast his own neo-baroque experimentation as a potential

extension of, rather than an antidote to, the recycling of imperial, as well as literary, forms: “There is an eternal return to the imperial spirit, historically speaking, just as there is an eternal return of the baroque.”<sup>95</sup> Immediately after writing *Kingdom*, Carpentier produced a self-reflexive representation of his own attempt to inspire an “unthinkable” transformation. In a way that entirely abandons and even criticizes his former exoticism of the premodern past, Carpentier’s next novel, *The Lost Steps* [*Los pasos perdidos*] (1953), imagined an absolute return to pre-Columbian origins, reached only by reversing time to a deep past in which the most primitive of shamanistic rituals could be reimagined. But what Carpentier’s protagonist finds within the unknown recesses of time is a violent “outcry over a corpse [that] became horrible, terrifying”:

The shaman now stood facing the body, shouting, thumping his heels on the ground in the paroxysm of a fury of imprecation which held the basic elements of all tragedy—the earliest attempt to combat the forces of annihilation which frustrate man’s designs. I tried to remain outside, to establish distances. And yet I could not resist the horrid fascination this ceremony held for me. Before the stubbornness of Death, which refused to release its prey, the Word suddenly grew faint ... gasped and died away convulsively.<sup>96</sup>

After travelling back to the furthest imaginable point in prehistory, which he conceived with a hope of resurrecting the past against a present burdened by futility, Carpentier finds *another* attempt to resurrect the past in the face of futility: an untimely attempt to invoke the untimely. The “corpse” here, after all, belongs to none other than the past itself. This untimely return seems to cast, against the hopes of the marvelous real, a major challenge to any kind of alternative temporality, as it threatens to render the “present impasse” eternal. *The Lost Steps* ends with the recognition that the deep past with which Carpentier formerly associated a reparative untimely temporality—one whose utopian impulse promised to imbue the profane time of modernity with the salve of sacred time—is forever lost.

But Carpentier returned to the subject of the Haitian Revolution, together with the cyclical temporality of lived experience, in his major novel *Explosion in a Cathedral* [*El siglo de las luces*] (1962). And here he focuses on the epitome of the tragic cycle that haunted *Kingdom* in the first place: the declaration of the reinstitution of slavery in Haiti. Importantly, Carpentier wrote *Explosion* while the Cuban Revolution of 1954-59 was finally ousting U.S. empire from the island, but just as importantly, he revised it several times as new contradictions and compromises began to surface. His return to the subject of the Haitian Revolution, then, presents not only a repudiation of any attempt to access lost origins—as in *Pasos*—but also a *timely* return to a different origin of sorts, i.e., the genesis of return itself in the hemispheric American struggle for freedom: the “unthinkable” Revolution in Haiti from which “unthinkable” returns ensued. This untimely return suggests that in post-revolutionary Cuba, the *forms* remained the same even as the *substance* successfully changed. As such, Carpentier mediates the historical form of the Haitian Revolution once again as he confronts the need to overcome its analogical logic of history in yet another “present impasse.” As Carpentier’s favorite character Sophia suggests, “Men may fail but ideas continue to make headway until the time comes for them to be fully realized.”<sup>97</sup> If we follow Sophia, whose name etymologically signals the voice of wisdom, what becomes clear is that any untimely return that unveils another untimely return is perhaps all the more necessary. And, more

to the point, it is all the more necessary that any attempt to summon an alternative temporality has to change direction—as it did from *Ecue* to *Explosion*—from a romantic primitivism that attempts to reverse the recurrence of empire to a futurity that beckons the dissolution of empire’s final return. The next chapter will explore this search for a future beyond the constraints of the present on the US-México border. But, as we will see, this search will encounter its own uncanny returns, thereby presenting how the emergence of U.S. empire in the Caribbean extends not only to the transnational borderlands but also to an early form of Chicanx cultural production that has yet to be critically considered for its formal mediation of historical time.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 473.

<sup>2</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *La consagración de la primavera* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1978), 60. (my translation): “Y todo me resultaba tan nuevo, tan desconocido, tan distinto de lo que hasta ahora hubiesen contemplado mis ojos, que, ante esta América de pronto dada a me anhelo de entenderla, me sentía como el hombre consciente de su ignorancia en filosofía ... ‘Empieza.’ —¿Por dónde empezar? ¿Por el comienzo? ¿Y donde está el comienzo? ¿Donde buscar el agua de Heráclito? ¿En el arroyuelo presocrático o en el brazo de mar hegeliano? ¿En el enunciado precursor, casi apólogo, célula primera pero ya explicita, o en el desarrollo monumental, en la expansión universal de una dialéctica arrolladora?”

<sup>3</sup> Here I am referring to “the problem of origins” that, as is well known by now, Édouard Glissant theorized by reference to what he called the “quarrel with History” in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989); see also “Creolization in the Making of the Americas,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 268–75. See also Paul B. Miller, *Elusive Origins: The Enlightenment in the Modern Caribbean Historical Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Paget Henry, *Caliban’s Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Earl E. Fitz, *Rediscovering the New World: Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991); Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and other essays*, trans. Edward Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

<sup>6</sup> Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 120.

<sup>7</sup> See fn. 77

<sup>8</sup> Alejo Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1995), 93.

<sup>9</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (México: Edición y Distribución Ibero Americana de Publicaciones, 1949), 17.

<sup>10</sup> See Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016); John V. Waldron, *The Fantasy of Globalism: The Latin American Neo-Baroque* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013); Miller, *Elusive Origins*; Maria Takolander, *Catching Butterflies: Bringing Magical Realism to Ground* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007); Donna V. Jones, “The Ambiguous Promise of European Decline: A Comparative Study of ‘the End of History’ in Literature of the Americas and Europe,” PhD diss, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> See Introduction, page x.\*

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<sup>12</sup> Rosario Rexach, "La Revista de Avance publicada en Habana, 1927-1930," *Caribbean Studies* 3, no. 3 (1963): 3–16.

<sup>13</sup> Juan A. Martínez, "Social and Political Commentary in Cuban Modernist Painting of the 1930s," in *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere*, ed. Alejandro Anreus, Diana L. Lindren, and Johnathan Weinbert (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 21–42; Rexach, "La Revista de Avance publicada en Habana, 1927-1930."

<sup>14</sup> Certainly, as it first appears in the prologue to Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World*, the concept of "the marvelous real," in its claims to "an unexpected alteration [or] revelation of reality," retrospectively fits the larger category of magical realism; however, the debate over whether it should instead be categorized as a discrete precursor has generated a profusion of critical debate over literary style and classification. As Peter R. Beardsell explains in *Europe and Latin America: Returning the Gaze* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 198, the term "magical realism" is attributed to the art critic Franz Roh, whose book *Nachexpressionismus. Magischer Realismus* (1925) introduced the term to describe German post-expressionism in the fine arts (198). The Spanish translation of the term, *realismo mágico*, was first employed in Latin America by Arturo Uslar Pietri's *Letras y hombres de Venezuela* (1948). Although Carpentier never used the term (and may have attempted to avoid it altogether), it was later inferred by critics that since Carpentier had befriended Pietri in Venezuela while writing *The Kingdom of This World*, the term "marvelous real"—introduced in the very same book for the first time—must, by association, be synonymous with the "magical realism" Pietri was describing. This is not exactly the case; Carpentier's term refers to a geographical and historical phenomenon of stark juxtaposition and incongruity, which established the foundational worldview for magical realism. As such, it can be described as a theoretical and artistic precursor to the movement, rather than a literary technique that is synonymous with it.

<sup>15</sup> Jeremy L. Cass, "Finding a Place for *¡Ecué-Yamba-O!*: Carpentier's Tenuous Dialogue with Afrocubanismo," *Romance Notes* 49, no. 3 (October 3, 2012): 313.

<sup>16</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Xanadu, 1968), 125–26.

<sup>17</sup> These influences are not merely implicit in the philosophical genealogy that influenced Spengler's work. Spengler in fact affirmed that his thinking, especially in *The Decline of the West*, owes a great debt to Nietzsche and Goethe especially: "the two writers to whom he owed 'practically everything.'" The metaphysical vitalism and historical organicism undergirding the work of these two philosophers, part of a larger irrationalist movement that sought to undo the positivism of the post-Romantic period, is self-evident in Spengler's philosophy. See H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 59.

<sup>18</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>21</sup> Oswald Spengler, *Letters: 1913-1936* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1966), 261. My sincerest thanks go to Donna V. Jones for this reference and that of H. Stuart Hughes.

<sup>22</sup> See Anke Birkenmaier, "Scenarios of Colonialism and Culture: Oswald Spengler's Latin America," *MLN* 128, no. 2 (May 23, 2013): 256–76.; Luis E. Carranza, *Architecture as Revolution: Episodes in the History of Modern Mexico* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010). To be sure, some of the Caribbean and Latin American writers influenced by Spengler during this period also harbored reactionary views—some of whom could be considered more extreme. José Vasconcelos' conception of the "cosmic race," for example, required the disappearance of autonomous indigenous communities under the subsumption of an ostensibly superior and "universal" Latin American *mestizaje* that would encompass and therefore transcend all races. Under this model, local tribes and settlements were rendered superfluous and therefore disposable. Instead, the value of Native American "culture" would express itself through

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the emerging, indeed cosmic, empire of the Iberian-led Hispanic America. Beyond the scope of this chapter, there are many debates concerning Spengler's influence in Latin America during the 1930s and 1940s, as well as alternative, contrapuntal voices from the Spanish Civil War, such as José Gaos, whose contribution to the development of Latin American identity in the 1940s is worth further consideration. Gaos, not to mention Ortega y Gasset attempted to define a foundation for an autonomous, Spanish-speaking global culture that was considered more viable after the war. Retaining his leftist politics, Carpentier approached Spengler's work idiosyncratically and, albeit, with very limited knowledge of Spengler's ultimate aims. What becomes particularly important for my purpose here is not simply the influence of Spengler but rather the New Worldism and innovative literary production that emerged well beyond the pinnacle of his influence.

<sup>23</sup> Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 93.

<sup>24</sup> Birkenmaier, "Scenarios of Colonialism and Culture," 257.

<sup>25</sup> Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 234.

<sup>26</sup> See Alejo Carpentier, *El ocaso de Europa*, ed. Eduardo Becerra Grande, 1st ed. (Madrid: Fórcola Ediciones, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Alejo Carpentier, "El ocaso de Europa," *Carteles*, November 23, 1941, 37.

<sup>28</sup> Francisco García Godoy, *Americanismo literario* (Ayacucho: Editorial-América, 1917), 22–24. Translated by George B. Handley in *New World Poetics: Nature and the Adamic Imagination of Whitman, Neruda, and Walcott* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 33–34.

<sup>29</sup> Handley, *New World Poetics*, 34.

<sup>30</sup> Alejo Carpentier, "Prologue to The Kingdom of This World (1949)," trans. Alfred Mac Adams, *Latin American Literature and Arts* 47 (Fall 1993): 31. Here and in several other instances, I cite this translation directly, rather than providing my own. This occurs when my translation is nearly identical to one that is already published.

<sup>31</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World: A Novel*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 179.

<sup>32</sup> Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, *Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin American Writers* (New York: Joanna Cotler Books, 1967), 58–59.

<sup>33</sup> Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, 116.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 140, 111, 106.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 171–72.

<sup>36</sup> Carpentier, *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!*, 125.

<sup>37</sup> Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the United States: A Chronological History* (New York: Ocean Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>38</sup> In 1928 Carpentier escaped much more than political imprisonment. After Machado manipulated the election process to secure his own reelection, public outrage, already at a tipping point, fomented into local insurrections. In the months that followed, Machado's police became notorious for acts of severe brutality; leftist students and writers that opposed the Machado regime—with whom Carpentier was affiliated—were questioned, beaten, silenced, or exiled. See Rexach, "La Revista de Avance publicada en Habana, 1927-1930." When in 1930 Machado's police killed Rafael Trejo, a student activist at the University of Havana, resistance swelled again. In 1933 Cuba's military defected against Machado, and the nation found itself in a state of widespread revolution. Not surprisingly, Roosevelt

intervened by appointing his Assistant Secretary of State to organize a series of coups with Sergeant Fulgencio Batista, the famous U.S.-backed Cuban dictator that Fidel Castro would come to overthrow in the revolution of 1954-59. Batista secured indirect power by forming a U.S.-sponsored *junta* to run the nation in 1933 following Machado's overthrow. Within weeks, sensing a "rise of communism" on the island and fearing that it might bleed through the U.S. border, Roosevelt's appointees declared a state of emergency and demanded more drastic U.S. intervention. Franklin, *Cuba and the United States*, 12-14. Roosevelt, despite his public endorsement of the Good Neighbor Policy toward Latin America, ordered at least 29 warships to Cuba and the Florida Keys, while also reportedly preparing a special infantry of U.S. Marines, replete with bombers for use on Cuban soil if necessary. Batista was thereafter pressured by the Roosevelt administration to squash rising communism and personally manage the next two puppet presidents using U.S. backchannels that same year (and four more presidents the following year). The Batista regime—initially supported by students as a lesser evil to ensure the overthrow of Machado—ultimately repeated the very same forms of suppression and civil rights abuses that it sought to reform: once again, Carpentier's fellow artists and friends had to answer for their radicalism in extreme ways. Upon ending his eleven-year exile in 1939 to escape the upheaval in Europe, Carpenter returned to Cuba only to find himself face to face with what seemed like permanent upheaval back home, sponsored by the United States. That same year, the toppling of yet another government installed by Batista caused the formation of a constituent assembly to develop a new Constitution—one that would try to limit the U.S.'s power on the island but which would be unsuccessful due to global trade and military pressures. Carpentier left again in 1945, settling in Venezuela to write *Kingdom*. His nation's "life-course," it seemed, possessed a historical logic of its own; an eternal return of the same, with no better alternative in his native Cuba than in a Europe headed for a "decline" much steeper than he ever imagined.

<sup>39</sup> The Platt Amendment was annulled in 1934 with Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. But by then, the U.S. market share had become so integral to the island's economy that only small concessions could be made. Even so, when the Cold War began, the Good Neighbor Policy was abandoned to protect U.S. economic interests against new, ostensible communist threats, commencing another wave of U.S. expansion to the South.

<sup>40</sup> José M. Hernandez, "Cuba in 1898," Hispanic Division, Library of Congress, *The World of 1898: The Spanish-American War*, (2011), <https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/hernandez.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 64-65.

<sup>42</sup> Dalleo, *American Imperialism's Undead*, 10-11.

<sup>43</sup> Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 48-52; Dalleo, *American Imperialism's Undead*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Dalleo, *American Imperialism's Undead*, 124. At this critical juncture, what was most pressing for Carpentier's immediate political landscape was the possibility of the U.S. gaining a similar imperial footing in Cuba—an attempt that would not be the first, given the long, taxing, and devastating battle for independence from Spanish empire following the Ten Years War. Even before then, José Martí conveyed his anxieties concerning North America's "iniquitous plan to put pressure on the island and drive it to war so as to fabricate a pretext to intervene in its affairs and, with the credit earned as guarantor and mediator, keep it as its own." Charles A. Gallagher and Cameron D. Lippard, *Race and Racism in the United States: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2014), 1178. Martí and Carpentier shared many commonalities: both were politically imprisoned for speaking up against the ruling order in vanguardist publications; both were exiled multiple times; both lived as exiles in Northern metropolises while looking for work as journalists; and both sought, later in their lives, to found some form of autonomy for Cuba and the Americas writ large—whether cultural or political—from the imperial reach of the United States. In Carpentier's present, these anxieties returned as a major threat to the nation's new and unstable political sovereignty, one registered even in Carpentier's formulation of the marvelous real, and one that, as we saw, came to fruition leading up to *Kingdom*.

<sup>45</sup> Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier*, 45.

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<sup>46</sup> Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea, *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 82.

<sup>47</sup> Although it did not appear until much later in Carpentier's 1958 collection of short stories, *Guerra del tiempo: tre relatos y una novela: El camino de Santiago, Viaje a la semilla, Semejante a la noche y El acoso* (México: Compañía General de Ediciones, S.A., 1958), a small volume published in Mexico and not translated into English until 1970 as *War of Time*, the short story I mention here, "Journey Back to the Source" ["*Viaje a la semilla*"], was written in 1944. "Manhunt" ["*El acoso*"] (the title of which in Spanish conveniently forms an anagram of *ocaso*, meaning "decline" or "dusk," as we saw earlier), was also not published until after *The Kingdom of this World* and *The Lost Steps*. But, as Carpentier states in an interview, its outline and subject matter, which depicts a violent "decline" in Havana, had already been drafted in the early 1940s. Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier*, 189–90; Klaus Müller-Bergh, "Entrevista con Alejo Carpentier," *Cuadernos Americanos* 28, no. 4 (1969): 144. Significantly, the representation of black "Afro-Cuban culture" in "Manhunt" is stripped of all the "enchantment" and "magic portents" that, as we will see in the next section, dominated his aesthetics of "the marvelous real." This notable shift is visible in the argument presented by *Kingdom's* narrative discourse, which renders profane any ostensible sacralization of the mythic cycle inherent to Carpentier's vision of "magic portents."

<sup>48</sup> Frank Janney, *Alejo Carpentier and His Early Works* (London: Tamesis Books, 1981), 11.

<sup>49</sup> Müller-Bergh, "Entrevista con Alejo Carpentier," 144.

<sup>50</sup> Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, 159.

<sup>51</sup> Carpentier, "El ocaso de Europa," November 23, 1941.

<sup>52</sup> Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, 148.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>55</sup> Carpentier, "Prologue (1949)," 31.

<sup>56</sup> Franklin, *Cuba and the United States*, 14. Also see fn. 38 in this chapter.

<sup>57</sup> Carpentier, "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," 98–99.

<sup>58</sup> Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo*, 7–8. (my translation): "*A fines del año 1943 tuve la suerte de poder visitar el reino de Henri Christophe—las ruinas, tan poéticas, de Sans-Souci; la mole, imponentemente intacta a pesar de rayos y terremotos, de la Ciudadela La Ferrière—y de conocer la todavía normanda Ciudad de Cabo—el Cap Français de la antigua colonia—donde una calle de larguísimos balcones conduce a palacio de cantería habitado antaño por Paulina Bonaparte. Después de sentir el nada mentido sortilegio de las tierras de Haití, de haber hallado advertencias mágicas en los caminos rojos de la Meseta Central, de haber oído los tambores del Petro y del Rada, me vi llevado a acercar la maravillosa realidad recién vivida a la agotante pretensión de suscitar lo maravilloso que caracterizó ciertas literaturas europeas de estos últimos treinta años.... Lo maravilloso, obtenido con trucos de prestidigitación, reuniéndose objetos que para nada suelen encontrarse: la vieja y embustera historia del encuentro fortuito del paraguas y de la máquina de coser sobre una mesa de discección, generador de las cucharas se armoño, los caracoles en el taxi pluvioso, la cabeza de león en la pelvis de una viuda, de las exposiciones surrealistas.*"

<sup>59</sup> Carpentier, "Prologue (1949)," 28. As Alfred Mac Adams notes, Carpentier witnessed the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in Paris (Galerie Beaux-Arts) before returning to Cuba at the outset of World War II. Most of the surrealist art to which he refers in this passage was featured there (29, 30n4).

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<sup>60</sup> Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo*, 12. “De ahí que los maravilloso invocado en el descreimiento—como lo hicieron los surrealistas durante tantos años—nunca fué sino una artimaña literaria .... no por ello va a darse la razón, desde luego, a determinados partidarios de un regreso a lo real.”

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 16. “En él se narra una sucesión de hechos extraordinarios, ocurridos en la isla de Santo Domingo ... dejándose que lo maravilloso fluya libremente de una realidad estrictamente seguida en todos sus detalles.”

<sup>62</sup> Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> Carpentier, “Prologue (1949),” 29.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>66</sup> Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo*, 7–8.

<sup>67</sup> Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” 105.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>70</sup> Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo*, 11 (my translation): “Lo maravilloso se presupone una fe. Los que no creen en santos no pueden curarse con milagros de santos.... Ciertas frases de Rutilio en Los trabajos de Persiles y Segismunda, acerca de hombres transformados en lobos, porque en tiempos de Cervantes se creía en gentes aquejadas de manía lupina... Marco Polo admitía que ciertas aves volaran llevando elefantes entre las garras, y Lutero vio de frente al demonio a cuya cabeza arrojó un tintero.... De ahí que los maravilloso invocado en el descreimiento—como lo hicieron los surrealistas durante tantos años—nunca fue sino una artimaña literaria .... no por ello va a darse la razón, desde luego, a determinados partidarios de un regreso a lo real.”

<sup>71</sup> André Breton, Helen R. Lane, and Richard Seaver, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 13–14, 26, 37.

<sup>72</sup> Carpentier, “Prologue (1949),” 30.

<sup>73</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 82–83.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> See Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier* for a thorough list of Carpentier’s sources, including colonial-era archives.

<sup>77</sup> As Monika Kaup explains in “‘¡Vaya Papaya!’: Cuban Baroque and Visual Culture in Alejo Carpentier, Ricardo Porro, and Ramón Alejandro,” *PMLA* 124, no. 1 (2009): 80, “a new turn in baroque discourse after World War II [popularized] the notion of an insurgent, *mestizo* New World baroque unique to the Americas. Carpentier and [José] Lezama Lima are the key authors of the notion of a decolonizing American baroque,” which “expressed *contraconquista* (counterconquest), as Lezama punned, countering the familiar identification of the baroque with the repressive ideology of the Counter Reformation and its allies, the imperial Catholic Iberian states.” Michael J. Horswell adds, this “‘return of the Baroque’ in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, then, is often explained, in part, as an artistic and ideological reaction to the unfinished and continuing production and performance of identity in

Latin America ... as a challenge to, or crisis of, [an] unfinished modernity.” Michael J. Horswell, “Baroque and Neo-Baroque Literary Tradition,” *Oxford Bibliographies*, Latin American Studies, n.d., <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>. In aesthetic terms, Carpentier defines the neo-baroque as a style “characterized by a horror of the vacuum, the naked surface”: a style “where the central axis ... is surrounded by what one might call ‘proliferating nuclei’ ... motifs that contain their own expansive energy, that launch or project forms centrifugally.” Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” 93. As a “style” that represents *mestizaje*, the neo-baroque derives its power from—and gives over to the marvelous—a historical embeddedness and entanglement that the prologue’s naïve primitivism keeps from sight. Decades after the publication of *Kingdom*, Carpentier declared that the neo-baroque represented not simply a “return of the baroque,” but rather an imperial recurrence of its own: “What the baroque displays is, in fact, a kind of creative impulse that recurs *cyclically* throughout history.... There is a baroque spirit, just as there is an imperial spirit.... There is an eternal return to the imperial spirit, historically speaking, just as there is an eternal return of the baroque in art through the ages.” *Ibid.*, 90–91. Carpentier’s central aim here was to note how the baroque, as an art form, recurs cyclically across history, and can therefore be considered a transhistorical art form. But his decision to attach it to the very enterprise of empire and, in turn, attach empire to a historical logic of cyclicity is all the more interesting, especially since he consistently specified that the *neo*-baroque, far from being universal, pertained to a sole geography: “Latin America [is] the chosen territory of the baroque ... [and] develops along with *criollo* culture, with the ... awareness of being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic.... America, a continent of symbiosis, mutation, vibration, *mestizaje*, has always been baroque.” *Ibid.*, 98–101.

<sup>78</sup> Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” 91; Kaup, “¡Vaya Papaya!,” 156.

<sup>79</sup> Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo*, 15–16. “Por la virginidad del paisaje, por la formación, por la ontología, por la presencia fáustica del indio y del negro, por la Revelación que constituyó su reciente descubrimiento, por los fecundos mestizajes que propició, América está muy lejos de haber agotado su caudal de mitologías.”

<sup>80</sup> Carpentier, “Prologue (1949),” 30.

<sup>81</sup> Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, 159.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>83</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life,” in *Unfashionable Observations* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 86–87.

<sup>84</sup> Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 157.

<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004), 117, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Carpentier, “Prologue (1949),” 30.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>89</sup> Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” 107.

<sup>90</sup> Carpentier, “Prologue (1949),” 31. Emphasis added.

<sup>91</sup> Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, 5–6.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 6–9.

<sup>93</sup> See Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier*.

<sup>94</sup> Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, 44.

<sup>95</sup> Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” 90–91.

<sup>96</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *The Lost Steps*, trans. Harriet de Onís (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 184–85.

<sup>97</sup> Harss and Dohmann, *Into the Mainstream*, 63.

## Chapter 3

### Outlaw Aesthetics:

#### John Rechy and the Narrative Poetics of a Borderlands Modernism

“To keep still when we’re on fire is the worst punishment we can inflict on ourselves.”

Federico García Lorca, *Bodas de sangre*

“We [write] because the world we live in is a house on fire and the people we love are burning.”

Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

The first epigraph above appears in John Rechy’s “The Outlaw Sensibility” to honor the memory of Federico García Lorca, a Queer author who was killed in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War for depicting images of “tabooed sensuality to explore sexual repression.”<sup>1</sup> Although Rechy’s life met with no such tragedy, his experiences as a *hustler*, or male prostitute, during the late 1950s and early 1960s met with its own timely violence and unjust persecution. In his semi-autobiographical novel *City of Night* (1963) Rechy documented these encounters across a multitude of U.S. cities. In doing so, he experimented with narrative discourse to convey the circuitous, ineffectual course of his journey in a postwar liberal context that could provide neither the recognition nor the acceptance of non-normative sexuality. His novel, therefore, literalizes the problem of social mobility by showing how the ceaseless attempt to overcome the obstacles of enfranchisement and national belonging reproduce new ones, thereby generating a seemingly eternal return of the same: a paradoxical stasis that, in his work, may be said to represent the effect of “keep[ing] still” while being “on fire,” despite every attempt to move. While the last chapter focused on Carpentier’s conceptualization of historical time to mediate “the present impasse,” together with the “untimely” alternative he envisioned, this chapter will focus on Rechy’s own narrative poetics of dual temporality: one that is inseparable from the same impasse that Carpentier was facing, yet beholden to the inter-imperiality of the Southwestern United States. It is here—in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands—that the world, for Rechy, becomes a “house on fire.” The urgency behind his writing, therefore, becomes equally inseparable from the tradition of Chicana cultural production that Sandra Cisneros references in the second epigraph above: the very same tradition to which Rechy arrived belatedly.

As a Queer “Mexican American” author writing before any reforms could be secured by the Chicano Movement and the broader Civil Rights Movement of 1954-68, Rechy—not unlike James Baldwin—felt the need to foreclose one part of his intersectional identity in order to affirm another.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the works of Carpentier and Hurston that I analyze in other chapters present themselves more recognizably as products of transnational cultural production that engage the imperial legacy of racialization, slavery, dispossession, and expansionism. Rechy diverges significantly from this field of representation by focusing almost exclusively on matters

of non-normative sexuality, even as his work also speaks, albeit laconically, to matters of race, class, and coloniality in mediating the present impasse.

These matters, after all, are inseparable from the kind of intersectionality that Rechy experienced as a Queer person of color from the borderlands. As we will see here, however, they are also inseparable from the ethnic, cultural, and transnational history of the city in which he was born and raised, i.e., the city he wrote about most frequently; the city he identified with most strongly; and the city in which he authored *City of Night*: El Paso, Texas. Standing on the Rio Grande, across the border from Ciudad Juárez—the biggest city in the Mexican state of Chihuahua—this region, including Las Cruces, is often referred to as *El Paso del Norte*, and constitutes the largest bilingual and transnational population in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>3</sup> The inter-imperial history for which this region is known is the same contextual history that informs *City of Night*: the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20, the Cristero War of 1926-29, the Great Depression of 1929-39, and—contemporaneously with the writing of *City of Night*—Operation Wetback from 1954 onwards. Importantly, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, Rechy mediates this complex, overlapping history of the borderlands, even as he turns away from it to emphasize the postwar context of the United States.

In fact, as I will argue here, Rechy's narrative discourse subtly dissolves his novel's national imaginary to show an internal-colonialism in the U.S. that invokes a larger, inter-imperial governance of the borderlands among Spain, Mexico, and the United States. When setting out to write *City of Night*, Rechy intended to organize the trajectory of his travels across the United States by relying on memory as a primary guiding force for novelistic structure and organization. In doing so, he sought to mediate a personal and collective history not simply through the contextual detail of realist description, but rather through the structural organization and figural representation of narrative emplotment. What emerged, as we will see, is a story about cyclical experience, rendered all the more palpable by a cyclical narrative discourse, i.e., a *mise en abyme* of duplication and repetition, which proliferates the instance of structural recurrence across multiple narrative arcs. This cyclical process then goes on to expand the novel's representational horizon of intelligibility, thereby exposing a metonymic condensation of geography that discloses the narrator's "reluctant inheritance" of colonial history and the displacement of that history through the latency of sexual repression. As such, *City of Night* demonstrates an articulation of sexuality with the history of empire by which it is irrevocably conditioned. In this way, Rechy's narrative discourse, in its macro-structural organization and trajectory, approaches an abstract conceptualization of the inter-imperial history that constitutes the U.S.-Mexico borderlands upon which the whole novel depends. In doing so, it portrays a narrative epistemology of border-thinking that deconstructs the novel's core national imaginary: the assumed cohesion of national belonging with which the U.S. gains not only presumably fixed boundaries but also an inclusive and progressive social character. This narrative "strategy," as Rechy calls it, is an extension of his "Outlaw Sensibility": an "awareness of separation" that he extends not only to every other ethnic minority in the United States but also to his own personal existential rejection of postwar liberalism. As such, it forms the foundation of his borderlands

modernism, which locates the Queer Chicana subject not between but outside the geographical horizon of national belonging and the temporal horizon of liberal progressive politics.

As in Carpentier's work, Rechy's novel actively seeks out an *untimely* temporality, which, as we will see, is tragically bound to encounter the full force of the present. Despite every attempt to find and validate a Queer temporality beyond "the here and now" of El Paso, Rechy's autobiographical narrator cannot escape this peripheral yet significant point of origin and terminus. His own story, in fact, cannot help but mediate the inter-imperial history that was being reproduced presently by neo-colonial forms of state power and governance with the implementation of Operation Wetback. This experience renders the novel's central focus on displacement and migration across the many U.S. "cities of night" inextricable from the displacement and migration that characterizes the borderlands from which the novel was being written. In generating these reverberations across the representation of historical time, *City of Night* develops a narrative poetics of history that asks whether progress itself is possible under the governing structures of internal colonialism that reproduce themselves as the United States and Mexico consolidate transnational forms of state power. As such, the novel discloses not merely the residual forms of empire as effects *in* history but also their constitutive—and constituting—presence as active, transmissive effects *of* history.<sup>4</sup> By examining this textual mediation of historical process, we may better comprehend how Rechy's unexplored poetics of history helps to broaden the U.S. peripheral imagination so crucial to our understanding of hemispheric cultural production.

### **Rechy's Narrative Discourse and the Limits of Postwar Liberalism**

As I mentioned above, *City of Night* appears to resist the overt representation of race, empire, and cross-cultural exchange that mobilizes most hemispheric modes of critical inquiry. Rechy's novel emphasizes the repression of homosexuality during a conservative postwar period in the U.S., the discriminatory laws of which pathologized and criminalized the Queer community. By legally codifying normative and deviant binaries of sexual conduct, many states enabled the institutionalization of homophobia during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> While the novel does not scrutinize these specific enactments, it emphasizes their impact on collective issues of social stratification and individual issues of psycho-social development. Written and received as a *roman à clef*, Rechy's novel tells the story of an autobiographical narrator who leaves El Paso to explore his budding homosexual orientation in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New Orleans, among other cities. Near the end of his journey, he comes to understand his own sexual repression, and recognize—although not overcome—the guilt and shame that had thwarted self-acceptance until that point. While he is withdrawn and introspective, Rechy's narrator is not shown to suffer a private or isolated phenomenon. Rather, his journey demonstrates how, from city to city, across dozens of underground subcultures, the need—and not the desire—for sexual repression is reinforced by the violent repression of state power. Obscenity laws and broad, institutional forms of discrimination govern and discipline the expression of non-normative sexuality in the pre-Stonewall context that Rechy distinguishes for its culture of non-normative

sexual “containment.”<sup>6</sup> The journey recounted by Rechy charts a repetition of this pattern across the quadrilateral borders of the U.S., mapping for the reader a finitude that characterizes not only his own experiences but also that of many other sexual and ethnic minorities in every major region of the nation state.<sup>7</sup> In these ways, despite its impressionistic emphasis on individual experience, Rechy’s novel can be said to register a larger historical field of collective struggle. But even so, restrained to a strictly national context, *City of Night* seems to omit the representation of transnationality implicit in the kind of hemispheric regionalism we have been exploring so far. Moreover, the aggressive interiority with which the narrator is characterized seems to display not the mediation of history but rather the representation of an inward subjectivity concerned with the immediacy of sensory experience and individual self-reflection.

From this perspective, *City of Night*’s critical reception seems only to lengthen this apparent distance between the text and the broader history of empire without which the novel could not exist. The negative reviews that immediately followed the novel’s publication—itsself a product of the liberal consensus against which Rechy was writing—ultimately led to more positive and complex affirmations of Rechy’s work.<sup>8</sup> But these later developments remained focused almost exclusively on the author’s sexual politics. Many Queer theoretical approaches have remarkably emphasized Rechy’s use of irregular grammar, representational indeterminacy, and identity performance to highlight the novel’s implicit critique of discursive power.<sup>9</sup> Adding to this emphasis on gender and sexuality, Chicana literary criticism has successfully stressed aspects of the novel that wrestle with racial identity and socio-economic class.<sup>10</sup> But even here, perhaps owing to the vestiges of an older criticism that refused to accept Rechy’s work as both Queer and Chicana,<sup>11</sup> seldom has his “unapologetically sexual” work been associated with the cultural production of the borderlands.<sup>12</sup> One could add, of course, that Rechy’s own representational bias facilitates this critical lack. On *City of Night*’s first page, Rechy’s protagonist declares that his story “must begin in El Paso,”<sup>13</sup> but after a few pages, he turns his back on the borderlands to focalize a journey across the major cities of a neatly-bounded nation state. Several times along the way, he employs impressionistic prose that describes “America as one vast City of Night, stretching gaudily from Times Square to Hollywood Boulevard.”<sup>14</sup> Concatenations such as these confine the novel’s own spatial boundaries to the lateral boundaries of the nation. Critics, then, are actually *invited* to abandon any consideration of the borderlands by reproducing in their criticism the way in which Rechy subsumes the continental category of America under the national category of the U.S. As such, much criticism has either assigned insularity to the novel’s context or viewed the novel as a Queer expression of a distinctly national counterculture.

But *City of Night* demands that we understand the novel’s representational field by recognizing Rechy’s attachment to formal, i.e., nonrepresentational, history. Even as later critics deemed the novel worthy of consideration under the purview of cultural studies, Rechy noted that the novel’s formal artifice had not received sufficient attention. His remarks about the critically unrecognized aspects of the novel’s narrative discourse, even decades after its initial publication, show that he intended to impart a demonstrable, if challenging, formal complexity in his work:

Only the book's *subject* seemed to be receiving outraged attention; its *careful structure*, whether successful or not, was virtually ignored. I was being viewed and written about as a hustler who had somehow managed to write, rather than as a writer who was writing intimately about hustling—and many other subjects.<sup>15</sup>

According to Rechy, early critics neglected his narrative discourse to sensationalize what was then considered the novel's more salacious representation of hustling and sexual fluidity. What remained to be seen at the time—and to a great extent remains to be seen today—is a more thorough consideration of the “careful structure” to which Rechy was making reference here. As he suggests in an essay that revisits the making of *City of Night*, Rechy strategically “plotted” a narrative discourse, or *sujhet*, that rendered the shape of his story, or *fabula*, coextensive with a series of important experiences during his journey across the United States in the late 1950's pre-Stonewall period.<sup>16</sup> While composing *City of Night*, Rechy discovered that the more he relied on memory, the more he “increasingly found meaning in structure.”<sup>17</sup> This discovery enabled him to approach novelistic writing through a self-fashioned aesthetic principle in which “memory itself, being selective, provides form.”<sup>18</sup> Memory, that is, allowed Rechy to record his experiences, while “imbuing [them] with a discovered ‘meaning’ ... [an] ‘ordering’ of the chaotic reality [he] had experienced and witnessed.”<sup>19</sup> Taking this autobiographical endeavor at face value, while accounting for the slippage that always exceeds authorial intention, it becomes all the more important to consider not Rechy's reconstruction of memory (the ins and outs of which are impossible to even conjecture), but rather the narrative discourse that it produced. The critical attachment to contextual representation, therefore, needs to consider how Rechy's novel mediates a personal and collective history not simply through the kind of dense, detailed description that we have come to associate with realism, but rather through the structural organization that narrative discourse affords. What becomes clear is that the trajectory of Rechy's narrative discourse, replete with repetitions and patterns, approaches an abstract conceptualization of his narrator's winding course, which then generates a form of emplotment capable of staging its own argument about the historical context that his novel represents.

Rechy begins to stage this argument at the outset of the novel by adopting the genre convention of a pilgrimage: a journey of self-discovery, which usually entails a moral or spiritual aim, a quest for healing, or—in Rechy's case—a search for salvation. Traditionally, the pilgrim finds some version of progress through which to reconcile conflicts and attain much-needed closure. Rechy employs this genre autobiographically to describe the purpose and nature of his travels across the United States. This much is clear when his narrator, interpreting his own departure, declares that “he would embark on that journey ... looking for ... some substitute for salvation.”<sup>20</sup> And indeed, it is through this journey that his quest becomes a search for the *untimely* as we have understood it up to this point, i.e., a search for rupture from the self-same present, a mode of existential freedom not *within* but rather *outside* the determinants and constraints of the historical present. For Rechy, this untimely rupture is found in the non-normative sexual act itself. It is in the freedom from timely prescriptions for sexual behavior that some sense of utopia is ascribed to an otherwise dystopian landscape. And surely, as fleeting as

they may be, these ephemeral, momentary instances of Queer time, lived out in and through the phenomenological timelessness of sexual encounter, are found in every “city of night.” But as the narrator’s journey unfolds, it calls into question whether any kind of freedom is possible beyond the transitory—and unlawful—break with the cult of “respectability,” not to mention the prescribed rights of citizenship and national belonging that, in contradictory fashion, are supposed to extend such freedoms rather than render them inadmissible.

That is, as the narrator’s journey unfolds across the United States, a pattern of timely disruption unfolds, marked by the recurrence of state power. Every landscape to which Rechy’s narrative abruptly shifts is charged with police brutality, heightened surveillance, unwarranted arrests, and subsistence-level living conditions that give way to an underground minoritarian subculture. No matter how far he travels, Rechy’s narrator repeatedly finds himself subjected to the enforcement of institutionalized bigotry. Certainly all is not “well with society” when “the cops scour Times Square”; when “the newspapers are full of reports of raids” against “UNDESIRABLES”;<sup>21</sup> when “fugitives” have to “protectively assemble” because “a world with so little compassion [had] shut them out.”<sup>22</sup> Time and time again, Rechy’s narrator, together with a nascent yet considerably large LGBTQ community, migrate from city to city, where they are either brutalized, incarcerated, or repeatedly ordered by police to “move on, move on”; but even the repetition intrinsic to such a phrase—a phrase that itself repeats many times throughout the novel while curiously moving it along—emphasizes the contradictory *inability* to move, leaving the narrator and many like him “inevitably ... back in the same spot.”<sup>23</sup> Rechy mediates this experience, moreover, on a macro-narrative scale by removing the *road* from his narrator’s road narrative; that is, by introducing changes in location through abrupt spatial and temporal shifts that generate an effect of stasis and repetition rather than change and progression.

This remarkable pattern discloses the limits of a postwar liberalism in which the extension of rights and citizenship thwart, rather than enable, the self-determination of sexual and racial minorities in the U.S. Neither the progress nor the closure associated with the pilgrimage genre, then, becomes attainable under this structure of governance. Rather, what becomes attainable—as we have seen within the novel’s own purview—is an unbearable model of internal colonialism that constitutes the double consciousness with which Rechy’s narrator mobilizes the language of *worlding*, i.e., the hundreds of references to a split or bifurcated existence, between having to “live within *their* world” and yet wanting to live in “that seething world” of hustlers rendered unacceptable by the powers that be.<sup>24</sup> This duality echoes the contradictions of national belonging and segregation instituted by forms of Jim Crow segregation in the Southwest; those to which, as we will see later in this chapter, Rechy’s own family and autobiographical narrator were subjected. It is a form of separation that recurs in every city, thereby combining the dual existence of everyday life on a spatial axis with its repetition and intensification on a temporal axis. In the novel, this experience generates an effect of prolonged cyclical stasis, a perversion of the pilgrim’s progress that keeps Rechy’s narrator locked out of mainstream society, while ensuring that he remains locked in to this stratification across the U.S. nation state.

In turn, the logic of recurrence and stagnation that characterizes the social structure into which the narrator is thrown determines many of the symbols and figures of speech expressed by the narrator's internal monologue. For example, while reflecting on his experiences midway through his journey, he declares on one occasion that "the world spun dizzily like a ferris wheel out of control," and on another, that "the world was revealing its death to [him] by the process of slow discovery."<sup>25</sup> Repeatedly in passages such as these, the narrator deploys tropes and images that demonstrate the cyclical and—by reference to the slow decay of "death" in this passage—declining course that structures his path and diminishes any pretense to self-determination and social mobility. Even more hopeful observations, such as his description of the skyline as a "magic cyclorama embracing the water [with] a glittering network of lights,"<sup>26</sup> are countered with a threatening presence, i.e., of "a giant searchlight [that] soars above [and] encircles the nightcity ... dominating the skyline" and illuminating "that fusion of savage contradictions within this legend called America."<sup>27</sup> These impressions, as innocuous or merely figurative as they may seem, present the reader with their own argumentative force. In highlighting the work of consciousness to adumbrate the material structures within which his narrator is confined, Rechy's metaphoric language produces shapes that mirror the very form of the narrator's circuitous course: "wheel," "cyclorama," "encircles," "swirling," "network"—even the "searchlight" itself—connote a circularity that reinforces the recognition of finitude by leveraging figural signification of cyclical stagnation. The recurrence of this experience amounts to what I referenced in my introductory chapter as "a historically-effected consciousness," here overrun with cyclical images, such as the ferris wheel, to convey the logic of repetition, return, and stasis. The central agency afforded here is recognition—one whose process of "slow discovery" synthesizes this cyclical experience over the course of the story's unfolding into a gestalt whose causal forces require greater understanding from the narrator.

And precisely as the narrator attempts to understand the dual nature of the postwar liberal landscape through which he migrates without end, another duality is constructed in the text, i.e., between his lived experience and his interpretation of experience. This phenomenon can be recognized visually by the novel's broad narrative structure, as indicated by each part's chapter titles:

### **Part One**

*City of Night* [Begin: El Paso]

Mr. King: Between Two Lions

*City of Night*

Pete: A Quarter Ahead

*City of Night*

The Professor: The Flight of the Angels

*City of Night*

### **Part Three**

*City of Night*

### **Part Two**

*City of Night*

Miss Destiny: The Fabulous Wedding

*City of Night*

Chuck: Rope Heaven by the Neck

*City of Night*

Skipper: A Very Beautiful Boy

*City of Night*

### **Part Four**

*City of Night*

Lance: The Ghost of Esmeralda Drake III  
*City of Night*  
 SOMEONE: People Don't Have Wings  
*City of Night*  
 Neil: Masquerade  
*City of Night*

SYLVIA: All my Saintly Children  
*City of Night*  
 CHI-CHI: Hey, World!  
*City of Night*  
 Jeremy: White Sheets  
*City of Night* [End: El Paso]

As we can see in this breakdown of the novel's "careful structure," *City of Night*'s macro-narrative arc is constituted by four major Parts. What is not disclosed in this static, spatialized representation, however, is that over the course of narrative time, each Part forms a micro-narrative arc of its own, an embedded narrative that echoes every other Part. Each one of these Parts also includes four "City of Night" chapters, interweaving and bookending a triad of "portraiture[s]," or "interviews," as they are labeled in the book.<sup>28</sup> These interviews, in fact, offer the narrator an opportunity to enact an interior *view* of his own repressed sexual identity as he investigates the sexual repression of others. Every "interview" chapter that begins with someone's name (for example, in Part One, Mr. King, Pete, and The Professor), focalizes *exteriority* by emphasizing an immediacy of experience with little to no interior monologue. But every interwoven chapter titled "City of Night" (italicized here to demonstrate the novel's most frequent structural recurrence), focalizes *interiority* by emphasizing the work of consciousness as it interprets experience. Through this dialectical oscillation of interiority and exteriority the narrator enacts a series of hermeneutic circles to achieve understanding: each one moving out into the *exterior* of the contextual world, and back into the *interior* of reflexive thought with a new comprehension of the whole through which to integrate the part (Figure 2.1). Toward the end of the narrative, this oscillation from exteriority to interiority amounts to a final horizon of intelligibility that reveals to the narrator his own sexual repression.<sup>29</sup>

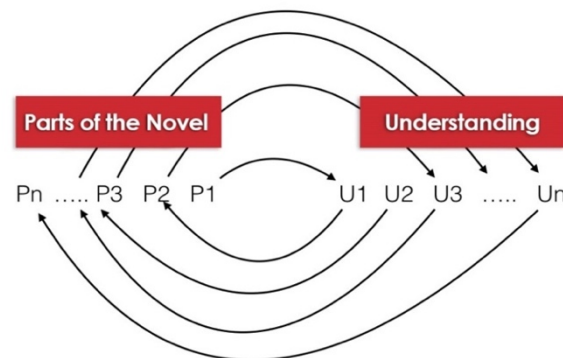


Figure 2.1. Every shift between interiority and exteriority that occurs in each of the novel's four Parts, in turn, expands the textual horizon of intelligibility through which a broader historical context comes into view.

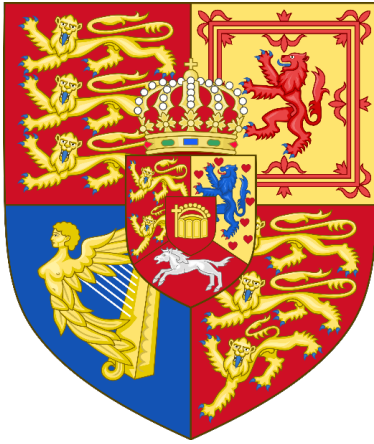


Figure 2.2. Gide's example of a "device from heraldry," displaying the first variant of his *mise en abyme*

From the visible pattern shown above, we can see how the recurrence of interpretation mirrors the recurrence of lived experience, thereby creating a repetition of repetition itself. In this way, Rechy's narrative discourse forms a *mise en abyme*: a representation *in* the artwork that instantiates a recurrence of the artwork itself. During the interwar period this visual technique was transposed to *literary* art in the experimental narratives of André Gide, whose work became a *central* reference for public discourse surrounding sexual difference in the 1950s, and notably, a major influence on Rechy.<sup>30</sup> As one example of this technique, Gide offers a "device from heraldry that involves putting a second representation of the original shield 'en abyme' *within* [the original shield]" (Figure 2.2). As a second example, he cites a painting titled "The Money Changer and his Wife" by Quentin Metsys, in which, quote, "a small convex mirror reflects ... the interior of the room in which the action of

the painting takes place."<sup>31</sup> Unlike the first example of heraldry, this second example does not reproduce the painting from within itself; instead, Metsys' mirror expands the viewer's horizon of intelligibility, producing not a reproduction of the production so much as an extension of the context within which the work of art is produced (Figure 2.3). As such, the surface of the canvas attempts to generate its own depth and offer a subtle, yet significant, key to its interpretation.

Curiously, Rechy's *City of Night* employs both variants of Gide's *mise en abyme*, i.e., vertical repetition on the one hand, and horizontal expansion on the other: a combination of *identity* and *difference* that together unravel not only a more complex geographical storyworld but also an expanding fusion of horizons for the reader through which to invite a bigger history into the frame. In the table above, which illustrates the structural repetition in Rechy's novel, we can identify the first variant of Gide's *mise en abyme*: each Part of the novel produces a short narrative arc that *reproduces* the long narrative arc of the larger narrative that contains them. Of course, these are abstract reproductions whose concrete particulars differ, but along the lines of emplotment, they parallel one another as the novel unfolds to represent the recurring cycles of stasis that I referenced earlier—those which characterize the narrator's tragic pilgrimage. In this political register, then, the *mise en abyme* becomes a useful technique through which to demonstrate the reproduction of the production of social relations, while delineating their forms diachronically. In doing so, it enables Rechy to emphasize how narrative possesses a *figural* capacity to provide not only content on a *spatial* axis but also how context is immanent to the reconstruction of historical becoming on a temporal axis.

Context becomes crucial here as this first variant of Gide's *mise en abyme* enables and gives way to the second variant, lending Rechy's narrative poetics a greater complexity that requires, for the complete legibility of its suggested meaning, a synthesis of both. The first variant amounts to a pattern of reproduction that generates not a palimpsestual logic of erasure and re-codification but rather one of accretion and expansion through shifting landscapes. And with expansion comes extension: a broader or, as in Gide's second variant, a deeper scope of representation. Much as in Metsys' painting, in Rechy's novel this marginal yet wide-reaching form of inconspicuous representation offers a larger hermeneutic repertory for the reader; one that, together with the narrator's own interpretation and understanding, expands the horizon of intelligibility within which the reader can allocate and ascribe meaning to events as they unfold. This narrative process brings us closer to that view from which—as in Metsys' convex mirror—we catch a glimpse of the context that lies behind Rechy's own "canvas" and which is given just outside of its core representational field. That is, it brings us closer to the peripheries of the novel's national imaginary, providing an opportunity to see beyond the nation and rethink the long history of inter-imperiality between the U.S. and Mexico without which, as we will see, Rechy's novel could not have been written.



Figure 2.3. The second variant of Gide's *mise en abyme*, which reproduces not the work itself, but rather a "window" into the contextual conditions of its making. Rechy's horizontal expansion is similar in function and enabled by the accretion of meaning generated through the reproduction of Gide's first variant.

### **"An Awareness of Separation": Outlaw Form, Outlawed Peripheries**

The process that we have been analyzing here, i.e., the machinery of narrative discourse through which Rechy constructs his own poetics of history, in fact exposes a geography far bigger than the strictly national landscape foregrounded in the novel. Rechy's narrator often emphasizes the bifurcation between the "straight world [and] the boiling subterranean world" of hustlers.<sup>32</sup> But while he goes to great lengths to highlight this division in the novel, he subsumes a second division between the strictly national storyworld in which this bifurcation exists and another "world" that, from the beginning of the narrative, presumes to hold a marginal relation to it: the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Rechy's narrator may be able to navigate swiftly in and out of the gay and straight "worlds" that the novel foregrounds, but this other world, this periphery from which the embedded narrative begins (and to which it returns) remains marginal to the national imaginary of his narrative. This treatment becomes all the more surprising, given that he wrote

the novel just after the implementation of Operation Wetback: a major escalation in the U.S. militarization of the borderlands, which saw millions of violent deportations and civil rights abuses after the mid-century but especially from 1954 to 1956.<sup>33</sup> Apparently, what Rechy relegated to the peripheries of the text—that is, what becomes strategically disclosed as a *secondary* repression, produced by the narrator’s own emphasis on sexual repression—is a transnational history of imperial violence at the peripheries of the nation-state. This overlapping history to which Rechy often, albeit surreptitiously, alludes—from the conquest to the interwar years—becomes all the more significant when his present is concretized by the novel’s *mise en abyme* as a recurrence of the imperial past. Curiously, as Rechy rendered his Mexican community largely invisible, while detailing the police brutality waged against ethnic and sexual minorities in the northern United States, a reemergence of state power was materializing in the borderlands against an immigrant population already rendered invisible in the social and political life of the nation. But in a manner that, as we will see here, becomes just as prone to military strategy, Rechy renders visible this contemporary history slowly, symbolically, and even cyclically throughout his novel.

After all, while *City of Night* foregrounds the nation, it does so autobiographically from the explicit guidance of a cultural memory that explains why the novel may expose the hemispheric periphery precisely as it foregrounds a national imaginary. As many of his essays make clear, Rechy was writing from the position of a deeply riven, *mestizo* consciousness, inflected by the institutional and cultural imperatives to suppress his Chicanx origins.<sup>34</sup> Citing John Philip Santos’s *Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation*, Rechy connects his own origins to the conquest of Spain and its lasting impact on the borderlands—an impact that is directly responsible, even centuries later, for what he understands to be a psychic condition of alienated subjectivity that requires this conditioned response:

The grandiose melodrama of Catholic tradition [did not fully destroy] the “inframundo” of the Aztecs ... where all that has been forgotten still lives. [But] as [Cortes] swept into Mexico, [he] carved deep wounds into the psyche of the Indians, spawning children often born of rape, mestizos, “the mixed ones,” outsiders from the two worlds that produced them. That conquest *still* “runs through most Mexican-American families like an active fault line.” It creates an *epic of defensive forgetting* among a people who, like Santos, easily weep. We have made *selective forgetting* a sacramental obligation. Leave it all in the past.... There is pain enough in the present.<sup>35</sup>

Considering Rechy’s emphasis on “forgetting” in this passage, especially as it relates to a cultural memory that links past and present, it is all the more important to recall the significance of memory to the “careful structure” of his novel. Not only did Rechy “increasingly [find] meaning in structure”; he found structure in “memory itself.”<sup>36</sup> Giving new meaning to the ceaseless imperative to “remember,” an authorial demand that becomes just as important to his autobiographical protagonist, memory serves to link Rechy the author and Rechy the implied narrator.<sup>37</sup> As such, the author’s protagonist can access and leverage the author’s own cultural memory to mediate not only the lived experience of his travels in the United States but also—and

precisely through the dialectical exchange between interiority and exteriority that produces his *mise en abyme*—the broader collective experience of the borderlands history from which he attempts to flee. Rechy's narrative structure, then, can be understood to leverage a "selective ... memory" that "provides form" to redress the "selective forgetting" of settler colonialism, together with the *mestizaje* that it produced. And while it goes on to do as much, it does not fail to uphold the highest possible fidelity to the "epic of defensive forgetting" that the novel's narrator is more than capable of obliging.

Indeed, *City of Night*'s long-winding journey, which has been compared to that of Homer's *Odyssey* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, can be considered its own reparative "epic of remembrance"—one that, like all epics, is burdened with the need to mediate a larger history yet one, unlike others, that must confront its own capacity to mount an "epic of defensive forgetting."<sup>38</sup> After all, given the specious distinction in the passage above between a history that must be left behind and one that necessarily remains in the present, it is not so easy to tell where "selective forgetting" *ends* and where the conscious "pain ... [of] the present" *begins*. Rechy's narrator, whose characterological makeup showcases this very problem, still retains the need to displace the conquest that, as Santos explains, is the primary cause of forgetting and, implicitly, the catalyst for which remembering is made necessary. This recourse to erasure, as Rechy puts it here, is ritualized as a "sacramental obligation," a product of the religious order that he repeatedly associates not only with the imperatives of sexual normativity but also with the first colonial rule of Mexico and, by extension, the borderlands to which his narrator is beholden.<sup>39</sup> As such, it becomes apparent that, especially for the Chicanx community to which Rechy belongs, everyday life in the inter-colony requires an avowal of disavowal, whether through conscious suppression or unconscious repression: not a presence of history but rather a rendering of its absence in negotiation of the conquest that must—yet cannot—be forgotten. It is no wonder, then, that the self-reflexive imperative to "remember" appears nearly two hundred times in *City of Night*. With the same subtlety of Metys' convex mirror, remembrance provides access to a narrative epistemology of the borderlands, if only through a strategic negotiation of concealment and disclosure.

As Rechy explains, this approach may be considered all the more necessary when the legal and educational inculcation of inferiority in the borderlands, together with the social mandate to pass racially, *if at all possible*, renders repression itself tantamount to survival:

The temptation to pass became enormous. I would run home to secret poverty, having given a false address of a prettier house.... "Oh, don't say you're Mexican," kind friends would offer absolution. "You must be *Spanish*." A similar "out" is often proffered to homosexuals, to become "bisexuals." At one time passing was necessary for homosexuals to ensure survival. In the 1950s ... the accusation of having been involved in a homosexual act, even in private, might result in imprisonment of up to 15 years. And in some states, life in prison.<sup>40</sup>

Rechy's own juxtaposition here associates a repressive tactic of racial passing with the repressive attempt to survive the sexual misconduct codes of the early-1950s that criminalized homosexuality. As Rechy makes clear, this experience proffers its own defense mechanism: "there is hardly a member of *any* minority who has not had to deal with factors of imposed inferiority and self-hatred, aroused by the dominant society's insistence that it represents the desirable 'norm.' That creates the problems of 'passing,' the rejection of one's rich heritage and sensibility."<sup>41</sup> Throughout the novel, this articulation of racial and sexual passing is laid out for the reader, even if its relationship to "selective forgetting" is not. A characterological repression of the part, i.e., sexuality, becomes a repression of the whole, i.e., the intersectionality of race, class, and the coloniality that renders them all inadmissible. Indeed, it is expressed in the "subterranean world" to which Rechy's narrator refers constantly. No doubt, while this language of the "underworld" is meant to denote a life lived on the margins, it also names the English translation of the Aztec *"inframundo"* mentioned earlier: where the pre-Columbian past "that has been forgotten still lives."<sup>42</sup> Even his description of the first "subterranean graydepths" that he visits shows how "from the thundering underground ... the world pours into Times Square. Like Lost souls emerging from the purgatory of the trains."<sup>43</sup> This first "city of night," like those which succeed it, imbues the narrator's attempt to write himself out of El Paso with the memory of an indigenous past that was written out of history by the advent of settler colonialism. Even in seemingly innocuous passages such as this, the narrator's disclosure of his own *inframundo* away from home becomes inseparable from the disclosure of his racial formation in and through the borderlands he calls home: where what he attempts to forget "still lives."

As a *tactic*, this kind of passing forms only part of Rechy's larger, self-conscious narrative *strategy*—one that does, in fact, hold a reparative relation to forgetting, while making itself useful to artists who face discrimination in variously different ways. Rechy's own train of thought in the last block quotation above, which couples sexuality to race and class, already highlights an associative intersectionality of, or shared experience between, a multitude of oppressed groups. And indeed, this coupling, as Rechy describes in a later essay, is what extends *to* a discourse on sexual repression an articulation *with* coloniality:

Arguments abound about whether or not there is a unique "sensibility" manifested in the arts by certain minority groups... A feminine sensibility? A gay sensibility? A black sensibility? A Hispanic sensibility? I suggest that such sensibilities do exist, and that they are linked by one main factor: the awareness of separation—call it exile—from the authoritarian "mainstream." That awareness shapes what I call an "Outlaw Sensibility."<sup>44</sup>

This acknowledgment of a "linked" difference, of a single history of oppression that pertains to multiple groups, shows how Rechy's own artistic practice already assumes a deep structural association between different forms of legally mandated *separation*. *City of Night*'s central focus on sexuality therefore subsumes the issues of race, class, and coloniality under the same signifier, and it does so precisely by reference to a self-fashioned aesthetic principle, an "Outlaw Sensibility" whose own phrasing discursively rejects the legal codes that mobilize punitive branches of state power to govern markers of difference. "Intrinsic in the word 'outlaw,'" Rechy

adds, “is the implication that the ‘laws’ ... are wrong, repressive.”<sup>45</sup> In “exploring some tactics that the artist-as-outlaw employs,” Rechy points to “(1) infiltration, (2) sabotage, [and] (3) camouflage.”<sup>46</sup> He does not develop these tactics further, but he does claim that “throughout history the voice of the outlaw has conveyed from the frontlines urgent messages of impending struggles [in] the literature of our dangerous times... delivered not in the banal prose of the propagandist, but in the careful sentences of the artist, unlabeled.”<sup>47</sup> For Rechy, artistic expression must be tasked with the mission to generate political urgency, especially during the pre-Stonewall period in which he was writing, which saw a growth of sexual rights movements that focused less on the extension of equal citizenship and more on the existential demand for self-determination. His outlaw strategy, in many ways, forms a unique anti-liberal position beyond these movements, which suggests that the only ethical mode of governance lies perpetually on the *out*-side of the *law*.

The choice of diction for his self-fashioned aesthetic principle, therefore, is all the more apt; after all, the etymological sense of the word “outlaw” denotes, from the Old Norse *útlagr*, a state or condition of being *banished* or *outcast* indefinitely. Given the violence that, as we have seen, characterized so much of Rechy’s lived experience in the U.S.—not to mention the increased military presence that occupied his home town in the borderlands during Operation Wetback—the mere description of his aesthetic approach indeed warranted the military-speak of subterfuge. And in this sense, it encapsulates both the martial law of the U.S. border patrol and those which were perpetually wrangled and deported, i.e., banished, outcast, through its execution. While Rechy wants artistic expression, in conjunction with the untimely expression of non-normative sexuality, to uphold a political urgency, he feels that it must nevertheless operate tactfully through the very same state of negation, omission, or absence that outlaws, in their role as outsider, can use to their advantage while nonetheless achieving their aims. By considering how this dual mode of agency and invisibility conditions Rechy’s work, we can better understand how the representation of *repression* in his novel in fact serves to demonstrate the tactful *expression* of his “outlaw” narrative strategy.

### **Everything Begins and Ends in El Paso: Representation and Inter-imperiality**

If absence becomes the tactic through which to preserve the furtive presence of “impending struggles,” Rechy’s “outlaw sensibility” demands that he convey his “urgent messages” using a narrative discourse that generates meaning precisely by re-routing these messages to the contextual peripheries of the novel’s storyworld that it makes accessible. And in this sense, representation in his novel is conditioned not only by the context of place but also by the temporal associations ascribed to “places left unfinished in the time of creation.” The resulting distance between the novel’s storyworld and its imperial past, then, is bridged not only through the presence of the storyworld’s geographical periphery but also through the connections and reverberations that Rechy’s outlaw strategy silently makes between past and present: one that anchors his pilgrimage and its structure to the workings of memory, while linking memory itself to the inter-imperial formation of the U.S. Mexico border: a formation that, closer to his

own present, was seeing a reproduction of inter-colonial governance by the segregational reach of Jim Crow in the Southwest, exacerbated by the Great Depression, and compounded by Operation Wetback during the mid-1950s. Rechy's novel, in other words, employs its own "camouflage" to recover this history by linking the cyclical returns in his pilgrimage to the cyclical experience of neo-colonial violence in his borderlands community using recurring symbols of insects, cobwebs, roaches, decaying wildlife, stagnant water, and rotting bodies. Many of these images, in generating phenomenological associations between the historical past and present, produce affective ruptures in narrative time that, as we will see in this section, crystallize to reprise the particulars of his segregated past *in* his segregated present.

Whereas Rechy's narrative structure asks us to acknowledge the *mise en abyme* of repetition and horizontal expansion that discloses the novel's representation, representation itself requires that we acknowledge a second narrative logic at play: the condensation and displacement that together constitute what is generally referred to as overdetermination. Condensation, a Freudian term initially borrowed from the field of rhetoric, is a laconic form, i.e., a "lacunary expression," whose omissions are characterized by the "formation of composite expressions, each of which belongs to several trains of thought."<sup>48</sup> Conversely, displacement is characterized by "a shift away from the central point," whereby latent content is transferred to manifest content.<sup>49</sup> Condensation operates by degrees of quantity and contraction, while displacement does so through degrees of intensity and expansion. Together, they constitute a phenomenon termed overdetermination. Generally, overdetermination refers to an effect produced by a multiplicity of dissimilar or opposing causes. Specifically, Sigmund Freud developed a theory of overdetermination for the field of psychoanalysis, I. A. Richards for literary criticism, and Louis Althusser for structural Marxism. Although Rechy was not explicitly engaging with any of these theoretical models, his novel's preoccupation with the self psychology of subjectivity and introspection certainly aligns his use of overdetermination with that of Freud's. After all, in its original psychoanalytic formulation, condensation borrows its material directly from memory, which, as we have seen, forms a crucial component of Rechy's aesthetics. In *City of Night*, the condensation and displacement of overdetermination govern the logic of representation, much as the repetition and expansion of Rechy's dialectical *mise en abyme* governs the logic of narrative discourse. In this way, both synthesize to form Rechy's "outlaw" narrative strategy.

At the very outset, *City of Night* demonstrates the causal and, in large part, determining significance of the borderlands to the novel as a whole. Rechy commences with a brief frame narrative, delivered through a stream of consciousness that condenses the narrator's journey, i.e., the embedded narrative that makes up the majority of the text:

Later I would think of AMERICA as one vast City of Night stretching gaudily from Times Square to Hollywood Boulevard—jukebox-winking, rock-n-roll-moaning: America at night fusing its darkcities into the unmistakable shape of loneliness. Remember Pershing Square and the apathetic palmtrees. Central Park and the frantic shadows. Movie theaters in the angry morning-hours. And wounded Chicago streets....

Horror-movie courtyards in the French Quarter—tawdry Mardi Gras floats with clowns tossing out glass beads, passing dumbly like life itself.... And I would remember lives lived out darkly in that vast City of Night....<sup>50</sup>

Note how, by beginning the novel's frame narrative, this brief, impressionistic passage demonstrates commencement by way of condensation, i.e., by radically compressing narrative temporality into a small fraction of the time through which his long, embedded narrative will unfold. But this process prompts the need to restart, to unpack what is entirely displaced by the first, condensed paragraph above:

But it should begin in El Paso, that journey through the cities of night. Should begin in El Paso, in Texas. And it begins in the Wind... In a Southwest windstorm with the gray clouds like steel doors locking you in the world from Heaven.<sup>51</sup>

This return to origins occurs immediately after the narrator summons his memory to "remember lives lived out darkly in that vast City of Night." Already on the first page, then, the need to begin at the beginning by proceeding from the end shows a cyclical logic of organization whose understanding requires the acknowledgment of condensation. Moreover, it demands a recognition of the way in which this form of condensation privileges El Paso as the site from which a hermeneutic repertory for the creation of meaning is made accessible. This geographical locus of historical prefiguration, then, becomes the ultimate horizon within which the narrator's journey will come to "make sense," especially the attribution of causal and deterministic significance that will periodically return—as he returns here—to the recognition that what happens in the United States "begin[s] in El Paso," where the national imaginary begins to dissolve. Even in this brief passage, the El Paso landscape represents one of the novel's most punishing images of finitude. This connotation of captivity, of exclusion, of rejection—here at the beginning of the narrator's story—already foreshadows the recurring experiences of his pilgrimage. The narrator's point of departure, then, is shown to largely prefigure his destiny. As such, it serves to determine the only conditioned response he is capable of giving to lived experience later in life, not to mention much of what he is capable of achieving in his attempt to redress his "awareness of separation" in the first place. The repetition of the phrase "should begin in El Paso," therefore, emphasizes the determining relationship of geography to the narrative as a whole. The first mention of El Paso anchors Rechy's travel narrative to a fixed point of origin that condenses much of what is later displaced onto the travel narrative itself. But its second iteration—"Should begin in El Paso"—removes the article, placing less emphasis on El Paso and more emphasis on the auxiliary verb "should." This change elicits a few questions: Why exactly should it begin in El Paso? Moreover, if El Paso is so important, why is it so quickly relegated to the peripheries of the novel's discursive space? And if the story so adamantly should begin in El Paso, could it have begun somewhere else? The answers to these questions lie in the novel's overdetermined field of representation, whose vast geographical referent of the borderlands is at once displaced onto and condensed into the deceptively simple signifier of "El Paso." Notably, in this passage, it is immediately displaced again from El Paso onto a "Southwest windstorm." And by yet another form of displacement, this passage shifts

focus from the windstorm to the greater abstraction of “Heaven,” the delayed rhetorical placement of which produces the effect of anticipation to convey its mutually determined necessity and inaccessibility.

What “Heaven” means for the narrator, however, is explained by a larger form of overdetermination that constitutes the first chapter as a whole. As we saw earlier, the frame narrative condenses the narrator’s pilgrimage, i.e., the embedded narrative that follows it. But the first chapter within the embedded narrative develops a causal framework in the borderlands without which the narrator’s journey into the U.S. mainland could not be possible. In this way, it provides a key through which to better understand not only the novel’s representational logic of overdetermination but also the relationship between the peripheral borderlands and the core—a dichotomization that exists both textually and *contextually*. As a young boy, the narrator runs outside to protect his beloved dog Winnie from a windstorm, but he is too late; “the clouds have shut out the sky completely, the wind is howling violently, and it is awesomely dark.”<sup>52</sup> This first instance of narrative conflict employs the pathetic fallacy to demonstrate an affective register that will characterize the narrator’s experiences throughout the novel: confinement and immobility; violent and ceaseless ineffectual striving; resignation to a life lived in what becomes an extension of this first, unacknowledged “city of night,” of darkness, invisibility, and inherent meaninglessness. This conflict, moreover, illustrates the hostile landscape against which—within the context of Operation Wetback—Rechy’s “outlaw sensibility” fittingly directs the language of military force: “Standing watching Winnie, I see the gray clouds massing and rolling in the horizon, sweeping suddenly, terrifyingly across the sky as if to battle, giant mushrooms exploding, blending in to that steely blanket.”<sup>53</sup> Natural phenomena here resembles the explosion of an atom bomb, whose nuclear radius renders even the air toxic, hostile, warlike. Moreover, it contaminates the world within which he is “locked.” For Rechy, the anthropomorphism of nature often serves an anti-romantic purpose that renders poisonous what should otherwise be a nurturing relationship: as “the wind sweeps up the dust,” for example, the narrator discerns how “the water in the bowl beside [Winnie] has turned into mud.”<sup>54</sup> A traditional symbol of rejuvenation and life-giving sustenance—precisely what the dog needs most—is here robbed of any life-giving quality. For the narrator, this spells danger, but the more he tries to save the dog, the more painful the “needlepoint wind” becomes. Ultimately, he is forced to run indoors. This moment shows the first instance of failure when attempting to move against the force of wind, which Rechy often links to the inevitable force of historical change: for him it is the “wind which sweeps through our lives shaping our destinies...eroding belief.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover this episode shows the first representational occurrence of displacement, which offsets the fear of damnation in lieu of salvation. This fear repeats itself indefinitely in a myriad of ways throughout his life, the reason for which is implied here: “Inside now, I rush to the window.... I long for something miraculous to draw across the sky to stop the wind,” but it never comes; Winnie dies.<sup>56</sup> And with the recognition that “Dogs don’t go to Heaven [because] they haven’t got souls.... [that] the body just ... becomes dirt”; with the realization that all he can do now is “stand by the window, thinking: It isn’t fair,”<sup>57</sup> we are introduced to yet another phenomenon whose impact weighs heavily on the narrator for the rest of the novel: the feeling of helplessness, of an “*inherited* unfairness” that repeats itself time and time again.<sup>58</sup> This episode shows the novel’s logic of

representation by condensing a series of events whose consequences and affects repeat until the end of the novel. As such, it allegorizes the conditions of everyday life that mark the narrator's failed pilgrimage. He is, after all, incapable of finding agency against forces that, much like the wind, render his whole endeavor tragic and fatalistic. Much like Winnie he is born a "mutt" of mixed race into a hostile environment whose unnatural dangers are inherent to the natural conditions of his birth. This whole episode, in fact, is rooted at the site of the narrator's birth, where his narrative "must begin," precisely because what begins here begins elsewhere in his adult life, again and again. So in a number of ways whose overdetermination goes undetected on the first reading, it appears that everything *does* begin in El Paso. But quite significantly, the logic of circularity that governs the novel as a whole has already clued us in to the paradox that what begins here is also what *began* somewhere else.<sup>59</sup>

This other beginning, or inheritance, is most present at the geographical and historical periphery that constitutes the narrator's horizon of intelligibility. That is, not simply the domestic life of his childhood foregrounded in the first chapter, but rather the contextual borderlands of El Paso that is shown to govern his domestic life. The narrator's representation of El Paso includes not only a window into the causal determinants of his entire journey, as he sees it, but also, and even extending the *mise en abyme* of Metsys's painting, the contextual history that created the horizon offered by El Paso itself. Curiously enough, *City of Night's* dedication reads, "for My Mother/and the Memory/of my Father," a fact made all the more interesting when his father's memory forms a metonymic relation to the history of imperial settlement in the borderlands, upon which, like memory itself, his whole project hinges:

"I became the reluctant inheritor [of] my father's violence.... That man who alternately claimed French, English, Scottish descent; that strange man who had traveled from Mexico to California spreading his seed—that turbulent man, married and divorced, who then married my Mother, a beautiful Mexican woman who never once understood the terror between me and my father."<sup>60</sup>

While the narrator reserves a deep, unquestioning admiration for his mother, he cannot do the same for his father, a "strange man" who marred the narrator's childhood with unspeakable acts of violence. However, his alienation from his father, produced precisely by the psychological portraiture that Rechy details at the outset of his novel, leads to a line of questioning that exposes the centrality of his father's influence. Composing the beginning of his story from the end of his pilgrimage, the narrator reflects on how, upon leaving, he sought to understand his own place in history by understanding the patrilineal ancestry that constituted his father's place in history. But here, what the narrator sought to understand in retrospect condenses into an abstract portraiture of empire before his travels even began—not only of its continental reach and proliferation, but also of its capacity to make of a *terra incognita* a hemispheric America. Even the northbound trajectory of his father's expedition parallels that of his hometown's first colonial wave. The first Spanish colonizers to arrive there in 1598, followed by Juan de Oñate's imperial expedition, travelled *from* the South, hence the name given to the city, *El Paso del Norte* [the Pass of the North].<sup>61</sup> Here—and particularly in relation to the question of ancestral lineage—the father's

displacement *from* Mexico points back to an imperial legacy that Rechy, in an interview, connects to that of the dictator, Porfirio Diaz, whose rule led to the Mexican Revolution and the mass migrations of over 600,000 to El Paso.<sup>62</sup> During the Cristero War in Mexico that followed the Revolution, El Paso received its largest exodus of migrants, more than doubling this population to well over a million. These migrants ultimately bolstered domestic industries, while falling into racialized and proletarianized subsistence-level labor conditions that sustained the nation's cohesive agricultural and industrial identity, while being excluded from it entirely. Although Rechy's narrator goes on to represent this population in a later passage, here he notes how his father's displacement from Mexico points toward the U.S. but his connection to Mexico points back to the aristocratic legacy associated with the cause of the Mexican Revolution. Despite his estrangement from his father, then, his attempt to "discover him in [his] memories" is equally an attempt to discover a history of imperial occupation and northward migration that—like Mexico's first occupation of El Paso after gaining independence from Spain in 1821—constitutes the borderlands he calls home.<sup>63</sup>

Importantly, his father's presence—or the imperial legacy with which his presence is intertwined—travels with the narrator, helping to constitute the discernable *shape* of his memories. In reiterating his intention to "discover" his father, the narrator describes the purpose of recounting his pilgrimage: "to understand his [father's] torture in searching out the shape of [his] own."<sup>64</sup> This deliberate substitution occurs not only because his father was also deeply troubled by sexuality, violence, loss, and poverty; in addition—and for reasons all too significant for the adult narrator who is writing from the endpoint of the narrative—this substitution is made possible by his understanding that his "father for [him] then existed only as someone who was around somehow; taking furious shape later, fiercely."<sup>65</sup> There is an important, unexpressed connection here between the narrator's pilgrimage to "discover [his father] in [his] memories" and the memories that, as we have seen, give shape to the narrative's "careful structure" by mediating lived experience—especially when both take the same "furious shape." We have already witnessed the importance that Rechy gives to shapes and patterns, not to mention the way in which he articulates shapes with narrative structure to project a figural representation of patterned experience. Here Rechy's narrator is describing himself as a young boy before embarking on his journey, but he is writing as an adult at the end of his journey. From this vantage point, he already knows precisely the kind of "furious shape" his life will take: that which his narrative expresses—both through formal mimesis and characterological diegesis—in the patterned cyclical swing of violence and repression. Yet here the *shape* of that pattern, together with the *memories* that drive it, are both aligned with the influence of his father. In the narrator's case, therefore, the causal framework of the pilgrimage is overdetermined by his father's memory and perpetual presence. And as we've seen, the memory of his father, itself largely repressed throughout the narrative, is inextricable from the constituting power of empire and the colonial making of the hemispheric West. The narrator's father and the colonial legacy he embodies come to represent the historical conditions of empire that are simply "around somehow" during childhood yet are recognized for their "fiercely" determining power later in life.

This duality of temporal and spatial immanence points to another father-son relationship that gives Rechy the opportunity, through a series of condensed images, to mediate the Cristero War that followed the Mexican Revolution and the historical similarities that migrants were facing during Operation Wetback in the mid-century. The father's violence, whether sexual or purely physical, is explicitly associated with religion through the recurring memory of the narrator's childhood *nacimiento*, the very thought of which conjures the threat of stasis through "petrification": God's punishment to any child who "struck his father."<sup>66</sup> The narrator's violent domestic circumstances alone are enough to drive him to seek "salvation." But even when attempting to gain distance from the lack of providence at home, the narrator finds himself in close proximity to the source of this lack, represented at the borderlands by the absolute fatherly symbol of salvation:

Sundays during summer especially I would hike outside the city, along the usually waterless strait of sand called the Rio Grande, up the mountain of Cristo Rey, dominated at the top by the coarse, weed-surrounded statue of a primitive-faced Christ. I would lie on the dirt of that mountain staring at the breathtaking Texas sky.<sup>67</sup>

Here the narrator uses geographical markers to root his whole pilgrimage in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands where Texas and New Mexico meet the Rio Grande, i.e., from the horizontality of the dry, almost "waterless straight of sand" that delineates the borderline, to the verticality of the Cristo Rey Mountain, the name of which can be translated to signify "Christ the King." This "straight" constitutes the artificial boundary between the United States and Mexico—a line wrested from Spain by Mexico in 1821 and wrested from Mexico by the U.S. in 1848, after James K. Polk and James Buchanan mobilized General Winfield Scott's army to coerce the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo by invading Veracruz and later Mexico City. The Rio Grande is a physical reminder of this layered, inter-imperial history and—for the *mestizo* sons and daughters of empire—a reminder that "the struggle against the conquest [is] still alive" today.<sup>68</sup> Of course, this "struggle" could not be possible without the Catholic Church, whose crowning jewel in the passage above protects this boundary, but to the history of El Paso, mainly populated by mass migrations from the Mexican Revolution and the Cristero War that followed, the representation of religion here holds a powerful metonymic relation to a curiously familiar history of state power and institutional violence. It was well known in Rechy's El Paso community that the Cristero War—a series of Church-sponsored popular revolts against the secular, post-revolutionary Mexican government in the name of "religious liberty"—commenced with a statue very similar to this one. As James W. Wilkie states, "it was the Church which took initiative in creating new tension [in] 1923, when it held a mass open-air ceremony erecting a monument on top of El Cubilete, a mountain at the geographic center of the republic of the state of Guanajuato. Apostolic Delegate Ernesto Philippi led a winding procession of 50,000 pilgrims up the mountain to crown Christ as King of Mexico. The government," he adds, "viewed this ceremony, carried out in fulfillment of ... counter-revolution ... as inflammatory."<sup>69</sup> After militant Catholics formed a Catholic Civic league to "reconquer religious liberty" from the state, a number of armed uprisings broke out in 1926, leading to the forced migration of thousands from Central Mexico to El Paso. After the U.S.-backed Mexican state violated a truce and executed

over 500 Cristeros, the number of migrants attempting to cross the border rose to over a million. The statue in the passage above, then, allows Rechy not only to associate the repression of homosexuality with the mandates of the Church but also to envision repression as an extension of the violence in Central Mexico that was reemerging in the militarization of the borderlands during the mid-1950s. It is no wonder then that in the passage above, Cristo Rey's designation as King, positioned at the top of a celestial hierarchy that is here represented by topographical elevation at and above the dividing line of the U.S.-Mexico border, grants him the absolute power to "dominate." Here the condensation of history discloses the strand of entanglement between the narrator's repression and the colonial religious order that dominates the borderlands he calls home. It is a connection that the novel's narrative focalization discursively blots out as often as it can—as it does in this passage when the narrator's gaze shifts immediately from the cross, to the dirt, to the sky—but it is one that the novel's peripheral horizon all too willingly evinces.

After all, the only contextual horizon within which the narrator can understand Cristo Rey is one whose historicity identifies the statue with the human geography of the borderlands—a community he finds neglected, rather than saved by Cristo Rey. This statue's true significance is not entirely clear until we consider Rechy's extended description of the same statue in an essay titled "El Paso del Norte," written alongside *City of Night* and published just before it:

The statue. It is a primitive Christ. Fifty feet tall, And it looks like a Mexican peasant.... The poor Mexican Christ, what it has to look down on—the line of desperate ants, as the Magazine (I think it was *Time*, or if it wasn't they would have) called it, of mustached, strawhatted men, braceros invading America.... The Magazine also said, well, wasn't it natural, those wetbacks wanting to come to America? ... They tried to come across again and again and again. (I remember a dead bracero near the bank of the Rio Grande, face down drowned in the shallow water, the water around him red, red, red. Officially, he had drowned and was found, of course, by the Border Patrol).<sup>70</sup>

This passage was written at the end of the same pilgrimage recounted in the novel. As such, it speaks volumes about what the author, in deploying his outlaw strategy, chose to omit. The difference between both descriptions helps us understand not only what the narrator's horizon of intelligibility could not provide as a boy, but also what it can provide as an adult, yet remains largely suppressed in his retelling: the lack of salvation, or symbolic damnation, that he understands to be afflicting the borderlands as a whole and not only the narrator as an individual. Rechy's racialized statue, for all its kingly power, is rendered powerless by his affiliation with a race and class historically oppressed by the colonial practices of exclusion, violence, and appropriation that have governed this boundary line long before it was last "fixed" by the end of the Mexican-American War. As though embodying this contradiction of power and powerlessness was not enough, Cristo Rey "has to look down" on what a U.S. mainstream magazine pejoratively calls "[a] line of desperate ants" who risk death to cross the border precisely during Operation Wetback and depend on this mediational figure of immanence and transcendence to safeguard them, to grant them a form of *salvation* that, according to Rechy's

narrator, cannot possibly be conferred. The braceros' inevitable disappointment the narrator knows too well, and not only because they may be captured, or killed, or have their murder suppressed by the border patrol and the press, or somehow find refuge in a nation that belittles them (quite literally) by comparing them to insects. But also because the recurrent pattern of repression and stagnation, together with the repressive and ideological state apparatuses that perpetuate it—all that Cristo Rey sets in motion for the narrator—is precisely what the statue will signify for the braceros. That is, they are fated to experience the same recurrence of inter-imperial violence that this liminal zone represents for the narrator. And this fate is symbolized rhetorically here by the repetition—each time a trinity—of the words “again” and “red”; the latter an abstract reproduction of the former; the former a determinant of the latter, both of which form a rhetorical condensation of the literal, corporeal displacement—even unto death—that any bracero might find at the borderlands.

In the same stroke, then, Cristo Rey is identified as a symbol of salvation in the borderlands and yet also a symbol of false hope for the narrator; after all, here Cristo's own racialized and proletarianized constitution determines his damnation on earth, much as it does the narrator's. For this reason, the narrator's quest for salvation begins by turning *away* from the cross, as from his father and the borderlands of his birth. That Cristo Rey is mentioned just before he embarks on his pilgrimage is made all the more interesting when we consider that this statue, even three decades after the Cristero War, during Operation Wetback and the writing of *City of Night*, still served as the endpoint of many northbound Catholic pilgrimages from Western and Central Mexico. In the novel, the narrator briefly references the continuation of Cristero worship on the borderlands by pointing to “long processions of people from El Paso, Ysleta, Canutillo, Smeltertown, [and] Juarez, as they marched up chanting devout prayers—kneeling at intervals.”<sup>71</sup> He decides to turn away from this scene but not without invoking, once again, the anti-romanticism with which he characterizes the rest of El Paso: “physically, as I walked down, I could feel those very mountains which awesomely rim the city crushing me.”<sup>72</sup> This image travels with him and reappears from time to time, as do so many other particulars from the borderlands, e.g., when, toward the end of the novel, he dredges up “things forgotten for long, returning as phantom-memories,” that enable him to “suddenly remember the processions in El Paso when the people marched, chanting to the top of the mountain where the statue of Christ looked down, pityingly, arms outstretched.”<sup>73</sup> But as with the second description of Cristo Rey from the essay “El Paso del Norte” (1958), which lends a large degree of significance that Rechy omits in the novel, here a similar differential of disclosure occurs. In the very same essay, Rechy describes the same procession, which evinces an extended description “beyond that [procession]” of “giant machines dig[ging] into the mountains for ores.”<sup>74</sup> Few images in the novel connote this degree of stark juxtaposition, but when they appear—as they do here to denote a recurrence of land and resource expropriation in the borderlands—they help expand the periphery from which the narrator is perpetually fleeing, together with the causal complex that contributes to the overdetermination of the narrator's portrayed sexual repression.

And yet, as Cristo Rey still represented the endpoint of many pilgrimages from Mexico, Rechy's narrator uses this fixture precisely to designate his point of departure—in the opposite

direction. In this way, the purpose of his journey reverses the logic of salvation, whose “substitute” is to be found farther away from, not closer to, the cross. For outlaws such as Rechy’s narrator, who are violently rejected and outcast by both church and state, Cristo Rey cannot represent the end point of redemption; rather, it represents the condition from which damnation begins, together with his story, in El Paso. To begin in El Paso means to begin in a “place left unfinished at the time of creation,” to begin with the condition of founding, of settlement, of empire, and, of course, of damnation—to begin with the history of empire more comfortably dealt with by turning away from it. He considers himself, like his dog Winnie, ineligible for the kind of salvation promised by this iconic marker of the borderlands. Rechy’s emplotment, in this way, lends even more significance to the sub-genre of the pilgrimage, which is usually embarked on for, and oriented toward, a telos. Rechy’s pilgrimage, however, in tandem with his outlaw sensibility, takes a reverse trajectory, not toward but rather away from the site of ostensible salvation. For these reasons, it is not salvation, as others seek, but rather “some substitute for salvation” that the narrator requires. Whatever substitute for salvation may be found, it cannot be found in this “world,” and so he rejects it by inverting the traditional trajectory of pilgrimage and commencing what becomes the narrative’s dominant national imaginary. The national focus, in this way, loses cohesion as the borderlands becomes the catalyst for its fabrication.

Granted, the act of turning away that is represented by this unconventional pilgrimage is not so straightforward when the complex history of the borderlands—inseparable from the religious meaning that it has for Rechy—reemerges again and again. In fact, the events at we have been analyzing ensure that repetition remains constant throughout his pilgrimage. In describing the writing process behind *City of Night*, Rechy issued a curious comment about the novel’s formal content and its relationship to the author’s own past: “My rejected Catholicism was bringing to the narrator’s journey a sense of ritual.”<sup>75</sup> In this statement the conflation of pronoun and noun evince a transitive property between author and protagonist that parallels the same relationship between the negation of ritual and the positive enactment of ritual. This contradictory relationship manifests itself in many ways throughout the novel. As we have seen, Rechy’s narrator turns away from Catholicism, yet he is compelled to abide by its “sacramental obligation.” In doing so, moreover, he is drawn to its obsession with guilt and even to its chief analytical method of hermeneutics, whose holism and circularity recycle the logic of divine immanence. This inescapable pull of orthodoxy is unavoidably entangled with the landscape of El Paso from which he attempts to escape. As such, the narrator’s religious conditioning ensures that no matter how far he travels, he carries with him the vestiges of empire that are equally entangled with the borderlands. In this way, it becomes part of Rechy’s narrative strategy, i.e., one that demonstrates the importance of self-psychology to the understanding of a non-normative sexuality, the rejection of which needed to be amended by way of camouflage, infiltration, and sabotage. This outlaw strategy, as we see here—even amid the untimely ritual of hustling that Rechy foregrounds in the novel—does not fail to include the timeliness of neo-imperial governance in the borderlands as a recurrence of the past in the present. Even when he’s furthest away from home, whether in New York or Chicago, among other places in the North, the narrator cannot help but contextualize his self-discovery, again and again, by referencing points

in El Paso, near the Rio Grande, or near Smeltertown or Brownsville, or in his poverty-stricken home in the Southwestern borderlands, on the Rio Grande, where his “pattern ... emerged clearly,” the “motive [for] which had sent [him] away from ... Cristo Rey, long ago.”<sup>76</sup> The long narrative cycle that begins and ends in El Paso never allows the narrator to enter a different historical formation, i.e., that of the U.S. North, without perpetually historicizing and understanding the transnational South that anchors this very endeavor.

And this cycle becomes only one of the many ways in which the seemingly isolated recurrence of stasis in the U.S. core is tethered to the narrator’s associative displacement of the periphery. In fact, the perpetual entanglement of North and South in the novel is mediated by an image that combines cyclical and stasis. On several occasions throughout his journey, the narrator briefly recalls a childhood “game called ‘statues’: Someone swung us round and round, released us unexpectedly, and we had to freeze in the position we fell”: once a harmless game but now a reality that he calls “the *life*-game of statues.”<sup>77</sup> This “game” he acknowledges, “[is] here to sentence everyone to pass Eternity doing the same things over and over. Caught!—in whatever absurd fate life has apathetically but elaborately chosen to trap us in.”<sup>78</sup> This “game,” which involves repetitive circular motion, followed by subsequent paralysis, analogizes the experience that the narrator shares not only with other sexual outlaws but also with the pejoratively-termed “wetbacks” that are legally outlawed at the borderlands. After all, the only other image of fixed, rigid sculpture featured in the novel is that of Cristo Rey, which, in this light, comes to emblemize the greatest life-game to the narrator. Of course, the narrator never expressly acknowledges this strong association; rather, he displaces it onto, and remediates it by, the recurring presence of the church, e.g., as when “nearby church bells tolled their last for the night [and] everything seemed frozen in darkness.” This metonymic displacement is directly represented in the novel yet quickly displaced, once again, onto the next train of thought.<sup>79</sup> Not only the crystallization of his sexual repression, then, but also the punitive pattern of cyclical stasis to which amounts is condensed in the domineering statute of Cristo Rey.

It then becomes all the more important to note how the narrator’s encounter with the statue, which also links the Mexican Revolution, the Cristero War, and Operation Wetback is followed by a meditation on the contradictions of progress in a Jim Crow South made all the more inhospitable by the Great Depression. “Before [moving] to the house where Winnie died,” the narrator recalls how his first home “was being sold and [his family] could not buy it.” The second El Paso home into which he and his family moved, however, is shown to be considerably less comforting than the one from which his family was evicted:

The wooden porch decayed, almost on the verge of toppling down; it slanted like ... a dried up vine, dead from lack of water, still clung to the base of the porch like a skeleton, and the bricks were disintegrating.... Huge brown cockroaches scurried into the crevice. The paper was peeling off the walls over at least four more layers ... an unfinished jigsaw puzzle which would fascinate me at night: its ragged patterns making angry faces, angry animal shapes—but I could quickly alter them into less angry figures by ripping off the jagged edges.... Where the ceiling had leaked, there are spidery brown outlines. I flick

the cockroaches off the walls.... The house smells of Rot. I went to the bathroom. The tub was full of dirty water, and it had stagnated. It was brown, bubbly.<sup>80</sup>

This second house is thoroughly described using allusions to traumatic events that the reader has already learned to associate with the narrator's life in El Paso. Even "filthy water" and death "from lack of water" has already been linked to the death of Winnie, which, as with Cristo Rey, figuratively condenses an extended transnational history. It is no coincidence that this water, which is also contaminated, is "stagnated": a condition that characterizes not just the narrator's journey, but also a childhood governed by the socioeconomic stasis described here. This image appears briefly, at the outset of the story, but toward the end of his pilgrimage, he describes a third house into which his family was forced: "the government projects [they] moved into from that house with the winged cockroaches"; and this third house is the house to which he arrives one day to find that his "father was dead."<sup>81</sup> In this third settlement, the disintegration of *rot* is associated with the same "rot" that, after the second settlement, conjured the death of Winnie: the same rot that, although buried by the author, continues to reemerge in uncanny ways. The pattern that emerges through this multilateral progression of displacement and resettlement, beyond resembling the narrator's own continuous migration and dislocation throughout his travels, renders the liberal progressive ideal of upward mobility that he seeks contradictory. As it appears here, the historical logic at work in the narrator's emplotment connotes, rather, a linear stagism, the directionality of which should perhaps point forward; nevertheless, it is recast through a regressive trajectory that demonstrates a quality of life rendered more and more compromised as narrative temporality moves forward. Notice that here too he detects a "ragged pattern," which may be frightening, but it is nowhere near as threatening as that which marks his life as an adult. Fortunately, unlike the pattern that recurs throughout the narrator's journey, this pattern can be managed by easy alteration. The material structure it leaves standing, however, cannot be undone so easily. Like the many thin sheets that remain layered long after he alters their "jagged edges," the collective history to which his personal narrative belongs is layered by the residuals of empire that constitute his present. The stasis depicted later in his journey across the United States, which demonstrate the impoverishment of liberal enfranchisement on a broader collective stratum, is already shown to be present in and through the narrator's adolescent social, sexual, and racial formation. It is here, at the origin point that makes his narrative possible, where "the Mexicans live concentrated on the Southside of El Paso, crowded into tenements, with the walls outside plastered with old Vote-for signs ... or if not, in the government projects ... a section for the Mexicans, a section for the Negroes."<sup>82</sup> It is here, at the peripheral borderlands, which in many ways stand in metonymic relation to the U.S. core, that some of the signs plastering the walls of Chicanx and African American communities read, "WE DO NOT SERVE MEXICANS, NIGGERS OR DOGS." If "salvation" is withheld even for his "DOG," then surely it cannot be secured by a person of color who finds himself locked into a temporality that guarantees not the plenty of progress but the "rot" of regress. With this observation, we can recognize exactly how the representational field that we have been examining in this section is processed by the novel's narrative discourse to emblemize the present impasse that Rechy was facing. The Great Depression, combined with Jim Crow

segregation in the Southwest, only intensifies the history of migration and transnational conflict that is woven into his novel.

In this light, the cyclical violence experienced in the U.S. North is shown to mediate, like so many allusions to the U.S.-Mexico border throughout the narrator's pilgrimage, the reemergence of inter-imperial history between the United States and Mexico during Operation Wetback. It exposes, that is, how Rechy's origins are bound up with the transnational pressures of, on the one hand, the violence, machismo, conservatism, and religious ideology of his own migrant community and, on the other hand, U.S.-sanctioned violence from the border patrol, racial segregation, farmworker exploitation, and immiserating disenfranchisement. Moving beyond identitarian intersectionality, the transnational intersection of minoritarian experience that Rechy portrays here, which marks the beginning of his life in El Paso, is shown to be propagated precisely by an inter-imperial history that, between successive waves of settler colonialism from Spain, Mexico, and the U.S., repeats itself as it expands its hold: a historical—and not just narrative—form of repetition and expansion, whose affective and structural presence in the borderlands complicates any concept of liberal-progressive *becoming* with an affective narrative epistemology of perceived historical recurrence.

### **One Inexplicable Moment: The Timely Contradiction of Rechy's Present Impasse**

The last stop on our narrator's pilgrimage is New Orleans, where key signifiers reveal a final associative displacement of the borderlands onto "this oceanworld of cities" in the South.<sup>83</sup> New Orleans is introduced first as the "The City that Care Forgot" and second as "a rotting Southern city."<sup>84</sup> Although the first sobriquet is commonly known, both evoke the meanings formerly attached to "selective forgetting" and "rotting" that accompany many other representations of El Paso. The first deliberate yet subtle associative allusion to El Paso and the borderlands is presented when the narrator enters the city and stumbles upon an artist who reveals an abstract portrait of New Orleans:

A man is painting inside on an enormous canvas: color-smeared, savagely Red, yellow; swatches of black, inkily smeared at the edges, creating tentacles from a solidly dark body—a hungry giant insect groveling on a violent vortex of colors.... Aware that I was staring, [the painter] drawls: "This heres a picture of Nawleans."<sup>85</sup>

This supplementary passage, unnecessary to the constitutive progression of the plot, calls attention to itself for a reason. This giant insect resembling a spider evokes the Rio Grande as described by the narrator in the aforementioned essay, "El Paso del Norte," which more amply communicates the symbolic and motific discourse with which Rechy approaches the representation of Cristo Rey and its environs: "The Rio Grande is usually dry, just sand and scrawny spiders.... Sometimes it's very full, though ... like a dirty young black animal full of life rushing along the sand, swallowing the busy dry banks."<sup>86</sup> Other figurative references to insects produce the same effect, such as the braceros depicted as "a line of desperate ants," the "spidery brown outlines" in the projects to which the narrator's family was forced, or even the

Rio Grande “banks on which sick spiders weave their webs... and divide the United States from Mexico.”<sup>87</sup> Even when the narrator draws geographical differences between both sites, such as the sandstorms and dilapidated housing projects of El Paso in contrast to New Orleans’s “pallid historical buildings from a timepast of gilded elegance,” he responds to both with similar aversion: “the toppled [city]—assaults you. The odor of something stagnant permeates the winter air... not so much an odor that attacks the sense of smell as one that raids the mind.”<sup>88</sup> Whereas in El Paso the narrator “could feel those very mountains which awesomely rim the city crushing [him],” here in New Orleans he experiences a “raid[ing]” of the mind that is at once evocative of El Paso while becoming just as deleterious. It is no coincidence that here, at the end of the novel, French colonial residuals, whose “irongrillwork” resembles “rusted spiderwebs,” recall what, at the beginning of the novel, was “the decayed [porch]” of the project housing into which his family was forced, “almost on the verge of toppling down” and whose “bricks were disintegrating”: all “stagnant” images that have followed the narrator to his final stop before returning to El Paso.<sup>89</sup> It is not only the peripheral relation that New Orleans also holds to the U.S., then, but also its own inter-imperial recurrence of the past in the present that here “raids the mind.” Other particulars associated with El Paso, such as spiritual decline, infectious vermin, subsistence level living conditions, artifacts of colonial settlement—only here among the many cities featured in the novel—reemerge in relation to a peripheral geography marked by the legacy of colonial history.<sup>90</sup>

This shared attribution of meaning with the U.S.-Mexico borderlands across novelistic time and space begins to dissolve the national imaginary in new ways that are specific to the imperial history of this radically different—yet all too familiar—border town. In many ways, New Orleans holds a marginal relationship to the United States that should be salubrious to the aims of recognition, acceptance, and liberation that Rechy’s narrator seeks. But here, while generating reverberations of memory’s “active fault line,” New Orleans comes to signify the nexus of trans-American commerce through which not only plantation commodities, but also the slave trade that produces them, leaves its mark:

Now walking along the punctured area of old New Orleans, I see those famous hints of a world that disappeared long ago.... Before a candy shop in a shabby district, a stuffed black-mammy has a punctured breast revealing very white cotton insides.... Im churning inside with the implied mysteries of this physically moribund city; and therefore feeling as vitally alive as a child pretending for a moment to be dead, my emotions seesawing from anticipation to revulsion.<sup>91</sup>

This image of the black mammy forms another supplementary narrative element, which demonstrates for Rechy a shared experience of racialization and exploitation between the Chicanx residents of El Paso and the African diaspora. This comparative relation demonstrates the shared experience of segregation under Jim Crow in the Southwest landscape that Rechy’s narrator focalized before departing on his pilgrimage. Here, the punctured breast that reveals “very white cotton insides” issues a grotesque reminder that New Orleans, far from providing the “brief Freedom” with which the narrator regarded the city upon his arrival,<sup>92</sup> is still reeling from

the same slave-driven past of unfreedom that brought “the vagrants of America’s blackcities ... into New Orleans ... from the world’s seas.”<sup>93</sup> Surely, the “implied mysteries” to which he refers here—while traversing the cotton belt and stumbling upon shelters that served as “underground stations for Negro fugitives from the South”—are anything but divorced from this city’s own history of neo-imperial recurrence, which, as in El Paso, recycles dehumanizing “separation” by way of juridical segregation.<sup>94</sup> The narrator’s affective response, shown here to leave him “feeling as vitally alive as a child pretending ... to be dead,” evokes the historical recurrence and stasis produced by the “life-game of statues.” New Orleans, then, “raids the [narrator’s]mind,” but it does so to generate a significant reference to every other “raid” that brings his narrative full circle to the hemispheric border of the U.S. South.

As Rechy constructs this final piece of his storyworld, he begins to set the stage for a radical tension—already witnessed above—between expectation and experience. And through this juxtaposition, he highlights a relationship between narrative time and historical time that becomes all the more important to the novel’s poetics of history. Mardi Gras—and not just New Orleans—is a considerable event with which to end the longest cycle of the narrative, not only because it is a transnational ritual more commonly associated with the hemispheric South, but also because it holds a long-standing reputation for providing a space of free play, of libidinal excess and cathartic release: a utopian locus of exchange where Rechy’s own version of existential authenticity may be validated, if only through one of Carnival’s most unassuming, yet deeply significant, rituals. The Carnival procession, that is, which measures the duration of Mardi Gras for the reader, also measures the narrator’s “determined pilgrimage to Frantic Happiness” in the city, thereby aligning the novel’s denouement and closure with that of the procession itself.<sup>95</sup>

Thursday. The Parade of the Krewe of the Knights of Momus ... Friday. The Parade of Hermes ... Saturday. The Parade of Iris ... “Monday. The Parade of Proteus, who can assume any shape, any form, will pass tonight in a flaming snake of torches. White-robed mummers, ghosts of ghosts.... And at midnight, Mardi Gras begins.”<sup>96</sup>

This passage becomes especially important to the novel’s final section—and not only because the procession itself, in mediating the Holy Roman Empire, the French Empire, the Spanish Empire, the Confederacy, and finally the U.S. Union, articulates every occupier of the city into the novel’s most condensed image of inter-imperiality.<sup>97</sup> It also introduces the linear course through which temporality itself finds focalization in the novel, enabling a characterological observation of time that concretizes an association of narrative and historical time for the reader. Indeed, toward the very end of the procession, Rechy introduces a representation of what appears to be, at least from the narrator’s perspective, time coming to a halt. What occurs during the “parade of Comus ... the last parade of Mardi Gras,” triggers a rare out-of-body experience—and not one that, in the spirit of Carnival, or *carne vale*, symbolizes a “farewell to the flesh.”<sup>98</sup> Rather, the contradictory interpenetration of expectation and experience, shot through with “dregs of memories churn[ing],” the shoring and accretion of fragments from the past, amounts to a recognition in the present that the “substitute for salvation,” even in New Orleans, was “not to be found”.<sup>99</sup>

Suddenly, in one moment—in one single, solitary crazy one-unit moment ... I was two people.... And I knew it was happening, that the nightworld was caving in—because the terror of a lifetime can be contained in one inexplicable moment.... It was then that the ugly tortured world whirled.<sup>100</sup>

Here, during the novel's *denouement*, the narrator imagines himself splitting in two and gaining the power to observe himself from a position of exteriority. What appears to be an epiphanatic experience in this passage is preceded by a series of memories that develop in rapid succession and intensify precisely how the world has “whirled” for the narrator. Historical time does not actually stand still here, but *narrative* time does, in order to condense a long series of images in a short amount of discursive space. The narrator envisions an “angry angel” in the procession that—like a perversion of Benjamin’s “Angel of History”—suddenly becomes “the swinger in the [aforementioned] childgame of statues: here to sentence everyone to pass Eternity doing the same things over and over.” The recognition of stasis that this hallucination produces instills “the feeling that [he is] in hell,” i.e., excised from the path to “salvation” or its substitute. As such, the narrator imagines the processional “floats devoured by flames,” a “razing fire sweeping this rotten city ... the rubble of French irongrillwork, the cockroaches of this city scurrying out of their dank places, the balconies toppling ... the peeling walls of the Cathedral.... The purification. Vengefully, [he] cling[s] to the vision of the terrible apocalyptic fire. But the parade winds on. A pantomime of life itself.”<sup>101</sup> This sequence of thought presents a waking vision of condensation that fuses the “peeling walls” and winged cockroaches” of his childhood with the horizon of intelligibility that has radically changed in New Orleans. And here both are subjected to the same destructive desire to watch it all burn. Accelerating in succession, more “dregs of memories churn” until this conflation of temporal experience unleashes “that windstorm which is now howling again,”<sup>102</sup> as though it were blowing across the gulf from El Paso to reach the narrator in New Orleans. The representation of an externalized self represents an extension and intensification of the very same displacement with which the novel has established a powerful entanglement between origins and teloi. And in this instance, in response to the constellation of “terror” that has just crystallized for him over the novel’s long narrative arc, it amounts to a significant characterological and even narratological breakdown. There is no epiphany; there is no “substitute for salvation”; there is only the familiar effect of fragmentation and paralysis, emerging once again yet taken to a representational and affective extreme. And as such, it leads to a final acknowledgment of finitude, together with a recognition that the futurity for which he strives is now compromised and his pilgrimage has failed.

After excessive cycles of accretion and sedimentation, the past from which the narrator’s memory draws to generate this moment can no longer inform a mediational present from which a futurity beyond “futures past” can generate an authentically divergent expectation. Instead, the expectation of futurity becomes not merely conditioned but rather entirely reinscribed by the cyclical experience of the past that now promises only an eternal return of the same.<sup>103</sup> The *now time* of the narrator’s out-of-body experience, while recovering a vast and complex inter-imperial history, cannot secure any kind of radical social change beyond the strictures of the liberal

progressive “world” that, as an alternative to the borderlands, promises yet fails to deliver sexual liberation and inner, as well as outer, recognition. As with the *untimely* experience of intense yet ephemeral intimacy, this temporal experience evades the reproductive futurity measured in “clock-hours,” but certainly not because it privileges another rupture of existential authenticity in which “time exist[s] in the one dimension of Now, immediately.”<sup>104</sup> Rather, it presents a palpable perversion of the temporality that occurs in and through brief but intensely rewarding sexual encounters in the novel: “those moments [in which the narrator] felt an electric happiness, as if the relentless flow of life had stopped ... suspended [and] unmoving.”<sup>105</sup> Instead, the “one single, solitary ... moment” that appears here, bereft of another person with which to even experience intimacy, compromises and invalidates any utopian function previously accorded to the experience of a “suspended” temporality.

In doing so, this moment produces not only a doubling of the self but also the double consciousness of an intersectional subject position which recognizes the contradiction of temporality through which his pilgrimage has unfolded. This riven subject position, inseparable from the riven mestizo consciousness from which Rechy’s autobiographical narrator was writing, offers a salient evocation of the dual temporality that has been generated up to this point and crystalized in this chapter. That is, when temporality halts, it crystallizes a contradictory fissure between the experience and expectation of a life lived in and through a contradictory course that is both linear and cyclical: one that inevitably leads to a false *denouement* in which progress cannot exist, and so, neither can any real sense of narrative focalization, progression, or closure. The first-person narrator himself, therefore, must break down. The logic of linear progression, which in curious ways is echoed here by the calendrical sequence of the Carnival procession, is shown to be in direct conflict with the logic of recurrence and stasis that has characterized the phenomenological time experience of the narrator’s whole pilgrimage.

Indeed, these two temporalities, occurring together yet figuratively gridlocked in conflict, generate an impasse whose recurrence forms the critique at the heart of Rechy’s hemispheric poetics of history. The narrator’s pilgrimage intends to secure a specific teleological goal, i.e., “some substitute for salvation,” through a vision of progress specified at the outset of his journey. Yet if the locus of inter-imperial mediation ultimately prefigures, impels, makes possible his journey, and in doing so generates an expectation that, in the end, can only find recurrence—even purely in reference to a de-coupled sexual identity—then the lived experience of empire must contain within it a contradiction constituted by the coexistence of progress, from which there is no backward regression, and recurrence, from which there is no forward progression. This dual temporality, as it expresses itself in the narrative discourse and representational field of the novel, constitutes Rechy’s mediation of everything that “begin[s] in El Paso” yet also “begins in the wind,” i.e., of what began not only locally and individually but also globally and collectively. This temporality expresses itself time and time again across the nested narrative arcs of Rechy’s novel, which move the story forward yet do so only through episodic returns that homologize one another while mediating a greater historical process.

And this is a problem that presents itself in narrative form. Just before the narrator breaks down, he visualizes a form of hyper-condensation similar to that which appears at the beginning of the frame narrative. And this recurrence at the end of the narrative is now recognized as a fusion of horizons: “To escape the sad, sad, sight, I think: If I take the subway, I’ll be on Times Square. . . . Time Square, Pershing Square, Market Street, the concrete beach in Chicago . . . fusing for me into one City.”<sup>106</sup> But even if such a thing were literally possible, positioned as it is here at the end of the long narrative arc, it threatens to begin yet another cycle that reproduces the first. In a way, this is precisely what happens when the narrator leaves New Orleans and returns to El Paso—the final site from which he writes the narrative that constitutes the novel. And if this is the case, the implicit logic of the frame narrative too—and not only the embedded narrative—ends where it begins and begins where it ends. Indeed, the condensation at the beginning of the novel reveals itself to be a reiteration of its first occurrence—at the end of the novel. The memory upon which it depends also begins where it ends, conveying an implicit circularity that helps generate a logic of eternal return. The anaphora with which the story begins, “Later I would remember,” describes what will happen in an unspecified future of the specified past, a future that clearly becomes the present position from which he is writing. To remember is to reconstitute, to repeat, and here such recurrence occurs indefinitely. When one begins the novel, this circularity cannot be detected, but by the time it comes to a close, the novel has established this logic as much as it has established the problem of stasis that it represents.

In fleeing from the recurrence of imperial history—itsself mediated by Cristo Rey, the Catholic symbol of mediation *par excellence*—towards an untimely “substitute for salvation,” the narrator then also flees, in contradictory fashion, toward the closest thing to *timelessness*, i.e., God. In the Augustinian tradition with which Rechy was familiar,<sup>107</sup> only God can stand outside of time, i.e., to create time itself and straddle the “two worlds” of timely physical immanence and untimely metaphysical transcendence. But his pilgrimage—itsself a Catholic ritual made overwhelmingly apparent to Rechy by the Cristero War—cannot reconcile its own profane, desacralized temporality of eternal return with what, in this endeavor, should be an imperfect yet authentic course analogous to the transcendental holism of a divine and truly sacralized temporality. Evidently, this course cannot be reconciled with the desacralized cyclical time of meaningless suffering that becomes definitive of his experience. His narrator cannot possibly *affirm* recurrence, precisely because doing so would entail a perpetuity of “separation,” i.e., of violence, of unjust prejudice and persecution, of the damnation guaranteed by an ineligibility for salvation. Because he is resigned to this fate, he is shut out not only from “Heaven” as we saw earlier but also from the Augustinian “City of God” into a perpetually whirring, ceaseless “City of Night.” Consequently, the narrator, although not necessarily the novel, implicitly rejects the Augustinian notion of temporality, thereby postulating that nothing can stand outside of time. Nothing, as the narrator notes, can “defeat Time.”<sup>108</sup> The figural narrative discourse that resembles his structure of experience shows as much. In this way, there is no possible cosmology for the narrator beyond the structuration of lived experience, mediated by the memory that gives form to its expression of tragic emplotment—even if the tension that this emplotment produces with its other, i.e., its inaccessible ideal, may in fact be said to represent the true cosmology immanent to *City of Night*.

Rechy's poetics of history, therefore, is crystallized precisely by the very same problem whose recognition causes the narrator to shut down in New Orleans: the experiential logic of temporal recurrence that cannot be squared with the liberal progressivism on which he sets his sights. In the end, despite the rigor and persistence of his hermeneutic inquiry, the narrator never manages to break free of the cyclical narrative structure to which he is bound:

It's impossible to escape the wind.... What has been found [is] a circle which winds around, without beginning, without end.... And you know then that what has not happened will never happen. That hope is an end within itself."<sup>109</sup>

As such, *City of Night* ponders the degree to which the historical limits of finitude may in fact hold more determining force than the agency afforded by any expansion of epistemological horizons. After all, experience in his case reflects only the conditions of intelligibility rendered available by the legacy of empire from which they are manifested. For this reason, although the narrator will "look back on the world and ... try to understand," he will find that "perhaps it's as futile as trying to capture the wind."<sup>110</sup> That is, perhaps it is impossible to truly know, understand, and accept the forces of history into which he is born. Even if this is the case, it is clear that by the end of his story, Rechy's narrator is not so concerned over a life lived *with* knowledge, but rather a life lived *despite* it. After describing the death of Winnie, the narrator as a young boy "stared intrigued as [water] made unpredictable patterns on the dirt."<sup>111</sup> And just before the novel ends, this image returns, like so much else, to remind him of a structure, a direction, a life course that is neither one of cyclical recurrence nor one of progressivism:

If there is such a thing as [love] its shape must be as unpredictable as the patterns ... the strange unpredictable patterns I had watched in fascination as a child—patterns created by the water as it poured from the aluminum tub in which my mother washed our clothes: the grayish water spilling onto the dry dirt in directions impossible to determine.<sup>112</sup>

In this supplementary image, Rechy inverts the anti-romantic gaze with which his narrator formerly regarded his El Paso home in order to envision an authentic futurity, replete with choice, with freedom, with self-making, with self-determined indeterminacy: all of the options that elude his pilgrimage, thereby forming the negative dialectical aim of Rechy's capacious existentialism. The indeterminate patterns in the image above are formed by a process of love, an inner-directed, autonomous force that washes away the past yet imposes no design on the future. In this sense, this image represents precisely what a genuinely Queer temporality, for Rechy, may well demand. The untimely, then, becomes an object toward which to strive, i.e., what, in José Esteban Muñoz's understanding of Queerness, "is not yet here ... an ideality" that can nevertheless be felt as "a horizon imbued with potentiality," giving way to "a mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present."<sup>113</sup> Even if—or precisely because—the existential demands of Rechy's implicit Queer time is rendered unavailable, it becomes clear that his novel wishes to foreground this "mode of desiring" that, far from expressing narrower aims of pleasure, calls for a greater collective freedom within which to

render sexual identity itself an anachronistic oxymoron. This ultimate horizon becomes the key function of Rechy's "outlaw" aesthetics, as we have seen here, and extends beyond the Queer community to all who share his "awareness of separation." In this way, Rechy's narrative strategy demonstrates that it still has "urgent messages" to deliver: not necessarily from the front lines but rather, as "unlabeled" as the "ideality" after which his own utopia is implicitly modeled.

Although Rechy's implicit vision of an authentic, yet presently inaccessible, Queer futurity aims to encompass a broader collectivity of "outlaws," *City of Night* crystallizes this vision through a complex cross-regional and transnational meditation on the centrality of what, to the national imaginary that it portrays, is the marginalized borderlands. By positioning the U.S.-Mexico border as a local, synchronic nexus that stands in metonymic relation to a global, diachronic understanding of inter-imperial history, Rechy generates a narrative epistemology of the borderlands that redefines the relationship between core and periphery. This reconfiguration not only entails, as we have seen, a narrative discourse and mode of representation that displays an inescapable entanglement between the U.S. and the hemispheric borderlands to rethink the periphery as constitutive of, and immanent to, the core of the U.S. national imaginary. It also extends the very phenomenon of inter-imperiality to a broader minoritarian authorship that reconfigures late modernism in relation to the Americas from an early postcolonial perspective that shows how modernity cannot be *thought* without its relation to the recurring reproduction of empire. In this way, we witness what Rechy called an "outlaw" aesthetics and how such an aesthetics, despite being known only for its relation to Rechy's work and the gay fiction he inspired, offered up one of the earliest representations of border-thinking and *mestizo* consciousness long before there was a Chicano movement through which to formally theorize one. Long before, that is, there was a substantial intellectual repertory for a borderland hermeneutics. Rechy's borderlands modernism introduces a poetics of history that is inseparable from a larger, hemispheric imagination—one that calls attention to a spatial ontology of the Americas through the temporal epistemology of empire's residual traces as they become reallocated into emergent practices that were establishing a new dominance with the advent of Operation Wetback in the years just before the novel was written. For Rechy, as we have seen here, this requires an alternative temporality; one that can beckon the historical time of a future-bound subject against the recurrence of a death-bound subjectivity on the borderlands. To this need he ultimately responds with an existential ethics that proposes remaining outside of the postwar liberal structures of governance—a call for self-determination through an "Outlaw Sensibility" that may, at the very least, leverage some form of "authenticity" against the liberal mandates of racial and sexual "respectability." In this way, Rechy not only exposes the core of imperial modernity at its borders but also collapses the transhistorical focus of aesthetics to its recurring *other*, i.e., to a form of historicity that juxtaposes the "then and there" with the "here and now": an outlaw form necessitating a hermeneutics that can do without neither formalism nor historicism—and yet one that requires an obliteration of this dichotomy, precisely by demonstrating their inseparability in the narrative poetics of a borderlands modernism. In the next chapter, we will shift our attention to a different kind of borderland setting between the U.S. South and the Caribbean: one that serves to complicate the untimely dimension inherent to

Rechy's aesthetics and politics by rethinking self-determination in terms of national autonomy and gender equality.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> John Rechy, "The Outlaw Sensibility [1991]," in *Beneath the Skin: The Collected Essays* (New York: Avalon, 2004), 152.

<sup>2</sup> Although he is now widely regarded as a Chicanx author, Rechy often referred to himself as a Mexican American author, hence my use of the term here and in several other parts of this chapter when I draw a distinction between Rechy's own time period and my own. Importantly, Rechy was writing before the Chicano Movement expropriated the term "Chicano." In the mid-to-late-1950s, during the writing of *City of Night*, "Chicano" was currently being used as a derogatory term for *mestizos* of Mexican descent in the United States. For this reason, I use both terms in this chapter: "Mexican American" when speaking to matters of Rechy's authorial intention, i.e., to keep with his own terminology, and "Chicanx" when employing my own literary-critical terminology. Moreover, when referencing the historically-specific "Chicano Movement," I abstain from using the current nomenclature of "Chicanx" to avoid presentism and underscore the non-coalitional environment in which Rechy was writing. For more on the use and development of this term, see F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1997); Edward J. Escobar, "The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968-1971," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (1993): 1483-1514.

<sup>3</sup> Although here I am citing the present population of *El Paso del Norte*, which has certainly grown since the publication of Rechy's first novel, the region still represented one of the largest borderlands populations in the hemisphere during the mid-1950s, especially before millions of migrants were deported during Operation Wetback. Lisa Chamberlain, "2 Cities and 4 Bridges Where Commerce Flows," *The New York Times*, March 28, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/28/realestate/commercial/28juarez.html>; David Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez, 1893-1923* (El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005); W. H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History* (El Paso: University of Texas at El Paso, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Jerome Veith, *Gadamer and the Transmission of History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> The novel autobiographically portrays Rechy's experiences during an unspecified period in the mid-to-late fifties. By this time, many state laws had adopted a number of "sexual psychopath" laws and other so-called "obscenity" laws, a codification that began in the 1930s and intensified in the 1940s. One of the first journal articles to document these laws and consider their effects in the 1950s is Edwin H. Sutherland, "The Sexual Psychopath Laws," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 40, no. 5 (1950): 543-54.

<sup>6</sup> For over twenty years now, as Joanne Meyerowitz mentions in "The Liberal 1950s? Reinterpreting Postwar American Sexual Culture," in *Gender and the Long Postwar: The United States and the Two Germanys, 1945-1989* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 297, historians have outlined the sexual conservatism of the postwar United States. In her 1988 book *Homeward Bound*, Elaine Tyler May borrowed the word "containment" from Cold War foreign policy and reframed it as a broader cultural ethos that applied to gender and sexuality in the postwar period. In May's view, middle-class Americans understood unrestrained sexual behavior as a dangerous form of moral decline that would sap the nation's strength. In "postwar America," she wrote, "fears of sexual chaos" made "non-marital sexual behavior ... a national obsession." Various officials, experts, and commentators, she noted, "believed wholeheartedly in a direct connection between communism and sexual depravity." As such, they attempted to police sexual expression and "contain" it. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 93-94. See also Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1995), 11-89. During this time, medical specialists and sociologists—in conjunction with the mass media and other outlets of popular culture—portrayed homosexual men and women as psychologically damaged creatures who were capable of injuring those with whom they came into contact. See, for example, Kevin Allen Leonard, "Containing 'Perversion':

African Americans and Same-Sex Desire in Cold War Los Angeles,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 3 (2011): 545–67; Carolyn Herbst Lewis, “Waking Sleeping Beauty: The Premarital Pelvic Exam and Heterosexuality during the Cold War,” *Journal of Women’s History* 17, no. 4 (November 23, 2005): 86–110; Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: Second Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Robert J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Estelle B. Freedman, “‘Uncontrolled Desires’: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960,” *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (1987): 83–106.

<sup>7</sup> In one of his essays, Rechy describes in greater detail precisely the challenges that he was representing in the novel: “A time when homosexuals may have to look state-by-state to find acceptance as non-criminals . . . prison sentences of up to life; suicides; blackmail resulting from arrests; roundups out of gay bars and into waiting police vans. Policemen [following] men to break into [their] private residences.” John Rechy, “A High Court Decision and a Sense of Betrayal [1986],” in *Beneath the Skin: The Collected Essays* (New York: Avalon, 2004), 126.

<sup>8</sup> For early negative reviews that doubt whether *City of Night* is a Chicano novel or even whether John Rechy truly exists, see Alfred Chester, “Fruit Salad,” *New York Review of Books* 1, no. 2 (1963): 6–7; Stanton Hoffman, “The Cities of Night: John Rechy’s *City of Night* and the American Literature of Homosexuality,” *Chicago Review* 17, no. 2/3 (January 1, 1964): 195–206.

<sup>9</sup> Markus Heide, “Body Languages/Body Politics: Performativity in John Rechy’s *City of Night* and *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gonzalez*,” in *Body Signs: The Latino/a Body in Cultural Production*, ed. Astrid M. Fellner (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), 123–27; Kevin Arnold, “‘Male and Male and Male’: John Rechy and the Scene of Representation,” *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 67, no. 1 (2011): 115–34; Daniel Pérez, “Masculinity (Re)Defined: Masculinity, Internalized Homophobia, and the Gay Macho Clone in the Works of John Rechy,” in *Beginning a New Millennium of Chicana and Chicano Scholarship: Selected Proceedings of the 2001 NACCS Conference*, ed. Jaime H. Garcia (Berkeley, CA: Inkworks Press, 2006), 241–55; Jennifer Moon, “Cruising John Rechy’s *City of Night*: Queer Subjectivity, Intimacy, and Counterpublicity,” *Disclosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 15 (2006): 42–59.

<sup>10</sup> See Eric Bergman, “Chicano/a Multiplicity and In-Betweenness in John Rechy’s *City of Night*,” *Narodna Umjetnost: Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* 52, no. 1 (2015): 71–95; Marcelle Maese-Cohen, “‘But It Should Begin in El Paso’: Civil Identities, Immigrant ‘World’-Traveling, and Pilgrimage Form in John Rechy’s *City of Night*,” *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 70, no. 2 (2014): 85–114; Patrick L. Hamilton, *Of Space and Mind: Cognitive Mappings of Contemporary Chicano/a Fiction* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012); José David Saldívar, *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Wendell Ricketts, “‘We Almost Killed Ourselves with Rage’: Working-Class Lives in Recent American Writing,” *Western American Literature* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 449–61; Tim Libretti, “Sexual Outlaws and Class Struggle: Rethinking History and Class Consciousness from a Queer Perspective,” *College English* 67, no. 2 (November 1, 2004): 154–71; Juan Bruce-Novoa, “Rechy and Rodriguez: Double Crossing the Public/Private Line,” in *Double Crossings/Entrecruzamientos*, ed. Mario Martín Flores and Carlos Von Son (Fair Haven, NJ: Nuevo Espacio, 2001), 15–34; José David Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (University of California Press, 1997); Karen Christian, “Will the ‘Real Chicano’ Please Stand Up? The Challenge of John Rechy and Sheila Ortiz Taylor to Chicano Essentialism,” *The Americas Review* 20, no. 2 (1992): 89–104.

<sup>11</sup> As Juan Bruce-Novoa mentions in “Canonical and Non-Canonical Literature,” in *RetroSpace: Collected Essays on Chicano Literature, Theory, and History* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1990), 121–22, the early Chicano canon excluded Rechy because Queer/Chicano intersectionality “revealed the irony of homosexuality’s close link with machismo, undermining the chauvinistic stalwart of the male dominated Movement.”

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<sup>12</sup> To be sure, Rechy's ninth novel *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gomez* (1991) has received noteworthy critical attention for its representation of life in the borderlands and the poverty, violence, and racial prejudice suffered by Chicana communities in Texas and Southern California. See, for example, David J. Vázquez, "'They Don't Understand Their Own Oppression': Complicating Preservation in John Rechy's *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez*," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 74, no. 1 (March 9, 2018): 17–43; Hamilton, *Of Space and Mind*; Heide, "Body Languages/Body Politics: Performativity in John Rechy's *City of Night* and *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gonzalez*"; Saldívar, *Border Matters*; José David Saldívar, "In Search of the 'Mexican Elvis': Border Matters, 'Americanness,' and Post-State-Centric Thinking," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 49, no. 1 (April 15, 2003): 84–100. This late novel, however, was published decades after *City of Night*, long after the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 70s secured a path for the Chicana critical tradition of today. In addition, *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gomez* more openly approaches matters of race, class, and culture that remain subsumed in *City of Night* by Rechy's early intersectionality bias. A closer look at the essay "El Paso Del Norte [1958]," in *Beneath the Skin: The Collected Essays* (New York: Avalon, 2004), 3–16, written alongside *City of Night*, shows a stronger alignment between Rechy's non-fictional writing and political critique. Other autobiographical and expository works produced in this period, as we will see, reveal how Rechy's politics of representation may be re-oriented to *City of Night*'s nonrepresentational form—a significant matter that has yet to be addressed critically until now.

<sup>13</sup> John Rechy, *City of Night* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> John Rechy, "City of Night Remembered [1984]," in *Beneath the Skin: The Collected Essays* (New York: Avalon, 2004), 116. Emphasis added. Significantly—and not only for my purposes here but also for similar considerations of critical omission—is the added afterthought in this quotation about "many other subjects," those which give considerable meaning to the "careful structure" of the novel's form; those which, deemed potentially inadmissible by Rechy's use of the em-dash here, may remain curiously othered by a novel whose goal is precisely to represent a socially, politically, and legally othered group. As we will see, Rechy's "careful structure" participates in a narrative "outlaw" strategy that deliberately reveals and conceals what, I argue here, is not only the peripheral borders of the novel's storyworld, but also the concrete borderlands of its peripheral context.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, 53. Here I briefly reference an "LGBTQ community," but the pre-Stonewall collective of "vagrants" depicted by Rechy lacked a strong sense of cohesion and organization at the time. As such, they could not have been referenced in the 1950s by this now-popular acronym, which, consequently, appears anachronistic here. Likewise, the means and ends of today's LGBTQ movement cannot be adequately read *into* Rechy's work retrospectively. Avoiding this kind of presentism is all the more necessary when considering Rechy's own hermeneutic repertory from an intersectional subject position that benefited from neither the Chicano movement nor the sexual liberation movements that took hold after the Stonewall riots in 1969. To be sure, the pre-Stonewall 1950s and 60s did see

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activism from groups such as the Mattachine Society in New York and Washington, the Janus Society in Philadelphia, and the Daughters of Bilitis in New York, all of which often operated under the collective term, East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO). In contrast to these groups, however, Rechy offered an existentialist critique of citizenship rights and their failure to provide homosexuals with the proper apparatuses through which to actualize an equality within an unequal governing structure. In this sense, Rechy was working against the liberal progressive forms of enfranchisement that today have radically changed in a post-AIDS and post-marriage-equality political climate.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 114–21.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 118, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Rechy, whose greatest secret as a hustler was not his homosexuality but rather his private proclivity for literary analysis—arms his semi-autobiographical narrator with this textual tradition of interpretation. (Rechy “kept [his] ‘literary’ identity secret.” See “*City of Night* Remembered [1984],” 116.) And interpretation, as we know, always occurs within a given horizon of intelligibility, that is, within a “historically-determined situatedness” that is “neither static nor unchanging (it is, after all, always subject to the effects of history).” Jeff Malpas, “Hans-Georg Gadamer,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2015, accessed June 3, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu>. The concept of the “horizon,” while originally conceived by Husserl for phenomenology, always involves for hermeneutics a repertoire of historical meaning from which no phenomena is exempt. It calls attention to the historical, or contextual, field within which experience takes place, a field that grows through engagement, amassment, integration, and expansion. Within the Gadamerian tradition, hermeneutic inquiry produces a fusion of horizons through which historicity—as in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics—is constantly reconstructed by the dialectical movement between proximity and distanciation that help to synthesize the particulars of textual and con-textual experience into an understanding of the whole. Therefore, it is important to consider not only that the narrator aspires to interpret and understand his own experiences, but also that he does so within his given horizon. After all, it is through his own process of fusion and expansion, I will show here, that the novel’s textual and contextual peripheries come into view on a diachronic axis, granting narrative discourse the power to disclose the novel’s broader, transnational context. Veith, *Gadamer and the Transmission of History*; Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” *Philosophy Today* 17, no. 2 (1973): 129; Francis J. Mootz and George H. Taylor, *Gadamer and Ricoeur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Rechy notes Gide’s influence on his work in “*City of Night* Remembered [1984]” and in Debra Castillo and John Rechy, “Interview: John Rechy,” *Diacritics* 25, no. 1 (April 1, 1995): 113–25. *The Immoralist*, Gide’s major contribution to gay fiction, which explores the introspective self-discovery of non-normative sexuality and does so through a confessional tale, can be seen as a direct precursor to *City of Night*. Not surprisingly, Gide’s writings attempted to broaden dominant conceptions of sexual normativity; to expose the social determinants that constrain freedom of expression, and to excoriate the French empire for accumulation by dispossession in the global South. These subjects, which mark an uncanny resemblance to those that motivate John Rechy’s own letters, inspired the *mise en abyme* in Gide’s work.

<sup>31</sup> See Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 31.

<sup>33</sup> Kelly Lytle Hernández, “The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration: A Cross-Border Examination of Operation Wetback, 1943 to 1954,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (November 1, 2006): 421–44; Avi Astor,

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“Unauthorized Immigration, Securitization and the Making of Operation Wetback,” *Latino Studies* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 5–29. One detail that must be stressed here, and which will become more important as we come to understand Rechy’s “Outlaw sensibility,” is that Operation Wetback was conceived almost entirely in military terms. U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell, at the time, sought to enact a violent and disproportionately large assault on what the U.S. government openly proclaimed as “wetbacks,” or undocumented immigrants that were not part of the Bracero program established in accordance with Mexico in 1942. Brownell helped to appoint the Army General Joseph Swing, together with other military officers, to execute “Operation Wetback.” As Juan Ramon Garcia writes in *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), “What developed into “Operation Wetback” had from the outset all the earmarks of a military offensive. Not only did Swing bring in military consultants, but the terms and strategies used were also along military lines. Swing and his cohorts established an intelligence service and began to function with the precision, timing, and efficiency of a trained military or semi-military body.

<sup>34</sup> See Rechy, “El Paso Del Norte [1958]”; Rechy, “*City of Night* Remembered [1984]”; Rechy, “A High Court Decision and a Sense of Betrayal [1986]”; Rechy, “The Outlaw Sensibility [1991]”; John Rechy, “Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation [1999],” in *Beneath the Skin: The Collected Essays* (New York: Avalon, 2004), 191–96; John Rechy, “Sins of the Fathers [2002],” in *Beneath the Skin: The Collected Essays* (New York: Avalon, 2004), 234–37. This point is also supported by details in the novel. From the very first page—littered with temporal markers such as “Later I would remember”—Rechy establishes the role of memory as the guiding force of the novel. But in telling his story, the narrator foregrounds the need to interpret memory—a need that is fulfilled as the novel demonstrates an ongoing hermeneutic process at the intradiegetic level of narrative, i.e., a recurring interpretation of lived experience carried out by the narrator. Rechy’s semi-autobiographical narrator clearly needs to understand the conflict and repression with which he is confronted, and for reasons that are detailed in this section by reference to extra-literary materials. The third and fourth sections of this chapter, especially, will expand on his point.

<sup>35</sup> This passage is excerpted from a book review that was written by Rechy and appears in his collection of essays, *Beneath the Skin*, under the same title as Santo’s text. Rechy, “Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation [1999],” 192–93. Emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> Rechy, “*City of Night* Remembered [1984],” 118.

<sup>37</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> See Carlos Zamora, “Odysseus in John Rechy’s *City of Night*: The Epistemological Journey,” *Minority Voices: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and the Arts* 3, no. 1 (1979): 53–62.

<sup>39</sup> In his essays, Rechy employs a tone and voice when speaking about religion that is rarely seen in his fiction. One of several critiques, for example, demonstrates this more aggressive approach, providing a useful lens through which to understand his position: “From Roman courts to ‘the King’s courts,’ ‘ecclesiastical courts,’ it roams over centuries of bloody history.... On through the present, the church has contributed its power to some of the most evil acts on humanity. Centuries-long accusation of Jews as murderers of Christ ... and thousands of other ‘undesireables,’ gypsies, homosexuals. Its attitudes concerning sexuality have ... created a climate of hatred that bashers use to legitimize violence against homosexuals; are responsible for a huge population of children, mostly minority children, whose destitute families cannot care for adequately, children almost guaranteed turbulent lives.... As the wealth of the church burgeoned and its power spread across continents, the threat of children claiming rights of inheritance loomed. Rechy, “A High Court Decision and a Sense of Betrayal [1986],” 127; Rechy, “Sins of the Fathers [2002],” 235.

<sup>40</sup> Rechy, “The Outlaw Sensibility [1991],” 159.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

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<sup>42</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 467.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 41. Here and in other examples, we may detect a number of omitted grammatical markers or unusually compounded nouns, the use of which are unique to Rechy's style. These deliberate experiments in grammar are not to be confused for misspellings or erroneous examples of usage, which are otherwise designated here and in every other chapter by the Latin *sic*.

<sup>44</sup> Rechy, "The Outlaw Sensibility [1991]," 150. Rechy's emphasis on a "Hispanic sensibility" recalls Carpentier's involvement in the *mundonovismo* movement, which sought to formulate a similar mode of being for Latin Americans specifically. Here Rechy appears at once more pluralistic than Carpentier and yet also more restrictive in speaking to a distinctly North American paradigm of difference. Both, however, are drawing connections between marginalized identities and a particular form of understanding and expression, albeit on very different scales. As such, the "Outlaw Sensibility" serves to influence Rechy's narrative poetics of history, much as the "marvelous neo-baroque" influenced Carpentier's.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. On a textural and structural level, Rechy's novel appears to reject social critique in favor of aesthetic experimentation. But his "outlaw" approach, much as we will see with Zora Neale Hurston's own approach in the next chapter, aims to mount its own kind of protest outside the norm. It shows itself to defy the familiar classifications of the protest genre, even as it moves in the direction of remonstrance.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, ed. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 93.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 357. Emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 14.

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<sup>61</sup> See Leon Claire Metz, *El Paso Chronicles: A Record of Historical Events in El Paso, Texas*, 3rd Edition edition (El Paso, Tex: Mangan Books, 1993).

<sup>62</sup> Castillo and Rechy, "Interview," 124. In this interview, Rechy mentioned that he was "working on two other novels: *Love in the Backrooms: The Sequel to City of Night* (it moves from 1963 to 1993); and *Autobiography: A Novel*." In the latter, he stated, "I'm trying to re-create-or, more accurately, to imagine-the lives of my father, my mother, their families, a saga that ranges from Mexico City into the United States: my father's family ties to Porfirio Diaz, my mother's flight from Chihuahua to avoid Pancho Villa's amorous advances.... I'm trying to achieve a unique fictional "truth," imagined out of what I've been told are facts, facts being nothing more than the memories that survive, that are told-all already altered by that selectivity, memory being the first editor." Note how this passage locates his mother in Chihuahua, the Mexican state that borders El Paso, while his father is largely mentioned only for his "ties" to the same aristocratic leader who is known for partially causing the Mexican Revolution that brought his family to El Paso in the first place.

<sup>63</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>68</sup> Rechy, "Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation [1999]," 194.

<sup>69</sup> James W. Wilkie, "The Meaning of the Cristero Religious War against the Mexican Revolution," *Journal of Church and State* 8 (1966): 219.

<sup>70</sup> Rechy, "El Paso Del Norte [1958]," 4–5.

<sup>71</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 82.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>74</sup> Rechy, "El Paso Del Norte [1958]," 4.

<sup>75</sup> Rechy, "*City of Night* Remembered [1984]," 118.

<sup>76</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 53.

<sup>77</sup> Rechy, "*City of Night* Remembered [1984]," 116. Emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 370.

<sup>79</sup> Rechy, "*City of Night* Remembered [1984]," 119.

<sup>80</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 12–13.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>82</sup> Rechy, “El Paso Del Norte [1958],” 6.

<sup>83</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 286.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>86</sup> Rechy, “El Paso Del Norte [1958],” 4–5.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>88</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 286.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Of course, Rechy’s representation also builds upon the literary-historical understanding of “New Orleans as a hemispheric ‘center’ [of] empire.” Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, eds., *Hemispheric American Studies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 12. As Kristen Guesz explains, a variety of Latin American “literary modes [had identified] the banana trade as the crucial mediator between the United States and Central America” by the early-twentieth century. These literary modes—represented in her study by the works of Mexican poet Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Honduran writer Guillermo Bustillo Reina—confirm the “identification of New Orleans as the imaginative ‘pivot’” through which, artistically and commercially, a “reversal of traditional hemispheric hierarchies of modern/primitive” may be realized. “During the half-century,” she adds, “New Orleans itself registered and made canny use of this vision of the city as a transit point between the ‘Latin’ and ‘Saxon’ worlds in order to further economic development agendas that frequently turned on increased trade with Latin America.” Kirsten Silvia Guesz, “The Mercurial Space of ‘Central’ America: New Orleans, Honduras, and the Writing of the Banana Republic,” in *Hemispheric American Studies*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 143. Undoubtedly, Mardi Gras—the reason for which Rechy’s narrator, together with so many other “youngmen” rush to New Orleans—avails itself of this vision, and the narrator knows it. That he fails to share this vision with the “touristworld,” however, is no surprise. Rechy, *City of Night*, 324. After all, this “transit point” of the Americas not only resembles the borderlands from which he fled; it also emblemizes a form of internationalism that more emphatically mediates the global North and South within the U.S. national imaginary that Rechy’s novel at once recasts and dissolves.

<sup>91</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 285–86.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 309. Between the U.S. and Britain, the cotton belt fueled the fastest-growing textile industry in the West. The slave-driven cotton economy benefitted southern plantation owners and northern bankers, property managers in the Deep South and shipping merchants in the North. In fact, the high demand for cotton at the turn of the eighteenth century ultimately led to the Second Middle Passage in 1844—one of the nation’s largest forced migrations. Undoubtedly, “King Cotton” became one of the most iconic commodities of the slave trade. That cotton is here shown not only to constitute the black mammy but also to emanate from her punctured breast is yet another indication that—much as in the borderlands where machines drill the ground for ore—the history of conquest, racialization, and exploitation are still very much alive for Rechy’s narrator.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 299.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 316–21. This procession was originally inspired by the Carnival mystic society of Mobile, Alabama, whose parades, beginning in 1830, upheld class divisions and inspired segregation among Creoles of Louisiana French, Spanish, and Caribbean descent. In 1856, Anglo-American elites organized a secret society of their own in the French Quarter and created the first Carnival krewe called the Mistick Krewe of Comus, followed shortly thereafter by other major krewes that appear in Rechy's novel, such as that of Comus (1856), Momus (1871), and Proteus (1882). The first one that appears in the passage above—The Parade of the Krewe of the Knights of Momus—was known in Rechy's time for excoriating the post-Civil War Reconstruction efforts of the city government in 1877. See Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival*, 1st Edition edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>97</sup> After the Louisiana purchase, social relations between Creoles and Anglo-Americans became so fraught with violence that a 171-foot zone of “neutral ground” had to be established on Canal Street—a popular locale during Carnival. Even after the Civil War, New Orleans continued to hold an aloof relationship to the Union—a relationship represented by the lighting fixtures that occupy “neutral ground” and commemorate each occupier of the city: the French empire, the Spanish empire, the Confederacy, and finally the United States. Quite forcefully, the layered history of colonial occupation makes itself known on the very street through which the procession passes. The narrator's experience, therefore, confronts a residual structure, made dominant, of Spain's and France's colonization of the Americas. Moreover, and reaching further back in history, it confronts a deeper regimented past through which the pagan ritual foregrounded here becomes the product of the Holy Roman Empire's colonization of Europe. In yet another uncanny way that eludes direct representation in the novel, the legacy of empire into which the narrator has gleefully thrust himself echoes the borderlands history of French, Spanish, and U.S. occupation from which he is trying to escape. And yet here, at the end of his journey, it is precisely where he hopes to find the “substitute for salvation” that motivated his pilgrimage in the first place.

<sup>98</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 373.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 370–71.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>103</sup> My point here draws on the definition of historical time, bound to the relationship between experience and expectation detailed in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). See introductory chapter for a thorough explanation of this concept.

<sup>104</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 315.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>107</sup> See James R. Giles, “Religious Alienation and ‘Homosexual Consciousness’ in *City of Night* and *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,” *College English* 36, no. 3 (November 1, 1974): 369–80.

<sup>108</sup> Rechy, *City of Night*, 273.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 379.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 11, 362–63.

<sup>113</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 1–15. Muñoz deserves to be quoted in full, if only to distinguish my usage here from the radically different and often opposed conceptions of “Queer time” and “Queer temporality” that others have drawn: “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness’s domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.” For a glimpse at the many variants of “Queer time” and “Queer temporality” that have been theorized over the last decade, see Carolyn Dinshaw et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2 (May 14, 2007): 177–95. More comprehensive examples, which hold both contrasting and complementary, although variegated, relationships to Muñoz’s vision of “Queer Futurity” are Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2006); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004).

## Chapter 4

### Generative Catastrophe:

### Zora Neale Hurston and the Racial Discourse of a Primitivist Bildung

Ah done been in sorrow's kitchen and Ah done licked out all de pots.  
Ah done died in grief and been buried in de bitter waters, and  
Ah done rose agin from de dead lak Lazarus.

Zora Neale Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*

From the black community of Eatonville, Florida to the Seminole territory of the Everglades, where coastal mangroves and sawgrass marshes line the borderlands between the U.S. and the Caribbean, Zora Neale Hurston researched the folklore of a southern geography that remained peripheral to the U.S. South. Hurston extended her ethnographic work in Jamaica and then in Haiti, where she wrote her most celebrated novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) before returning to the United States. She wrote this *roman à clef* while investigating and even participating in the syncretic rituals of Haitian vodou, together with other pagan traditions of the West Indies that were either prohibited or disavowed by the nominally Catholic Haitian state.<sup>1</sup> Although Hurston set her story in Florida, she referenced these marginalized traditions using symbols, allusions, and metonymic tropes in her novel that are just as veiled to the casual observer as the vodou practices she studied in Haiti. By mediating both nations in this way, Hurston's novel represents a form of transnational cultural production and creative expression that critics have been reassessing in light of her anthropological findings.<sup>2</sup>

But Hurston's nonfictional work brought her to Haiti during the fallout of a long and devastating U.S. occupation, which exposed a transnational differential of state power brokered by U.S. private interests. As I explained in my second chapter, Haitian president Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, who supported commercial and political ties with the United States, was assassinated during a popular revolt in 1915. Fearing the rise of a new opposition that could thwart U.S. foreign interests on the island, Woodrow Wilson's administration occupied Haiti. Within two weeks, the U.S. mobilized a plan for intervention that—as Hurston's own account in *Tell My Horse* (1938) suggests—had been conceived before the assassination of Sam.<sup>3</sup> From 1915 to 1934, Haiti's own institutions were dissolved and the Haitian army was supplanted by a U.S.-run gendarmerie that transformed the nation into a militarized political state.<sup>4</sup> To build the kind of infrastructure that could sustain their own occupation, U.S. forces demanded a nationwide conscription of unpaid laborers, developing a neo-colonial relationship to the nation that was palpably felt when Hurston arrived on the island in 1936. Working in Haiti as an outsider and an American, Hurston underwent a difficult negotiation of national belonging and critique. Although she harbored an inner conflict about the occupation, she did interrupt her anthropological field notes to deliver a politicized historical narrative that foreshadows C.L.R. James's tragic history of Haiti and, much as in Carpentier's own work, frames the U.S. intervention as a reproduction of the French colonial order against which the Haitian Revolution

was fought. While conducting fieldwork among impoverished communities on the island, Hurston's own political views grew more complex in relation to the occupation, even to the point of embracing this broader international conflict for the benefit of national independence in Haiti. It is within this context that we need to revisit Hurston's most popular novel, which, for all its critical attention, has largely evaded the recognition of this transnational and political register.

This task requires that we approach Hurston's creative writing within the context of her racial discourse—itsself intimately forged alongside, and in relation to, her political rhetoric and aesthetic practice. The relative dearth of critical inquiry concerning the novel's larger historical context is not surprising, given that Hurston approached race and international politics in a manner that appeared, as one critic put it, "reactionary, blindly patriotic, and, consequently, superficial."<sup>5</sup> Some critics, however, are beginning to offer views that account for major differences in Hurston's own racial formation and geographical understanding, which complicate her place on the political spectrum.<sup>6</sup> Hurston's geopolitical perspective, after all, coalesced in and through her critique of racism at home and abroad. Raised in Eatonville, Florida, Hurston enjoyed the assurances of an all-black community whose members largely escaped the reach of Jim Crow and therefore enjoyed a greater—although obviously delimited—degree of social mobility and self-determination. This formative experience, together with her anthropological training, gave Hurston an unconventional sense of racial and national belonging: one that itself did not seem to belong among many of the other racial discourses across the Harlem Renaissance. After studying race sociologically across national divides and synthesizing a fierce opposition to the biological determinism and internalized racism that she witnessed, Hurston's views conflicted with a specific, nationally-oriented understanding of the color line. As we will see, in some cases, Hurston's views contrasted sharply with those of her contemporaries, even as she attempted to deconstruct racialism from a transnational perspective that held in tandem the discursive fluidity of Caribbean racial formation with an African American perspective. This "hemispheric parallax," or cross-regional triangulation of racial consciousness, allows us to examine the tension between Hurston's internationalism within national debates.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it enables us to reframe the novel's central questions of love, marriage, race, and gender equality within a broader, albeit subtler, framework of geopolitical inequality and literary protest—one whose indirect and multivalent approach requires its own critical parallax.

In what follows, I will analyze *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, while considering its relevance not only to Hurston's ethnographic and autobiographical works, such as *Tell My Horse* (1938) and *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), but also to her immediate social context, thereby revising a large body of scholarship that defines Hurston's work within strict national confines and in contradistinction to the protest novel. Doing so will require attention to the nonfictional polemics and the racial politics of Hurston's relatively under-examined narrative discourse. While *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is known for representing a duality of African American voices and linguistic dialects, its narrative emplotment generates a wholly different duality that, as I intend to show here, offers its own radical politics of racial and national liberation. It does so, moreover, through what Ricoeur called the first order of narrative argument, i.e., the concordance achieved by an author's configuration and organization of events. In a way that parallels her desire to undo the internalized racism and self-hatred that she encountered in

Jamaica and Haiti while writing her novel, Hurston bifurcates narrative time into cyclical and linear trajectories that reimagine an undoing of historical development. As her narrative unfolds to construct the novel's storyworld, it reverses the logic of universal history endemic not only to Eurocentric models of civilization but also to models of human development that, as she claimed, had been internalized by the black diaspora in the United States and the Caribbean. As linear time progresses forward in her novel, so-called civilization dissolves, giving way to an untimely past that is nonetheless oriented by a narrative progression into the future. Framed by a reparative cyclical narrative, this unique primitivist *Bildung* presents a vision—like that of “Lazarus ... from de dead”—of renewal, rather than one of nostalgia for the past. Through its own spatial and temporal imagination, Hurston's synthesis of cyclical and linear narrativity mediates the hemispheric reach of U.S. imperial power and the broad geographical scope of its racial relations. But in anti-colonial fashion, it also mediates the capacity for national autonomy in Haiti—an endeavor that articulates with Hurston's call for race and gender equality in the U.S. and the Caribbean. This affirmation of historical becoming offers an important counterpoint to the other works in this project through a complex form of literary expression that has to be understood as Hurston's contribution to an emergent hemispheric modernism.

### **Between Worlds: Artist and Anthropologist, at Home and Abroad**

After finding Hurston's unmarked grave in Ft. Pierce, Florida, Alice Walker published “Looking for Zora” in 1975. This essay revitalized Hurston's work after it fell into obscurity during the mid-century, more than likely as a result of her “staunchly independent political stances rather than any deficiency of craft or vision.”<sup>8</sup> In her own time, Hurston attained success as an author, producer, choreographer, critic, and ethnographer. The highpoint of her career arrived in 1942 when she published her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, and in 1943 when she won the Anisfield-Wolf Book award in Race Relations, which landed her a spot on the cover of *Saturday Review*. Since the first reissue of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1978—only three years after Walker inaugurated her revival—Hurston has been restored as a key figure of the Harlem Renaissance, a movement of prolific cultural production by African American and African diasporic artists during the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, Hurston has earned a central place in the broader canon of modern American literature, becoming a huge influence for such later writers as Toni Morrison, Edwidge Danticat, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, and Gayle Jones.

But the scene that gave way to this influence, i.e., the Harlem Renaissance itself, becomes an important point of departure for my purposes. After all, this movement introduced the first wave of black criticism to draw a distinction between Hurston's work and the African American social realism of the late 1930s that began with the Great Depression and intensified with the Harlem riot of 1935. This early distinction was followed, moreover, by the Black Arts movement in the 1960s, which deepened the obscurity from which Hurston's work would later be recovered in Walker's endeavor to recast *Their Eyes* as a representation of “racial health—a sense of black people as complete, complex, undiminished human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much black writing and literature.”<sup>9</sup> Walker was addressing Hurston's capacity to undo what James Baldwin would later underscore as a representation of African Americans as “neatly analyzed, hard-working ciphers,” the damaging effects of “everybody's protest novel.”<sup>10</sup> Albert

Murray famously called this brand of realism “the social Science Fiction Monster” for promoting the idea, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. puts it, that “racism had reduced black people to mere ciphers, to beings who only react to an omnipresent racial oppression, whose culture is ‘deprived’ where different, and whose psyches are in the main ‘pathological.’”<sup>11</sup> As is well known, this mode of protest rejected creative work that did not illuminate the social determinants of racism in the United States, thereby presenting a marked turn away from earlier African American modernisms that were said to cater to Anglo-American tastes. Paradoxically, according to the likes of Walker and Baldwin, the prescription of protest fiction that would reject Hurston’s work, while working against the same assumptions of inferiority, was reinforcing them.

It becomes all the more understandable, however, that within a divisive national culture that leveraged scientific racism to disparage non-white, non-Western communities, Hurston’s endorsement of black rural dialect, folklore, and primitivism was met with disapproval from peers who advocated for protest within the intellectual parameters of Western thought. Authors as dissimilar as Richard Wright and Alain Locke both excoriated Hurston’s work for staging what they saw as a literary transposition of minstrelsy, intended to garner approval from the white community while failing to provide important social criticism from and for a more politicized black perspective. Wright’s early assessment demonstrates precisely this critique:

Hurston voluntarily continues in her novel the tradition which was forced upon the Negro in the theatre, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the “white folks” laugh.... Her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which is “quaint,” the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the “superior” race.<sup>12</sup>

Wright’s charge, which appears in a 1937 issue of *New Masses*, is echoed and extended by Locke’s own assessment, which was meant partly to redeem Hurston’s work while also calling for a different direction in African American letters. Although a former mentor and supporter of Hurston, Locke demanded that she adopt Wright’s brand of protest fiction:

It is folklore fiction at its best, which we gratefully accept as an overdue replacement for so much faulty local color fiction about Negroes. But when will the Negro novelist of maturity, who knows how to tell a story convincingly — which is Miss Hurston’s cradle gift, come to grips with motive fiction and social document fiction? Progressive southern fiction has already banished the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over and envy. Having gotten rid of condescension, let us now get over oversimplification!<sup>13</sup>

Given the disapproval here, one cannot help but read Hurston’s critique of “Race Solidarity” in her autobiography—written shortly after these reviews—as a retort to the contradictions in this line of thought: Those who “considered themselves Race Champions,” she stated, “drew color lines within the race. The Spirituals, the Blues, *any* definitely Negroid thing was just not done. They went to the trouble at times to protest the use of them by Negro artists.... They felt that there was so much scorn for black skin in the nation that their only security was in flight.”<sup>14</sup> One

of Hurston's earliest essays, written in 1928, foreshadows precisely this kind of response against the call for protest fiction:

I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. . . . I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal. . . . No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.<sup>15</sup>

This affirmative standpoint, which appears in one of Hurston's earliest essays, runs like a vital current through all of her writing, electrifying and giving life not only to her nonfictional criticism and ethnography but also to her literary and artistic endeavors. In *Their Eyes* Hurston was interested in forging a literary mode of expression that could offer a more affirmative representation of African-American subject-hood through a linguistic register. After all, the embodiment of an intersectional subject position that must negotiate race and gender—one of the central concerns in her book—requires a language that becomes inseparable from the task of embodiment itself. But even as Hurston's 1937 novel underscored the importance of black female empowerment and independence—themes that were vastly underrepresented among other works in the Harlem Renaissance—her depiction of dialect and folklore, inseparable from her intention to foreground black pride and creative female agency within the framework of masculine power and ideology, was met with an unfortunate dose of disapproval. Not without an equal dose of irony, her male critics partly reproduced the very framework against which she was writing, substituting political quietism, condescension, and oversimplification for the assertion of black female subjectivity in a climate that already ascribed passivity, simplicity, and compliance to the biological makeup and behavior of women.

Despite charges from its early detractors, many critics worked to redeem the novel's capacity to disclose not a damaging, stereotyping product of "dialect writing" but rather a rich archive of African American and diasporic expression—one, moreover, that could "establish a maternal literary ancestry" through which to intersect the authentication of diverse geographical expression with the validation of a diverse female voice.<sup>16</sup> Comparable to Claude McKay's own international heteroglossia—yet informed by an entirely different biographical and ethnographic understanding—Hurston's focus on the richness of linguistic cadence, syntax and diction, not to mention her emphasis on the power of storytelling to transmit history and culture, divulges key differences in education, gender, region of birth, class status, and belief systems across the rural South and the Caribbean regions with which she interacted intimately. As we saw earlier with John Rechy's work, then, with Hurston's novel we encounter not only a literary mediation of minoritarian intersectionality, but also the representation of a national culture that becomes inseparable from a liminal hemispheric standpoint, i.e., a standpoint that may include an unacknowledged vision, however blurry, of protest.

Indeed, by redeeming Hurston's novel as an alternative to the protest novel—as surely as it was, given its radically different style and subject matter—many critics have neglected the novel's capacity for its own remonstrance on a wholly different register. And they have done so not without reason. Hurston's representational bias leans toward an affirmative appreciation of

black culture and folklore. This mode of writing is largely reparative in that it celebrates and even mythologizes, while making sure to avoid overt expressions of violence, criminality, pathology and the like. Moreover, the complex racial discourse that Hurston establishes in her nonfiction, which largely amounts to this kind of appreciation for African American and diasporic culture, was and continues to be a polemical subject among critics. Although it was deeply intertwined with her lauded fiction, Hurston's views on race relations could not serve the many critics that understood themselves to be engaging in reparative scholarly gestures of their own. Her more political writings on Haiti and U.S. empire aside, Hurston's racial discourse tends to attract criticism on three general counts: an embrace of primitivism, a rejection of racial solidarity, and a periodic renunciation of race thinking that may be construed as damaging to the more politically necessary modes of critical racial consciousness.

The first one can be aligned not merely, as in Wright's problematic critique, with a form of minstrelsy—whether fictional and characterological or nonfictional and biographical. It can also be understood as a detrimental appropriation and performance of primitivist irrationality, impulsivity, and instinctual or libidinal gratuity:

When I sit in the drafty basement that is The New World Cabaret with a white person, my color comes. We enter chatting about any little nothing that we have in common and are seated by the jazz waiters. In the abrupt way that jazz orchestras have, this one plunges into a number. It loses no time in circumlocutions, but gets right down to business. It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo and narcotic harmonies. This orchestra grows rambunctious, rears on its hind legs and attacks the tonal veil with primitive fury, rending it, clawing it until it breaks through to the jungle beyond. I follow those heathen--follow them exultingly. I dance wildly inside myself; I yell within, I whoop; I shake my assegai above my head, I hurl it true to the mark yeeeeooww! I am in the jungle and living in the jungle way. My face is painted red and yellow and my body is painted blue. My pulse is throbbing like a war drum. I want to slaughter something--give pain, give death to what, I do not know. But the piece ends. The men of the orchestra wipe their lips and rest their fingers. I creep back slowly to the veneer we call civilization with the last tone and find the white friend sitting motionless in his seat, smoking calmly.... The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him. He has only heard what I felt. He is far away and I see him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen between us.<sup>17</sup>

This endorsement of "the jungle way" is not uncommon to other forms of black primitivist expression that attempt to embrace and represent indigenous African culture. Of course, such popular appropriations, while perceived as wholesome and beneficial in some circles, were critiqued by advocates of African American uplift for delimiting the recourse to self-determination and reinforcing negative stereotypes against the black community. Hurston's "primitive fury" here also may be seen to support a form of separatism, which finds irreconcilable differences among races in the "New World Cabaret" that keep "the ocean and the continent" between them. This view, of course, could not possibly gain favor among black

reformists combating the ideology of separatism and pushing to end segregation in the United States—especially after the Compromise of 1877 and the official restoration of white supremacy.

The second charge of disunity can be extracted from Hurston's more disapproving comments concerning "Race Pride," the urgent imperative by lofty "Race Men," as she saw it, to "feel ... superior to the whites" and therefore commit to another form of "Race Prejudice."<sup>18</sup> Hurston does proclaim that the call for "Race Consciousness," i.e., a "plea to Negroes to bear their color in mind at all times" is superfluous because "no Negro in America is apt to forget his race."<sup>19</sup> But in approaching the hope for racial unity and organization, Hurston reveals a pessimism that did not align with contemporaneous efforts to dissolve separatism: "There is no such thing as Race Solidarity in America with any group. Our interests are too varied. Personal benefits run counter to race lines too often for it to hold."<sup>20</sup> This proclamation is common across much of Hurston's racial discourse. "The Negro race," she would declare soberly, "was not one band of brotherly love. There was stress and strain inside as well as out. Being black was not enough."<sup>21</sup> The general sense of disunity from which she writes, moreover is made worse by the misogynistic beliefs of "Race Men" as she encountered them:

I found ... always the blackest Negro, being made the butt of all jokes, particularly black women.... They [supposedly] slept with their fists balled up ready to fight and squabble even while they were asleep. They even had evil dreams. White, yellow and brown girls dreamed about roses and perfume and kisses. Black gals dreamed about guns, razors, ice-picks, hatchets and hot lye. I hear men swear ... these things to be true.... If it was so honorable and glorious to be black, why was it the yellow-skinned people among us had so much prestige? ... The lighter the girl, the more money and prestige she was apt to marry.... Was it really honorable to be black?<sup>22</sup>

In many ways, this is the biggest problem that Hurston encountered—the very reason for which she couldn't see a viable avenue for true race solidarity at home and abroad. The self-hatred and internalization of racism within and among African American communities amounted to a damaging colorism, made worse by the gendered dynamics of power and the dependency of women on the benefaction of men whose own biases not only privilege lighter women but also demonize darker ones. This problem, more so than any other one concerning race, gender, and politics, courses through all of Hurston's works in one form or another. As we will see later in this chapter, it becomes the central issue to link not only Hurston's anthropological work and her creative writing but also her creative writing and her encounter with the U.S. occupation of Haiti.

This issue, moreover, offers the strongest catalyst for what, in some tracts among the many writings that constitute Hurston's complex racial discourse, becomes a total rejection of race thinking altogether:

At certain times I have no race, I am me. When I set my hat at a certain angle and saunter down Seventh Avenue, Harlem City, feeling as snooty as the lions in front of the Forty-Second Street Library, for instance. So far as my feelings are concerned, Peggy Hopkins Joyce on the Boule Mich with her gorgeous raiment, stately carriage, knees knocking

together in a most aristocratic manner, has nothing on me. The cosmic Zora emerges. I belong to no race nor time. I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads. I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. I am merely a fragment of the Great Soul that surges within the boundaries.<sup>23</sup>

In all of Hurston's writing, the moments that appear to be most sanguine, in her estimation, are those in which, as in the passage above, she can shed her race consciousness and, by imagining her belonging to "no race," transcend the determinants of racialization altogether. Indeed, here we catch a glimpse of this utopian impulse in Hurston's writing. By pointing to a "cosmic" emergence of self that at once is only a fragment of "the Great Soul," she reconciles not only the universal and the particular but also the subject-object divide from which the workings of consciousness are traditionally found to be inextricable. That this experience adheres to limitations of neither race "nor time" affords her a communion with the very same state of raw, unracialized, ahistorical, instinctual being, made possible by the kind of primitivism that we witnessed earlier. It is only after this vanishing point itself vanishes, i.e., after she "creep[s] back slowly to the veneer we call civilization," that her "color comes" and, as in this passage, she ceases to embody "the eternal feminine with its string of beads." Here Hurston goes so far as to implicitly defy the division of race and nationhood made so urgent by Du Bois's unforgettable formulation of "double consciousness": a formulation that remains coded in a gender ideology that Hurston also deconstructs in this passage, not to mention in her other writings.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to what many of her contemporaries believed about its damaging impact, to Hurston, primitivism granted access to a mode of disembodiment that dissolved rather than strengthened racial stereotypes. Rather, it was the pall of "civilization," as we see above, that cast racialization, difference, and division over an otherwise raw and naked substratum of diffuse energy, dynamism, violence, and existential authenticity. Or at least that is one way to rethink Hurston's utopia, given that before she "became a little colored girl" by attaining race consciousness,<sup>25</sup> in her Florida home town "there were no discreet nuances of life.... All emotions were naked, and nakedly arrived at.... This was the spirit of that whole new part of the state at the time, as it always is where men settle new lands."<sup>26</sup> It is precisely this "spirit" that oddly reframes much of Hurston's political rhetoric in anarchic, rather than republican or democratic, terms: a disposition coextensive not only with her unconventional upbringing but also with the unracialized mode of existence that Eatonville afforded her for a limited, yet formative, time.

Although often cited for her conservative leanings, Hurston's position on the political spectrum is rendered complex by her unusual biographical experiences, which demand a recalibration of traditional assumptions and expectations on the reader's part. This demand arises not merely from the fact that Hurston was "a Southerner, and had the map of Dixie on [her] tongue," contrary to her fellow "northerners [who] did not know the way an average southern child, white and black, is raised on simile and invective."<sup>27</sup> Rather it arises from the same experiences, cited by Hurston in her autobiography, that made her disavowal of race thinking possible in the first place. Although Hurston initially found her community of fellow artists in the most popular city of the North, she was raised in a little-known community in the South about which very few of her peers in Harlem had ever known. Her childhood home—the first all-black municipality in the United States—had defied the advent of Jim Crow segregation in the

South: “On August 18, 1886, the Negro town, called Eatonville ... received its charter of incorporation from the state capital at Tallahassee, and made history by becoming the first of its kind.”<sup>28</sup> And by making history autonomously, Hurston’s hometown vested in her an appreciation for an all-black form of self-reliance and limited government, which sounded off-key in the mixed-race liberal environment of the North:

Eatonville, Florida is and was at the time of my birth, a pure Negro town—charter, mayor, council, town marshal and all. It was not the first negro town in America, but it was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America.<sup>29</sup>

Growing up in this environment, Hurston’s own racial formation did not arrive until much later in life, when she had to leave Eatonville and suddenly, upon being addressed by her race, “became colored.”<sup>30</sup> While developing her sense of self as a child, she enjoyed a degree of equality and autonomy seldom found elsewhere for African Americans in the early twentieth century. Despite being built near Maiton, Florida, a community populated almost exclusively by wealthy white settlers, the town of Eatonville and its residents, as Hurston portrays it, enjoyed a greater potential for equal status and social mobility than other black communities in the South proper. This arrangement gave way to, and yet was made all the more possible by, a communal sense of racial and national belonging that neither existed nor made sense in the northeast communities of black artists in which she wrote creatively. Unexpectedly—and not simply because the residents of Maiton, from Hurston’s perspective, portrayed a favorable disposition to those of Eatonville—her own “awareness of separation,” unlike Rechy’s for example, was surprisingly tempered rather than strengthened by the marginal geographical position that she held to artists in the North.<sup>31</sup>

Already, this unconventional subject position extended a strong sense of equal status from a personal experience that few had enjoyed and, therefore, most could not understand. And in becoming the first and only black woman to graduate from Barnard College, Hurston intensified her alienation from her contemporary peers within the Harlem Renaissance. And it was at Barnard, in pondering what it meant to be human, that she began a life-long relationship with the discipline of Anthropology. Although the legacy of nineteenth-century anthropology was traditionally responsible for legitimizing racist ideology, Hurston’s unique position within the new developments and transformations of the discipline helped her produce a unique critique of racism. Hurston began her studies when she transferred from Howard University to Barnard College and met the highly-influential Franz Boas, with whom she maintained written and personal contact over the next decade.<sup>32</sup> With direct support from “Dr. Boas, the King of Kings,” or “Papa Franz,” as she often referred to him, Hurston earned two consecutive Guggenheim Fellowships to conduct anthropological research in Jamaica and Haiti.<sup>33</sup> Hurston’s departure, moreover, was preceded by a long, privately-funded, expedition throughout the U.S. South to conduct ethnographic research for Boas—a period of intense productivity during which she wrote her first novel *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1934), followed shortly thereafter by her first publication on black folklore titled *Mules and Men* (1935). This radically new experience enabled a different kind of writing for Hurston, i.e., one that would give her fiction an

ethnographic perspective.

Hurston's affiliation with the discipline of Anthropology at Barnard further impacted and transformed her views on race. Having studied under Franz Boas and alongside Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, Hurston entered into an ongoing fight against the scientific racism that had mobilized eugenics laws in the 1920s. At the time, these laws were being proposed by lobbyists who argued that African Americans, together with immigrant groups coming from southern and eastern Europe, possessed inherent biological differences that rendered them inferior to Anglo-Saxon whites. Such claims, targeted and discredited by Boas's research findings, had introduced policies of racial segregation, such as the 1924 Racial Integrity Act that established the one-drop rule in the United States.<sup>34</sup>

This experience bolstered and strengthened Hurston's already strong commitment to anti-racism. Simultaneously, however, it created a greater distance between her mode of anti-racist expression and that which fell under the banner of "Race Solidarity," i.e., the form of protest in which she was expected to participate the most. Her disciplinary exposure, together with her ethnographic practice, instilled in her a critique of race relations that universalized cultural difference, while rejecting the kind of biological difference that could be upheld by "Race Men" to reproduce another specious form of racialized behaviorism:

Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem. I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so regardless of his color. It seemed to me that the human beings I met reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. Different idioms, yes. [Different] circumstances and conditions having power to influence, yes. Inherent difference, no.<sup>35</sup>

Influenced by Russian formalism and the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, the then-emerging field of linguistic anthropology, practiced by Boas and Hurston, was beginning to change the assumptions of nineteenth-century linguistics, which had legitimized white supremacy by reference to an supposed underdevelopment of non-Western languages on an evolutionary scale. Following Herder's and Humbolt's rejection of Kant's "universal reason," Boas claimed that each language, on a global scale, represents not a biological classification but rather a classification of experience. At times, Hurston's own ethnographic perspectivism, which mobilized this understanding of experiential difference to demystify the effects of racialization, led her to denounce racial pride on principle:

Why should I be proud to be a Negro? Why should anybody be proud to be white? Or yellow? Or red? After all, the word 'race' is a loose classification of physical characteristics. It tells nothing about the insides of people.<sup>36</sup>

In passages such as these, Hurston's racial discourse does not attack racism directly so much as critique the genetic classifications undergirding the scientific racism with which she became familiar, i.e., not only the eugenics of her day but also the biological evolutionism, phrenology, typology, polygenism, and social Darwinism that shaped her very own discipline of

Anthropology in the nineteenth century. With the enactment of eugenic policy at home in the 1920s and the stirrings of Anglo-Saxon superiority abroad during the 1930s, Hurston's views were highly unconventional, even within some circles in broader metropolitan black communities that had internalized and reproduced the racial prejudice behind colorism. To the aforementioned "Race Men" who, as she portrayed them, found it necessary to enforce black male superiority in order to mobilize a version of racial justice, her words appeared apologetic or dismissive of otherwise undeniable racial tensions in the United States.<sup>37</sup>

And this tension makes sense, given that the very same commitment to anti-racism, which nonetheless distanced Hurston from the nationalist cause of "Race Solidarity," came about through her transnational field work. Racial identity in the Caribbean, as Hurston understood it while conducting ethnographic research in Jamaica and Haiti, was inseparable from a widespread affordance of discursive play, made possible by the legal allowance of self-identification. In the United States, she notes, "anyone who has any colored blood at all, no matter how white the appearance, speaks of himself as black."<sup>38</sup> But "it is so arranged in Jamaica that a person may be black by birth but white by proclamation. That is, he gets himself declared legally white."<sup>39</sup> This may seem like a positive force for social change, especially in relation to "the strategy of the American Negro, which demands that 'each race ... maintain its separate identity.'"<sup>40</sup> But in practice, the politics of racial identity in Jamaica became particularly disappointing. As Hurston notes, "Jamaica is two per cent white and the other ninety-eight per cent all degrees of mixture between white and black."<sup>41</sup> These demographics, when combined with the legalistic, rather than biological classifications of race in the nation, can allow a mixed-race person to become "census white." This process, however, had established a new "colonial attitude" that amounted to various hypocritical practices: ones, moreover, that exacerbated the very same internalization of racism and prejudice of colorism that she encountered in the United States.<sup>42</sup>

In Jamaica, it is the aim of everybody to talk English, act English and look English ... but it is next to impossible to lay a European face over an African face in the same generation. So everybody who has any hope at all is looking out for the next generation and so on. The color line in Jamaica between the white Englishman and the blacks is not as sharply drawn as between the mulattoes and the blacks. To avoid the consequences of posterity the mulattoes give the blacks a first class letting alone. There is a frantic stampede white-ward to escape from Jamaica's black mass.<sup>43</sup>

Multigenerational *mestizaje* in the colonies, while exposing racialization itself as a form of biological reification, also amounted to the contradictions of increased racial prejudice within the race: a new quantitative spectrum of colorism subservient to an old qualitative spectrum of racist ideology. For Hurston, the Caribbean served as a space from which to displace the racial politics of the U.S. momentarily and then reintegrate them into a new perspective: a parallaxic vantage point from which to dissolve, through the legacy of hybridity, the racial polarity of separatism in the U.S. and reconstitute it to find deeper and wider obstacles to the possibility for race solidarity. As more fluid census classifications amounted less to a liberation from oppressive "race thinking" and more to an aggressive division between black and ostensibly less black communities, "black solidarity" began to don the same "veneer of civilization" with which

it was supposed to contend. From this encounter, we can see how Hurston's skepticism toward the imperatives of racial identity in the U.S., which was present in her early essays of the 1920s and reiterated more forcefully in the 1940s, intensified through her ethnographic encounter with Caribbean racial dynamics in the 1930s.

This encounter becomes central to her ambivalence regarding the U.S. occupation of Haiti. The occupation commenced not long before Hurston began developing her own geopolitical views in college, and the general protest against U.S. interventionism intensified when she began writing and producing within the bustling intellectual atmosphere of the Harlem Renaissance. After moving to New York to attend Barnard, Hurston met Langston Hughes, with whom she collaborated not only to produce the play *Mule Bone* but also to publish creative work in the journal *Fire!!* that she co-founded. Much like James Weldon Johnson and other writers of the "New Negro" circle, Hughes wrote against the occupation of Haiti, together with Wallace Thurman and other critical voices of the "Niggerati" circle.<sup>44</sup> But unlike many of her contemporaries, Hurston visited Haiti on an ethnographic expedition during which she attempted to maintain an "objective point of view" similar to that with which she approached the expression of folklore and language in her fiction.<sup>45</sup> Writing about the occupation within this framework meant writing in the same complex and controversial register with which she often composed much of her racial discourse. The skepticism that she began to harbor in relation to the politics of racial identity in Jamaica intensified when she arrived in Haiti and discovered greater contradictions of racial ideology there. In Haiti, she assessed, the problem of internalized racism *is* the central cause of the U.S. occupation, i.e., the very reason for Sam's assassination and Wilson's paternalism. Here history and geography take on a special significance for Hurston because Haiti, at least since the end of the Haitian Revolution in 1804, was supposed to have been reconstituted as an autonomous all-black state, i.e., what *Their Eyes Were Watching God* implicitly refers to as "some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power."<sup>46</sup> Hurston expected, therefore, to experience a sense of racial and national belonging not unlike the one she felt in her hometown of Eatonville, Florida. But she found this autonomy, or at the very least its potentiality, ruined by a racialism that was not merely similar to that which she found in the U.S. and Jamaica, but rather significantly more brutal and unforgiving. The reaction we observed in Carpentier's thought regarding the violence of the Haitian Revolution, then, we find in Hurston's thought regarding the violence of Sam's assassination.

This is perhaps the greatest reason why Hurston's opening chapter on Haiti in *Tell My Horse* is so dissimilar to her opening chapter on Jamaica. In fact, it's vastly dissimilar to any of her other writings, creative or otherwise, because it employs a divergent tone, style, and mode of critique that, surprisingly, comes closer to the protest novel. In the grave tenor of reportage—although one that remains embellished by her gift for evocative lyricism and striking imagery, Hurston begins by describing the setting of Haiti through a grand historical gesture that is reminiscent of Carpentier's style. "For four hundred years, Haiti meant spilled blood and tears for blacks.... even when they had fought and driven out the white oppressors, oppression did not cease. They sought peace under kingdoms and other ruling names ... but it eluded them and vanished from their hands."<sup>47</sup> And, she aims to show, with the assassination of Sam, that Haitians found themselves in a similar situation: "The nation wanted peace. The people were

weary of the ‘generals’ and their endless revolutions and counterrevolution. They breathed a great prayer for Peace! But where in Haiti?”<sup>48</sup> With this question, Hurston doesn’t mean to stress the preposition “in,” but this word becomes especially important here because “Peace,” as she sees it, can only come from within after conflict has arrived from without.

In representing the assassination of Sam and the arrival of U.S. marines on the island, Hurston intensifies the style with which she opened her ethnography of Haiti. In doing so, she does away with the affective, mythic, and folkloristic emphasis for which she is known and instead foregrounds action and violence at a rapid pace:

Skulls crushed in by machetes’ blows and bowels ripped away by blades.... The hunks of human flesh screamed of outrage. The blood screamed. The women screamed. The great cry went up from the bloody cells and hung over Haiti like smoke over a ruin.... The outraged voice of Haiti had changed from a sob to a howl. They dragged General Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, until the dawn of the day of the massacre, president of the Republic, from his hiding place ... struck him a vicious blow with a machete at the root of his neck, and he was hurled over the gate to the people who chopped off his parts and dragged his torso in the streets. They were like that when the black flume of the American battleship smoke lifted itself against the sky.<sup>49</sup>

In emphasizing the severity of Haiti’s internal problems to propose external solutions, Hurston appears not only to glorify the U.S. occupiers despite their own crimes but also to posit intervention itself as a positive force for social change. Hurston’s mixed statements and veiled critiques render her assessment ambivalent on this matter;<sup>50</sup> but there is a reason why the violence in this passage may read like an excerpt from a radical work of anti-colonialism. Hurston’s emphasis remains fixed on the goal of national liberation for Haiti. In the next paragraph she goes on to say that “the dead and mutilated corpse” of Sam “should be entombed in marble for it was the deliverer of Haiti. L’Ouverture had beaten back the outside enemies of Haiti, [i.e., the French empire] but the bloody stump of Sam’s body was to quell Haiti’s internal foes, who had become more dangerous to Haiti than anyone else.”<sup>51</sup> Importantly, these internal foes are not merely a people but rather a determining structure of internalized racism: the same one that Hurston had just witnessed in Jamaica and which was here magnified to what, in her estimation, becomes its logical and violent conclusion.

Travelling from Jamaica to Haiti presented Hurston with an uncanny reproduction of imperial social relations, which she frames to showcase a connection between past and present that she wants the reader to notice:

Haiti has always been two places. First it was the Haiti of the masters and slaves. Now it is Haiti of the wealthy and educated mulattoes and the Haiti of the blacks.... The mulattoes began their contention for equality with the whites at least a generation before freedom for the blacks was even thought of. In 1789 it was estimated that the mulattoes owned ... over 50,000 black slaves. Therefore when they sent representatives to France to fight for their rights and privileges, they would have been injuring themselves to have

asked the same thing for the blacks. So they fought only for themselves.<sup>52</sup>

By broaching this antagonism between black and mixed-race communities, the latter of which was found responsible for the assassination of Sam, Hurston claims—as did so many before and after her—that Haiti is caught in the vicious cycle of its own “present impasse.” Rather than finding “progress,” Haiti has only reproduced the racialized division of labor by which it was governed before its liberation and its reconstitution as a Republic. As in the United States and, to a greater extent, in Jamaica, here the color line works to separate not different races but—from Hurston’s U.S. perspective, governed as it was by the one-drop rule—members of the same race. “Haiti’s internal foes,” then, are precisely those who reproduce this residual vestige of eighteenth-century colonialism, based on the racial prejudice that has persisted since the Revolution.

Hurston associates these “internal foes” with yet another “enemy” in Haiti, i.e., with the nation’s very own “Race Men”:

Haiti has suffered from another internal enemy.... These talking patriots who have tried to move the wheels of Haiti on wind from their lungs, are blood brothers to the empty wind bags who had done so much to nullify opportunity among the American Negroes. The Negroes of the United States have passed through a tongue-and-lung era that is three generations long. These ‘Race Men’s’ claim to greatness being the ability to mount any platform at short notice and ... tell what great folks the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments to the constitution had made out of us; and *never* fail to quote, ‘We have made the greatest progress in sixty years of any people on the face of the globe.’ That always brought the house down. Even the white politicians found out what a sure-fire hit that line was and used it when addressing a Negro audience. It made us feel so good that the office seeker did not need to give out any jobs. In fact I am told that some white man way back there around the period of Reconstruction invented the line.<sup>53</sup>

To Hurston, it is the special skill of “Race Men” to disparage the black race by exalting it in a manner so abstract that it loses all meaning, save to soothe the emotions—but not the problems—of those who are most oppressed. In claiming “the greatest progress in sixty years” and yet, as she mentions in another essay, speaking of any one black individual as “a tragic unit of the race,”<sup>54</sup> a hypocrisy emerges that enables Race Men, unwittingly, to “nullify opportunity among the American Negroes.” In Hurston’s example, pacifying black outrage enables and empowers the white politicians that in her example are working against the racial collective. As such, Hurston’s “Race Men” become the key wholesalers and distributors of a new opium of the masses. Although this critique is addressed expressly to “another internal enemy” of Haiti and not necessarily the same ones who would divide the black race on the basis of colorism, the same effect is produced by both: contradiction, disempowerment, and self-defeat. The progressives that elect themselves to be “Champions of the Race” may preach for democratic equality but, in Hurston’s view, the “doctrines of democracy” tend to “deal with the aspirations of men’s souls, [while] the application deals with things.... And Democracy, like religion, never was designed to make ... profits less”: a goal that thwarts the equality for which it ostensibly strives.<sup>55</sup>

It becomes clear that Hurston's distaste for "Race Men" in this geopolitical context reflects her distaste for the logic of compromise and reform that characterizes not only liberalism itself but also more extreme forms of left-wing politics within the liberal state:

Many people have pointed out to me that I am a Negro and that I am poor. Why then have I not joined a party of protest? I will tell you why. I see many good points in, let us say, the Communist Party. Anyone would be a liar and a fool to claim that there was no good in it. But I am so put together that I do not have much of a herd instinct. Or, if I must be connected with the flock, let *me* be the shepherd my own self. This is just the way I am made. You cannot arouse any enthusiasm in me to join in a protest for the boss to provide me with a better hoe to chop his cotton with. Why must I chop cotton at all? Why fix a class of cotton-choppers? I join in no protests for the boss to put a little more stuffing in my bunk. I don't even want the bunk. I want the boss's bed.<sup>56</sup>

Although Hurston conflates communism and liberal reform in this passage, she finds a way to denounce the latter by rejecting the former, while expressing the fuzzy contours of her own political philosophy. To be sure, there is no one way to delineate Hurston's place on the political spectrum as we know it, given that her unique blend of anarchism, populism, and pragmatism even collided, at times, with a mutual fondness for progressivism and authoritarianism. Hurston's politics were not confused so much as individualistically-oriented and largely amenable to the pliability of specific use. What makes her standpoint so difficult to peg, above all else, is her ever-present awareness of "the wide gaps between ideals and practices," which render "the world ... too full of inconsistencies."<sup>57</sup> In other words, when any political orientation is bound to enact consequences that fall somewhere between the theoretical and the practical—disparate as they may be—then the very nature of praxis, based precisely on this indeterminacy and ambiguity, becomes inconsistent and impossible to comprehend to the fullest extent of its ethical implications. Whether Hurston's view here finally amounts to a political position that is generally pragmatist—or even a position that is pragmatically anti-political—any final word on the subject is likely to generate more questions than answers. It is precisely on this basis that her aforementioned critique of democracy, in conjunction with the Race Men's "claim to greatness," depends on what she considers a grave disparity between "aspirations" and "application."

One thing, however, is clear: Hurston's intimate and lasting relationship with Eatonville, "the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America," influenced her general political inclinations toward Haiti, which happens to represent the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of black former slaves in the Caribbean. Whereas this inclination would lead us to expect a vehement opposition to U.S. occupation, we would do well to consider Hurston's dialectical and conflict-oriented understanding of "self-government." The almost mythopoetic narrative of Eatonville's founding, which commences the first essay in *Dust Tracks*, emphasizes how "the town [of Eatonville] was not in the original plan. It is a by-product of something else. It all started with three white [Union Army] men on a ship off the coast of Brazil."<sup>58</sup> Curiously, in *Tell My Horse*, she introduces "the end of the [R]evolution and the beginning of peace" in Haiti with the arrival of "Admiral Caperton [on] ... the U.S.S.

*Washington*.”<sup>59</sup> What makes this analogue between Eatonville and Haiti significant is not the suggestion of a salvific “white hope,”<sup>60</sup> but rather the common link—across time and space—between a collision of races and the formation of an all-black autonomous state:

This had been dark and bloody country since the mid-seventeen hundreds. Spanish, French, English, Indian, and American blood had been bountifully shed.... The strong and powerful Cherokees, aided by the conglomerate Seminoles, raided the plantations and carried off Negro slaves into the Spanish-held Florida. Ostensibly they were carried off to be slaves to the Indians, but in reality the Negro men were used to swell the ranks of the Indian fighters against the white plantation owners.... The sore point of returned escaped Negroes could not be settled satisfactorily to either side. Who was an Indian and who was a Negro? The whites contended all who had negro blood. The Indians contended all who spoke their language belonged to the tribe. Since it was an easy matter to teach a slave to speak enough of the language to pass in a short time, the question could never be settled.<sup>61</sup>

Much like Hurston’s present-day Haiti, then, Eatonville emerged out of the “bountifully shed” blood of multiple races and ethnicities across overlapping inter-imperial occupations “since the mid-seventeen hundreds.” This uncanny historical parallel, however, deviates in Hurston’s own time, adding an unacknowledged political urgency to her stay in Haiti. Whereas Eatonville ultimately flourished from the conflict between, on the one hand, the white plantation owners and, on the other hand, two opposing races, i.e., “Negro” and “Indian,” Haiti was being ravaged by its own conflict between “Negro” and “mulatto” in a post-plantation economy. The arrival of the U.S.S. *Washington*, then, becomes an opportunity for conflict that, as Hurston sees it, may hold the promise of a new beginning: “the beginning of Peace.” And this, above the assessments of all other critical formulations regarding Hurston’s politics, comes closest to capturing the stable current of thought that courses through all of Hurston’s politically-inflected writings, i.e., the idea that *conflict* drives history. Or, said in other terms, the implicit assumption that change occurs over time only by way of conflict and resolution between opposing parties. The very last line of Hurston’s most politically-charged essay, which indeed proposes, negates, and synthesizes a number of political philosophies, proclaims resolutely that “from hard searching, it seems to [her] that tears and laughter, love and hate, make up the sum of life.”<sup>62</sup> And this concluding remark on the subject, which follows a number of other dyadic political oppositions, echoes an earlier remark in the same essay: “I know that destruction and construction are but two faces of Dame Nature.”<sup>63</sup> With this notion in hand, we can better understand Hurston’s rejection of party politics, and not simply because she did not “want to bother with any boring from within,”<sup>64</sup> but rather because she aligned herself with a radical, yet personal, philosophy of dialectical conflict and reconciliation, a logic of creative destruction or, as we might call it, generative catastrophe.

With this political orientation in mind, we can better understand Hurston’s hope for deliverance from the turmoil in Haiti: one that, if enacted, could symbolize a historical recurrence of the conflict and resolution that brought her beloved Eatonville into existence. And here, as was the case with Eatonville, hope arrives not from the occupation itself, but rather from

the manner in which the occupation, from catastrophe, generated an opportunity on the island for reparative uplift. She makes it clear that “before the withdrawal of the American Marines, Colonel Little and the officers of the Occupation prepared a Haitian fighting force of three thousand men under Colonel Calixte. With so many trained men ... some effective resistance could be made to an invasion.”<sup>65</sup> The capacity for resistance is important to Hurston because it gives Haiti a greater degree of national autonomy, i.e., an opportunity for self-making free from any future occupation from the U.S. or Haiti’s closest belligerent, the Dominican Republic. But even more important is what this new configuration represents *vis-à-vis* Haiti’s “internal foes”: “Colonel Calixte is and was a hero among the blacks,” and his appointment was already working to “soften the differences between the blacks and the mulattoes.”<sup>66</sup> The new President of Haiti, Sténio Vincent, whose candidacy was made possible by the occupation yet who won the election based on his fierce opposition to the U.S. occupation, presents a new hope in Hurston’s estimation: “Vincent has taken many steps to destroy this antagonism between the mulattoes and the blacks which has been the cause of so much bloodshed in Haiti’s past and has been one of the major obstacles to national unity.”<sup>67</sup> And from this new occasion for “Peace,” Hurston envisions a renewal of possibility for the great experiment of a form of all-black self-governance in Haiti:

So where does [Haiti] go from here? That all depends ... mostly on the action of a group of intelligent young Haitians ... who hold the hope of a new Haiti because they are vigorous thinkers who have abandoned the traditional political tricks.... These new and vigorous Haitian intellectuals [will] spur Haiti out of her fog of self-deception [and] internal strife.<sup>68</sup>

With the rise of these “organic intellectuals”—an opportunity made possible by the withdrawal of U.S. marines—we get internal renewal after external crisis.<sup>69</sup> This is the logic of international conflict with which Hurston concludes her narrative of the violent and convulsive assassination of Sam, followed by the U.S. occupation. And it is one that senses a renewal of anti-colonial national autonomy: “A feeling of nationalism is growing in Haiti among the young. They admire France less and less, and their own native patterns more. They are contending that voodoo is not what is wrong with Haiti. The thing fettering the country is its politics.”<sup>70</sup> In Hurston’s hands, the assassination of Sam was tragic precisely because it represented the greatest example of internalized racism and—by extension—violation of race solidarity that she had ever witnessed. In her narrative, it is due to this conflict between black and mixed-race factions on the island that the U.S. occupation began. Now that the occupation was over, Haiti had a real chance to regain the potential for autonomous control and self-determination once again.

### **Hurston’s Narrative Discourse: Dual Temporality and Primitivist Bildung**

Knowing full well that Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in Haiti, critics have attempted to discover a hidden relationship between the novel and her ethnographic scholarship. In doing so, they have located Haiti, so to speak, in Hurston’s archetypal characterization. In particular, they have drawn insightful analogical affinities between Hurston’s protagonist Janie Crawford and goddesses of Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian, and Norse mythologies with which Hurston was well acquainted.<sup>71</sup> In line with the logic of structural anthropology—which

understands language as a relational structure that establishes meaning from the distribution and opposition of terms—much scholarship has focused on homologous affinities between each of the three relationships that Janie experiences in the novel and several mythical dyads: Adonis and Aphrodite, Isis and Osiris, and Ishtar and Tammuz, to name a few. Extending this focus to Hurston's engagement with West Indian myth, scholars have located the presence of Haiti in Hurston's appropriation of vodou archetypes: namely, the Ezili goddess, whose main *loa*, or spirits, form a binary opposition of their own. Ezili *Danto*, associated with darkness, poverty, and rage, together with Ezili *Freda*, associated with lightness, nobility, and love. Janie's characterization, demonstrating both "mixed blood and mixed temperament," has been shown to encapsulate this mythic dyad in surprisingly homologous ways.<sup>72</sup> This pairing can even be said to pervade the novel's narrative voice, as it becomes starkly bifurcated, on the one hand, into an authoritative extradiegetical narrator and, on the other hand, into an intradiegetical speaker. This critical approach, while fruitful and in many ways necessary to understand the deep structural logic that makes its way into Hurston's own characterization, remains dependent on the constitutive relationality of discourse itself. In doing so, it keeps a safe distance between Hurston's study of vodou in Haiti and her politicized narrative of violent upheaval in Haiti. Moreover, it elides the significant relationship that may exist between her racial discourse, which was shaped in large part through her experiences in the Caribbean, and the narrative discourse of the novel that she wrote while attempting to make sense of these experiences.

Notably, Hurston's narrative is riven by two distinct classes of voice—an authoritative third person speaking in standardized English and a derivational voice that refracts into variegated first-person regional dialects. But here I want to consider how, in conjunction with this synchronicity of voices, another kind of division runs through the novel on a diachronic axis: one that mediates Hurston's politics of conflict and change over time. Creating a methodological distance from the structuralism of linguistic anthropology while coming closer to the storytelling and the chronological meaning-making of ethnography, the novel form gave Hurston an opportunity to displace yet mediate the content of *Tell My Horse* through *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It is hard to believe that these two radically disparate works were written simultaneously, but the latter, I want to suggest, brings the former within closer proximity as it unfolds. That is, as Hurston's novel progresses across narrative time, it gives expression to a South Florida geography that becomes further and further removed from the branches of state power in the U.S. South. Ultimately the novel represents a peripheral territory while mobilizing narrative temporality to render emplotment itself significant to the future of Haiti's national sovereignty after U.S. occupation.

For a *Bildungsroman* that traces character development across various stages of life, Hurston's novel appears to employ a traditionally linear and moderately paced narrative temporality. The story of Hurston's semi-autobiographical protagonist, Janie Crawford, centers on the theme of male and female relationships and unfolds evenly across the formation and dissolution of three marriages. From Logan Killicks to Joe Starks to Tea Cake, Janie survives varying amounts of inequality and even domestic violence, while growing more autonomous and self-determined with each marriage. Janie's grandmother, a former slave, first warned her that "de nigger woman is de mule uh de world," a remark that extends her former station as a slave to

Janie's own position in a gendered and racialized paradigm of inequality.<sup>73</sup> When Janie marries her first husband, the prosperous farmer Logan Killicks, and she is treated less like his wife and more like the beneficiary of a labor-laden sharecropping agreement, Nanny's warning becomes all the more palpable. The reader learns, through Nanny's own voice, how slavery shaped the expectations of a black woman's place in the division of labor and her standing (or total lack thereof) in national debates of racial belonging: "Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can stop you from wishin'."<sup>74</sup> This perspective establishes the principle challenge that Janie will have to overcome as a black woman. Even after gaining independence from Killicks, Janie's second marriage to Joe Starks becomes even more fraught when he places her in a diminutive and subservient position, thereby restraining her agency, delimiting her circle of friends, and demanding changes in her physical appearance. Janie stands up for herself by commanding the brazen, self-possession against which her Nanny warned her at the outset; and with an almost mythical power of the Word, she brings about Joe Stark's death. Her third and final marriage to Tea Cake finally extends Janie the freedom that she had been seeking in her former relationships. Tea Cake considers her a peer and an equal, all the while treating Janie with a reverence that, the reader recognizes, she has earned for herself. Hurston complicates this relationship, however, by attributing to Tea Cake an abusive side, and after a violent hurricane inflicts him with a murderous bout of rabies, Janie is forced to kill him so that she may save herself. With this gesture, Janie may be said to affirm the ultimate form of self-determination and independence. Through these marriages, Janie experiences three distinct stages of growth that, in the end, vest her with the autonomy to tell her own story. This story becomes the narrative itself, as she delivers it orally to her friend Pheoby Watson.

Through this progression of character across narrative time, Hurston employs a double narration similar to Rechy's; that is, Janie is not only the implied narrator but also the protagonist of the novel. Moreover, this double narration also implies a double audience; that is, her friend Pheoby Watson to whom she recounts her story and, of course, the reader of the novel in which her story is relayed. This duality of doubles exists alongside a third one, which I have referenced above and which other critics have referenced often: a free indirect discourse through which a third-person omniscient narrator begins the novel and then intertwines with Janie's own narrative voice, i.e., a voice that uses its own coded dialect and introduces other dialects as other speakers enter the novel. And this duality, which establishes the novel's rich heteroglossia, is accompanied by yet another one: unlike most *Bildungsroman* novels, which commence at the beginning of the protagonist's life, Hurston's begins with an ending. Janie's story is told in a nested narrative, which is embedded inside of a frame narrative that bookends the beginning and ending of the novel. In this way, Janie can express maximum autonomy by recasting her own story as she pleases—a sign of her fully-developed subjecthood. This fourth duality exists outside the central narrative of the novel, and this central narrative constitutes—while being constituted by—the other aforementioned dualities.

But, I want to add, Hurston's novel contains yet another important, and largely unacknowledged, duality. As Janie Crawford grows to embody an agentic subject position through a series of gendered power dynamics and ideological struggles, a different kind of

narrative takes place, and it is one that reverses the directionality of *historical* time, i.e., toward the contextual past, while maintaining a forward directionality in *narrative* time, i.e., toward the textual future. In other words, as Janie's characterization develops across the stages of her future-oriented growth and maturity, her storyworld changes to reflect a setting that resembles a deep past: a primitivist representation of wilderness, accentuated as a nourishing and enabling, rather than harmful and restrictive, non-state space. This dual narrative temporality conceptualizes the layering of inverse chronologies in a manner that is similar to, although distinct from, the dual temporalities of Carpentier's and Rechy's novels. Written simultaneously alongside Hurston's narrative of violent upheaval in Haiti, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* illustrates an untimely imagination that rethinks the timely crisis of the occupation in Haiti, together with a transformation of the race relations that gave way to it.

The very first page of Hurston's novel contains nearly a dozen linguistic markers that begin to establish the central role of temporality in the narrative to come. From "the life of men," whose "dreams [are] mocked to death by Time"; to "the beginning," which paraphrases Janie's return and thus implicitly points to a simultaneous ending; to the "sundown," which marks the setting of the novel that brings Janie's character into view; to the very reason for which the darkness enables her arrival:<sup>75</sup>

It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment.<sup>76</sup>

Here we can already detect a mediation of Haitian vodou, combined with the context of U.S. occupation within which Hurston conducted her ethnographic studies. To imagine that "mules and other brutes" had "occupied ... skins" is to reference, at once, an "occupied" Haiti and the practice of "mounting" in Haitian vodou, i.e., the ceremonial possession of a human body by a spirit—whether good or evil. Of course, possession itself, in ensuring a state of bondage for the possessed, associates both of these allusions with the unequal race and gender dynamics that deeply inform Hurston's racial discourse, i.e., precisely what Nanny, who declares that the black woman is "de mule uh de world," demonstrates for Hurston. And here, metaphors for attunement—a skill undoubtedly required if one is to read "nations" properly—are laced with mythic images that symbolize a transmutation of power and potentiality, recalling Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*. By aligning this vision of transformation, moreover, with "the time to" and "the time for" doing so, Hurston implicitly rejects clock time and instead endorses the human time of experience, i.e., of practice, action, event, habit, etc. This recalibration prepares us to locate the workings of temporality in the structures of experience.

What makes this view of temporality especially important, moreover, is the structural experience being proposed by the beginning and ending of the same chapter that includes the passage above. The first sentence of the chapter ends by stating how men's "dreams [are] mocked to death by Time." The last sentence of the same chapter begins by stating, "Time makes

everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked.”<sup>77</sup> Note that the last word of the first sentence and the first word of the last sentence are the same, i.e., “Time” with a capital T. Both statements highlight a forward temporal trajectory, even unto death, but the structural reversals here, which suggest that the last shall indeed be the first, are given special impetus by Janie’s “talk[ing]” in the end, which brings her end to our beginning. This nuanced chronological exchange between beginnings and endings introduces the duality of continuity and reversal that runs through Hurston’s novel. In this way, it indicates that the rhetorical device of *chiasmus*, or reverse parallelism, will constitute the governing logic of the narrative that follows. In Hurston’s novel, chiasmus occurs often at the sentence level,<sup>78</sup> but in this example it occurs on a much broader, structural level that metonymically references the longer chiasmus constituted by the novel as a whole.

This chiasmus form imparts not only the dual trajectory that time will take in Hurston’s novel but also its necessary function as a key provider of, and not just a passive vehicle for, meaning. The neologism “monstropolous” that appears in the sentence above, which states that “Time makes everything old so the young ... darkness became a monstropolous old thing,” functions as a portmanteau. As such, it connotes the dual construction of temporal progression itself, while also alluding to its constitution. The suffix “-opoulos” [-όπουλος], meaning “descendent of,” renders the “young ... darkness” the descendent of a monster, or monstrous thing, that makes it “old.” This curious construction recalls one of the most unusual passages in *Dust Tracks on a Road* in which Hurston anthropomorphizes “Time” itself in monstrous form:

*Thing* lies forever in her birthing-bed and glories. But hungry Time squats beside her couch and waits. His frame was made out of emptiness, and his mouth set wide for prey. Mystery is his oldest son, and power is his portion. That brings me before the un-lived hour, that first mystery of the Universe with its unknown face and reflecting back. For it was said on the day of first sayings that Time should speak backward over his shoulder, and none should see his face, so scornful is he of the creatures of Thing.<sup>79</sup>

This mythical allegory envisions “Time” as a predatory monster that waits and, when ready, takes “Thing,” or substance, for its “prey.” When applied to the novel’s framed chiasmic structure, Janie’s story—the embedded narrative—becomes not only the perfect prey for Time’s ravenous appetite but also, through its digestive process, an inseparable dimension of Time itself. Her story, that is, can only be told so long as it is told in and through time. But this is not enough. That “Time should speak [only] backward on the day of first sayings” suggests precisely what Hurston’s novel prepares us to accept: Janie’s first utterance of speech, given shape by Time’s unfolding, will begin while looking back to an end. And yet, it will move us forward through the narrative. This duality reinforces not only the importance of time in Hurston’s novel but also the trajectory that time will take. Finding its way to the story’s “birthing-bed” and taking “power,” it gives way to the representation of a timely present, while enabling an anterior view of the past that becomes constitutive of an untimely future.

In this way, Hurston’s novel offers an emplotment that stages a reverse *Bildung*, i.e., a coming of age that at once looks back to produce a vision of the past not in retrospect of the

future but rather in its stead. This process begins just as Janie Crawford, much like “Time,” sits “waiting for the world to be made.”<sup>80</sup> It is no wonder, then, that here behind “Nanny’s gate,” is where her “consciousness ... commenced.”<sup>81</sup> Not before long, Janie is introduced to her grandmother’s chosen suitor: “Brother Logan Killicks ... a good man” with which “to marry off decent like.”<sup>82</sup> But to Janie, Killicks “look[s] like some ole skullhead in de grave yard.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, “the vision of Logan Killicks [began] desecrating the pear tree” that, just moments before his visit, symbolized life, fecundity, and reproduction.<sup>84</sup> These references to old age, death, and decay bring Janie face to face with the recognition that “Time makes everything old.” As such, Killicks threatens to supplant her beginning with an end—and not simply his own personal end but rather the end of an era. “Logan Killicks and his often-mentioned sixty acres” emblemizes the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War.<sup>85</sup> As a Union effort to provide agrarian reform after a series of debates between the executive branch and radical abolitionists, the United States promised formerly enslaved farmers “forty acres and a mule,” not to mention the very land upon which they worked when laboring as slaves. However, the Freedmen’s Bureau Act, among other proclamations, directly reversed this promise after the war.<sup>86</sup> That Logan Killicks possesses status, notoriety, and “60 acres and a mule” suggests not only that he was able to survive the failure of Reconstruction but also that he was able to garner relative wealth despite it. For Janie, however, his acreage amounts to her bondage. The time to which Killicks belongs is supposed to bring, at the very least, a deliverance from human possession and forced labor, but with Killicks, Janie finds herself expected to fill these demands. This experience begins a bondage in freedom for Janie that she will try to reverse, in effect commencing Hurston’s reverse *Bildung*.

But it is not felt until we meet Janie’s next suitor and eventual husband. “Joe Starks was the name.... Kept hearin’ ‘bout them buildin’ a new state down heah in Floridy and sort of wanted to come” when he “heard all about ‘em making’ a town all outa colored folks.”<sup>87</sup> Given that “the white folks had all de sayso where he come from and everywhere else, exceptin’ dis place dat colored folks was buildin’ theirselves,” this “new state” is immediately recognizable as Eatonville when it was still the unimproved territory of West Maitland.<sup>88</sup> With Starks, “a feeling of sudden newness and change came over [Janie],” but this renewal came about simultaneously with another kind of change altogether.<sup>89</sup> Almost immediately, Starks became “very solemn” and even his unadorned seat became “some high, ruling chair.”<sup>90</sup> So regal was Joe’s self-generated stature that he “married [Janie] with new clothes of silk and wool.”<sup>91</sup> But Hurston’s characterization here aims to align Joe with the figure of a ruling monarch. When he asks “Guv’nor Amos Hicks” for the name of the town’s mayor, and Hicks comes up short, Joe exclaims, “Ain’t got no Mayor! Well, who tells y’all what to do?” Hicks replies, “Nobody. Everybody’s grown,” to which Joe then concludes, “No wonder things ain’t no better.”<sup>92</sup> He then proceeds to become a ruler granted with the divine right of kings, calling himself “I, god” and taking complete possession of Janie by demanding that she “dress up and stand in the store all ... evening” so that “nobody else’s wife [could] rank with her.”<sup>93</sup> Employing forced, unpaid labor to dig a massive “town ditch to drain the street in front of the store,” Starks introduces working conditions under which others “had murmured hotly about slavery being over, but every man filled his assignment.”<sup>94</sup> Clearly, the division of labor that Starks brings to the town resembles that of a pre-reconstruction-era, slave-holding time period—yet one that echoes the perverse

return of slave-ownership that, as we saw in Carpentier's work, constituted Haiti's supposed freedom from bondage after the Revolution.

His opportunity for domination, after all, is made possible because, as he muses when he first arrives, "taint nothing but a raw place in de woods."<sup>95</sup> Starks comes to embody not only the power of the planter class but that of an authoritarian leader: "There was something about Joe Starks that cowed the town.... He had a bow-down command in his face, and every step he took made the thing more tangible.... The rest of the town looked like servants' quarters surrounding [his] 'big house' ... painted in a gloaty, sparkly white.... It weakened people."<sup>96</sup> It is not long before his arrangement with Janie turns sour. This shift noticeably marks a developmental stage that, by anthropological measure, rules out the agricultural industrialism of Killicks' environment and especially the technological complexity of Northern "civil society." The monarchic social order Joe Starks introduces constitutes not just a liminal zone of the periphery but rather a territory apparently released of strict national ties. It is a developing social order, and its model of sovereignty parallels those that reproduce themselves in the Caribbean, i.e., what Hurston refers to as "an elected monarchy" in *Tell My Horse*, when demonstrating that Haiti had "never been a democracy according to the American concept.... The President of Haiti is really a king with a palace."<sup>97</sup> What comes to light, especially with the representation of absolute rule, is a reproduction of the colonial production of social relations—not too far off from the reinstitution of agrarian labor conditions in Christophe's Haiti by which Hurston, like Carpentier, was fascinated. Here Janie finds even more oppression than she did when she was with Killicks, but unlike her former relationship, which she could outright abandon, her relationship with Joe could only dissolve with his death, much as the end of a traditional monarchic rule.

With Tea Cake, what follows is a liberation from the logic of accumulation, dispossession, and authoritarian power embraced by Joe Starks: "Dis ain't no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine."<sup>98</sup> Janie fondly remembers that the time she spent with Tea Cake was "the beginning of things."<sup>99</sup> Surely, she is referencing the beginning of what, to her, became an authentically loving relationship: something she had not encountered until then. But there's another way in which this union marks "the beginning," and it has everything to do with the next change of setting that Tea Cake introduces:

To Janie's strange eyes, everything in the Everglades was big and new. Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything. Weeds that did well to grow waist high up the state were eight and often ten feet tall down there. Ground so rich that everything went wild. Volunteer cane just taking the place. Dirt roads so rich and black that a half mile of it would have fertilized a Kansas wheat field. Wild cane on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world. People wild too.<sup>100</sup>

Here the sonic consonance established by the "big beans, big cane, big weeds," combined with the change in tempo achieved by the succession of monosyllabic words, signals an unrestrained surge of abundance and proliferation. The sheer breadth and scale of lush vegetation, the life-giving properties of fertile soil, the vital growth of "wild ... volunteer cane," all of which departs

from “the rest of the world,” in turn, reveals a new world. And such is also the case for the reader, who enters—together with Janie—into yet another radically different landscape.

Moreover, the landscape of the Everglades brings a new social order. It is here, in the lowest rung of the most remote territory of an extra-regional and peripheral inter-American space, that we encounter a group of Bahamians, or “the Saws,” introducing Caribbean culture to the United States: “during the summer when she heard the subtle but compelling rhythms of the Bahaman drummers, she’d walk over and watch the dances.... She got to like it a lot and she and Tea Cake were on hand every night till the others teased them about it.”<sup>101</sup> In fact, “they began to hold dances night after night.”<sup>102</sup> This transculturation is accompanied by another form of encounter as Native American tribes appear in the wilderness: “[Janie] saw a band of Seminoles passing by. The men walking in front and the laden, stolid women following them like burros.”<sup>103</sup> Here the osmosis of transnational and pan-ethnic human geography amount to cultural expressions of ritual and tribal dance, lending to this peripheral space the trappings of a modernist primitivism. As such, and especially with the added presence of Native American tribes, this space—free of the presence and execution of state power—invokes a pre-Columbian social order through which to express, as Hurston did in her essay about the “New World Cabaret,” a utopian vision. It is here, in this stripped-down landscape, that Hurston’s semi-autobiographical narrator and protagonist grows more autonomous:

Sometimes, Janie would think of the old days in the big white house and the store and laugh to herself. What if Eatonville could see her now in her blue denim overalls and heavy shoes? The crowd of people around her and a dice game on her floor! She was sorry for her friends back there and scornful of the others. The men held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself.<sup>104</sup>

This social order largely contrasts with the one that preceded it but not by advances in technology; rather as in the transition from Killicks to Starks, it presents quite the opposite. This environment strongly evokes an earlier, more agrarian society, even more far removed from “the rest of the world” than Joe Starks’s “raw place in de woods.” And it resembles one, moreover, that lacks a strict, hierarchical social order. As such, it introduces a reconfiguration of the symbolic order, together with the organizational order of state power that, even in the unimproved territory of West Maitland, had been retained by Joe Starks. And it is one that gives Janie the power, finally, to express a meaningful voice that was denied her in the stages that precede this one. With Hurston’s representation of the Everglades, we have, in fact, entered a modernist mode of primitivist representation. This mode, of course, is inseparable from an ethnographic model of understanding, and Hurston is leveraging the latter to flesh out the former—from the description of the setting to a mode of existence free from the constraints of a domineering social order.

Throughout this narrative trajectory, Janie travels from West Florida to Eatonville to Jacksonville to West Palm Beach to the Seminole territory of the Everglades in South Florida—a location so far removed from the governmental reach of the U.S. nation state in 1937, and so

fluidly mixed with the Caribbean, that from this location one would literally have to travel North just to get to the “Deep South.” This trajectory moves the narrative action, together with our protagonist, further and further South, in the opposite direction of the Great Migration and closer toward the U.S. periphery, where its conflation with the holistic concept of “America” becomes more tenuous, especially in the mid-century, during which South Florida was still mostly remote from the enforcement of Jim Crow laws. So emplotment not only unfolds through a dual narrative temporality, whereby Janie’s characterization progresses as her storyworld dissolves the markers of so-called civilization. In addition, there is a move downward that brings her close to the Caribbean landscape from which she was writing her novel. From Killicks to Starks to Tea Cake, Hurston orients her protagonist toward a borderlands territory that enables Janie’s personal liberation: a non-state space that is at once pragmatic in development and nearly anarchic in its social order, bringing Janie closer to freedom than ever before. By intersecting this later stage in characterological development with the representation of an earlier, de-industrialized historical stage, Hurston’s primitivist *Bildung* nears completion in close proximity to the very same site from which she was writing her most politically-charged piece of narrative about the U.S. occupation of Haiti. This proximity renders her novel—and especially its final segment in the Everglades—coextensive with the reparative vision that Hurston reserved for Haiti: one that sees Haitians depending less on the French colonial residuals of racial identity and more on “their own native patterns.”

As such, it retains a curious connection to the practice of slavery from which Hurston is rethinking the untimely past *in* the future. In an early essay, a young Hurston alludes to this concept, long before writing *Their Eyes Were Watching God*:

Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me.... The terrible struggle that made me an American out of a potential slave said "On the line!" The Reconstruction said "Get set!" and the generation before said "Go!" I am off to a flying start and I must not halt in the stretch to look behind and weep.<sup>105</sup>

Much like Hurston’s novel, this brief yet significant form of nonfictional emplotment stages its own argument. Here there are two distinct linear chronologies that nevertheless intersect to uphold a concept of historical progress precisely through a form of reversal. One is rhetorical and follows the fixed chronology of idiomatic expression: (i) “On the line!” (ii) “Get set!” (iii) “Go!” The other lists three historical periods that also follow a set course, but they do so in reverse: (i) A path to citizenship, (ii) Reconstruction, and (iii) the “generation before” Reconstruction. In this latter chronology, Hurston invokes the struggle for citizenship and national belonging that followed the period of Reconstruction. And yet, to this period in history, she attaches the phrase “On the line!” To the period of Reconstruction that chronologically precedes this one, she attaches the phrase “Get set!,” signaling rhetorical progression by way of reverse historical chronology. To the earliest historical period that is listed here, i.e., the “generation before” Reconstruction, she attaches the final step “Go!” in the series of three. These two linear chronologies intersect to showcase the kind of reverse *Bildung* that we see in Hurston’s novel. *On the line*: the present, *Get set*: the generation prior to the present, *Go*: the generation prior to

the generation prior to the present. Together, both eventually lead to a telos beyond slavery, but they do so in two distinct directions: one that is oriented toward the future and one that is oriented toward the deep past. This parallax perspective unveils an imagination of de-colonial liberation by staging the intersection of timely and untimely temporalities. In giving shape to the novel's emplotment these temporal dynamics constitute not only Hurston's primitivist *Bildung*, but also the preconditions for their imaginative reconciliation in the throes of narrative conflict. And just as the phrase "Go!" here renders Hurston's primitivism not a fetishization of origins but rather a point of departure, the conflict that she finds necessary in Haiti will unfold through the novel's own narrative devices of mediation to guarantee a departure that is not only free but also free enough to recognize itself as such.

### **Hemispheric Renewal: Hurston's Reparative Mythic Cycle**

As we have seen, Hurston's primitivist *Bildung* holds a reparative relation to the colonial ideologies that have caused an internalization of racial inferiority and biological determinism among the African diaspora in the U.S. and the Caribbean. But in Hurston's representation of the Everglades, which imagines a more liberated social order in which different races and diasporas cohabit peacefully and productively, internalized racism returns to highlight the difficult challenges facing race solidarity. In the story, this problem curiously reemerges alongside the threat of a hurricane: a cyclical force of nature that Hurston uses not only to drive the novel toward its *denouement* but also to rethink catastrophe, in the face of racial discord, as a form of renewal. When the Bahamian "Saws" warn Tea Cake of the hurricane's advance, adding that even "de Indians gahn east" because "it's [too] dangerous" to stay in the Everglades, Tea Cake states that the "Indians don't know much uh nothin' ... else dey'd own dis country still. De white folks ain't gon nowhere. Dey oughta know if it's dangerous."<sup>106</sup> Reproducing and projecting onto the Seminoles the racist ideology to which he has been subjected, Tea Cake's characterization begins to represent the same introjection of race hatred that Hurston encountered in the U.S. and—to a greater extent—in Jamaica and Haiti.

But the racist ideology that Tea Cake is transmitting here was in fact transmitted to him by a different character: Mrs. Turner, a mixed-race resident of the Everglades whose bigotry and ignorance serves to represent Hurston's biggest critique against race hatred in the novel. Combining the features and colorist racial discourse that Hurston encountered among "anti-black mulattos" at home and abroad, Hurston's characterization of Mrs. Turner describes her as a "milky sort of woman" who was proud to boast that, unlike Tea Cake, she "ain't got no flat nose and liver lips"; in her estimation, she was "a featured woman" who, although half black, had "white folks' features in [her] face."<sup>107</sup> "To her way of thinking," Janie narrates, "all these things set her aside from Negroes. That was why she sought out Janie to friend with. Janie's coffee-and-cream complexion and her luxurious hair made Mrs. Turner forgive her for wearing overalls," but "she didn't forgive her for marrying a man as dark as Tea Cake."<sup>108</sup> Mrs. Turner's prejudice meets with xenophobia when she expresses that she "never dreamt so many different kins uh black folks could colleck in one place. Did Ah never woulda come."<sup>109</sup> To Janie, Mrs. Turner becomes all the more insufferable when she proposes that "we oughta lighten up de race.... Ah hates tuh see folks lak me and you mixed up wid 'em. Us oughta class off."<sup>110</sup> After failing to

convince Mrs. Turner that they are all “mingled people and all of [them] got black kinfolks as well as yaller kinfolks,” Janie decides to “treat her cold” to distance herself as much as possible from Mrs. Turner’s toxicity.<sup>111</sup> But, as Hurston demonstrates in one of the novel’s most memorable passages, Janie’s efforts only further expose the severity of the problem:

She felt honored by Janie’s acquaintance and she quickly forgave and forgot snubs in order to keep it. Anyone who looked more white folkish than herself was better than she was in her criteria, therefore it was right that they should be cruel to her at times, just as she was cruel to those more negroid than herself in direct ratio to their negroness. Like the pecking-order in a chicken yard. Insensate cruelty to those you can whip, and groveling submission to those you can’t. Once having set up her idols and built altars to them it was inevitable that she would worship there. It was inevitable that she should accept any inconsistency and cruelty from her deity as all good worshippers do from theirs. All gods who receive homage are cruel. . . . All gods dispense suffering without reason. Otherwise they would not be worshipped. Half gods are worshipped in wine and flowers. Real gods require blood.<sup>112</sup>

Through the racial discourse provided by Mrs. Turner, Hurston is able to catalog all the trappings of internalized racism: supremacy, separatism, xenophobia, biologism, colorism, and eugenics, among other forms of discrimination. But the indirect discourse in the block quotation above allows Hurston to display the hierarchical paradigm that governs Mrs. Turner’s racialism—one, moreover, that establishes her own victimhood to the “insensate cruelty” of this senseless “pecking order.” Finally, what becomes the greatest consequence of Mrs. Turner’s ideology is the very structure she has “built” from its tenets, no matter the “inconsistency and cruelty” that may befall her as a result. Unlike the vodou practitioner in Haiti who builds altar to her *loa*, or spirits, Mrs. Turner builds an altar to the gods of whiteness, which require not blood so much as blood lines. The representation of her belief system here allows Hurston to combine the kind of blood-sacrifice that she witnessed in Haitian rituals, together with the colorist distinctions made by the mixed-race communities that disparaged vodou on the island—the very same distinctions that would lead to the bloody assassination of Sam and the U.S. occupation of Haiti as a result. In doing so, Hurston synthesizes a critique of the occupation precisely by mounting a critique of the same-race prejudice within national borders that gave way to intervention from without.

This kind of synthesis, moreover, enables a third critique against gender inequality that Hurston, as we have seen, formerly leveraged against the more misogynistic Race Men of the African Diaspora: a critique that emerges as Janie becomes the object of sacrifice. When Mrs. Turner was in Janie’s presence, “she had a feeling of transmutation, as if she herself had become whiter,” all the while leveraging this increase in pride to pile an increase of hate on “Tea Cake . . . for his defilement of divinity.”<sup>113</sup> Mrs. Turner couldn’t “forgive [Janie] for marrying a man as dark as Tea Cake,” but in her estimation, “she could remedy that;” in fact, “that was what her brother was born for.”<sup>114</sup> By introducing her brother to Janie and attempting to disrupt her union with Tea Cake, Mrs. Turner sets into motion a chain reaction that radically changes Tea Cake’s characterological makeup as we know it: “Tea Cake had a brain-storm . . . [and] whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being

able to whip her reassured him in possession.”<sup>115</sup> Never did Tea Cake’s characterization foreshadow this change in behavior. By this stage of the novel, the reader—much like Janie—has come to expect from Tea Cake only acts of love, respect, kindness, benevolence, equal regard, and care-free playfulness. So surprising is this turn, in fact, that one wonders whether it, i.e., the *turn* itself, is connected to the name of the character that inspired it: Mrs. Turner. In Tea Cake’s own words: “Ah didn’t whup Janie ‘cause *she* done nothin’. Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss. Ah set in de kitchen one day and heard dat woman tell mah wife Ah’m too black fuh her. She don’t see how Janie can stand me.”<sup>116</sup> Clearly, Tea Cake’s behavior, while detrimental to his aims, is meant to demonstrate his self-worth and command for respect. So shocking is Tea Cake’s violent possessiveness in this passage that it becomes responsible for nearly half of the novel’s critical reception.<sup>117</sup> Being one of the most controversial parts of the book, given Janie’s reaction of silence, this episode has been read as an example of Hurston’s conservatism; a defense of male domination in the face of Janie’s attempt to find increased equality with Tea Cake; an extension of the gendered power dynamics formerly present in Janie’s relationship with Joe Starks; and a validation of stoic female submission to patriarchal constraints. But Tea Cake is anything but threatened by Janie’s equality. In fact, he encourages her to take part in more traditional male rituals, such as hunting and gaming and storytelling, not the least of which is shooting a gun: a transfer of skill that later seals his own sacrificial fate. Given the very problem of race solidarity, as Hurston experienced it, and the way in which she represented the long shadow of internalized racism in the character of Mrs. Turner, we can approach this passage knowing full well that here Janie becomes an indirect target of reverse colorism. Understood properly within the Haitian political context from which she was writing, this passage represents the transmission of colonial violence, i.e., a racialization that amounts to distributions of value based on assumptions of biological inferiority, which is then internalized by the victim of racialization, and redistributed as a self-destructive race hatred and colorism. With Tea Cake’s violent act, the tragic cycle is complete.

But with Hurston’s characterological mediation of this violent cycle, another cycle is introduced by way of narrative emplotment. As seemingly innocuous “hurricane warning[s]” give way to significant changes in the weather that begin to portend greater danger for everyone “in de muck,” the Bahamian “Saws” and “others hurried east like the Indians and rabbits and snakes and coons.”<sup>118</sup> Hurston compiles a whole catalog of “big animals like deer ... a panther ... a thousand buzzocks” to show how not only much wildlife is attempting to escape the ensuing tempest but also how much of it is subject to destruction. It is here, during a sudden calm before the storm, “before the sun gave light,” that Hurston’s language becomes particularly mythical: “the winds left the earth” and “dead day [began] creeping from bush to bush watching man,” while “old [Lake] Okeechobee began to roll in his bed.”<sup>119</sup> “Night was striding across nothingness with the whole wide world in his hands, just as “lightening trampled ... over the roof of the house” and “the lake got madder and madder.”<sup>120</sup> The darkness and nothingness here already suggest a prelapsarian cosmology of chaos, “before the sun,” or *son*, “gave light.” From this vacuum the hurricane unleashes a violent, “screaming wind” in which Janie and Tea Cake “heard things crashing and things hurtling and dashing with unbelievable velocity.”<sup>121</sup> At this point, the novel arrives at its most famous passage, in which everyone “seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God.”<sup>122</sup> This moment has been interpreted in a number of

ways that invoke the tenets of biblical myth, Christian eschatology, and even the vodou syncretism that Hurston studied while writing the novel in Haiti. But given the firm connection that Hurston has already established between the observance of gods and the observance of internalized racism and self-destructive colorism, a more attentive interpretation cannot fail to rethink the “dark” object of vision here with the vision of race itself. On the prior page, in a less-discussed passage in which “they huddled closer and stared at the door,” Hurston makes this association clear: “The time was past for asking the white folks what to look for through that door. Six eyes were questioning *God*.”<sup>123</sup> While, on the one hand, this passage connotes that the universal threat of catastrophe brings all parties beyond the divisions of race, on the other hand, it proposes that “the time” to rely on biologicistic assumptions of white superiority “was past.”

The hurricane, possessing its own allegorical function, presents an opportunity for renewal, i.e., a chance to begin again by undoing the racial and political order that has been mediated by Hurston’s primitivist *Bildung* up to this point. Certainly the beginnings of a new solidarity are introduced here as characters step into the wind, “dodging flying missiles [and] floating dangers,” while having to “fight to keep from being pushed the wrong way and to hold together.”<sup>124</sup> With its symbolic power, aggrandized by the mythic symbolism that framed its advance, the hurricane threatens, quite literally, to raise the sea and bring forth a flood of biblical proportions, accompanied by the high velocity winds and gales known specifically to shake up the Caribbean islands and the South Florida landscape Hurston identified with home. And here, using the mythic capacity for transformation with which Hurston has imbued her landscape, the hurricane generates a total displacement, admixture, and reconfiguration of all living and nonliving things: “They passed a dead man in a sitting position on a hummock, entirely surrounded by wild animals and snakes. Common danger made common friends. Nothing sought a conquest over the other.”<sup>125</sup> Through this cyclical device of unruly transformation, a complete razing and democratic leveling takes place. This representation of destruction and equalization exemplifies Hurston’s philosophy of generative catastrophe, i.e., what, in this passage, seeks to undo her understanding of “slavery [as] the efforts of any man or community to live and advance their interest at the expense of the lives and interest of others.”<sup>126</sup> What this hurricane makes apparent and urgent all at once is the need for a social order that may enable, rather than delimit, an opportunity for mutual freedom and collective striving. As she mentions in her autobiography, “[n]ational disaster touches us all.... The fate of each and every group is bound up with the others. Individual ability in any group must function for all the rest.”<sup>127</sup> Given Hurston’s conflict-oriented view of historical becoming, it becomes clear that her decision to implement this cyclonic device of disorder reflects her desire to engender the opportunity for a new order.

In fact, Hurston’s autobiography introduces an important connection between cyclones and social orders in a manner that is curiously homologous to the form of generative catastrophe in her novel. Immediately after praising the “primitive Negro dancing ... of the Bahamian[s]”—also represented in the novel just before the hurricane arrives—Hurston describes how she survived the “terrible five-day hurricane of 1929” in Nassau.<sup>128</sup> But this memory of the hurricane amounts to a sudden shift in discourse toward the topic of colonialism and slavery. Within close proximity to her description of the hurricane, Hurston recounts the story of an elderly African whose Anglicized name, she clarified, was Cudjo Lewis. Relaying his story, which was

originally delivered orally during one of Hurston's ethnographic interviews, she recounts how Lewis' own Nigerian kingdom had sold him into slavery in 1859 and how white slavers had taken him to New Orleans thereafter. Forming one of the most significant memories of her time conducting fieldwork, Lewis' story impressed upon Hurston "the inescapable fact that [her] people had sold [her] and the white people had bought [her].... Civilized money stirred up African greed."<sup>129</sup> Aside from the founding narrative of Eatonville itself, this is how the subject of empire first enters Hurston's autobiography. Here the rhetorical abruptness, proximity, and speed with which Hurston relates the hurricane to the slave trade establishes an important association in Hurston's thought between the corrupting impact of "Civilization" and the violent hurricane that brought catastrophe to the shores of so-called civilization. In this way, Hurston's thought also displays an important relationship between her own primitivist leanings and the need to rethink indigenous origins not as a telos for nostalgic return but rather as a point of departure for a future that paradoxically lies before and beyond imperial contact.

And ultimately, her novel represents this aim through a different kind of contact between story and narrative discourse. The hurricane, a device that drives Janie's story to its destructive conclusion, forces an equal annihilation of Hurston's primitivist representation, calling upon the function of narrative discourse to continue the hurricane's catastrophic logic of cyclicity through a generative cycle of renewal. This dual movement begins when the hurricane itself introduces the powerful capacity of myth: that which traditionally precedes historical narrative proper yet stands in place for historical origin where no origin is to be found. Note how the hurricane truly begins not when "the wind came back with triple fury" but rather, more specifically, when "the monstropolous beast had left his bed. The two hundred miles an hour wind had loosed his chains."<sup>130</sup> A quick reading here may understand the beast to stand in metaphoric relation to the hurricane, but another look demonstrates that the hurricane is the device, or event, that sets the beast loose. And as we saw before, the "monstropolous" portmanteau that modifies the beast here is the same one that signifies the monster as a "descendant of" narrative temporality. It is all the more curious, then, that the first time it appears in Hurston's novel is in the frame narrative, just before entering the embedded narrative, and the second time it appears is just before leaving the embedded narrative and reentering the frame narrative. In this case, the frame narrative, which first introduced time as monstropolous, introduces a significantly more liberated ending at the beginning, i.e., before the narrative level drops into the metadiegetic story within a story that ultimately reverses linear narrative progression. In parallel relation to the logic of mythic return, the frame narrative simultaneously introduces the end of Janie's story at the beginning of Hurston's narrative. When, at the outset of the novel, Janie relays her story to her closest friend Pheoby Watson, the phrase "in the beginning" invokes a biblical generation of life through the power of the Word—that which constitutes Janie's powerful act of storytelling in the novel—and, by extension, Hurston's. The hurricane's greatest function, then, is to allow Hurston to abandon the embedded narrative and reenter the frame itself, back into the retelling of her story, i.e., back into the power of the word that she shares with her semi-autobiographical narrator and protagonist Janie Crawford.

This is not to do away with Hurston's primitivist *Bildung* or to negate its importance. Rather it is to understand its final stage in the Everglades only as a final stage of the embedded

narrative, thereby making it legible as the penultimate stage of the novel as a whole. After all, Hurston's primitivist stage fails to completely eradicate the final remnants of racial discord and male violence that she encountered with Logan Killicks and Joe Starks. Tea Cake's possession by the dog (itself a masculine symbol) symbolizes his inability to completely shake off patriarchal forms of domination: an inability that, it becomes clear, was foreshadowed by his sudden and surprising display of violence and possessiveness. As we saw earlier, these character traits developed rapidly in response to the last vestige of biological determinism and internalized racism in Hurston's primitivist *Bildung*. Audiences may have found Janie's own slaying of the rabid and dangerous Tea Cake just as shocking as his sudden burst of abuse. But to kill Tea Cake is not only to refuse victimhood and grant herself the greatest, albeit most difficult, liberation possible. More importantly, to kill Tea Cake is also to eradicate the last intimate presence of race hatred in Janie's life—that which was cyclically transmitted from Mrs. Turner to Tea Cake and, in its violent consequence, to Janie herself. The kind of freedom envisioned by Hurston's novel, then, is not only one that demands a non-state space but also one that is liberated from the transmission of colonial violence: precisely what inflicted and infected Tea Cake the most. It is for this reason that the hurricane, which ultimately leads to Tea Cake's death, may be considered just as destructive as it is redemptive; it becomes the vital force with which to enable the representation of a cyclical return, i.e., a stepping out of the historical time that even Hurston's primitivist representation cannot avoid. This return brings Janie back to a beginning that never *was* because it had not been *said*. In that sense, it becomes all the more “untimely” by extending the ability to imagine beginning again by beginning for the first time.

The paradoxical function of this duality, then, entails beginning in earnest, i.e., with the autonomy and self-possession that the black diaspora has never been afforded. Toward the end of *Dust Tracks*, Hurston solemnly states, “No doubt America would have been better off if it never had been.”<sup>131</sup> Written as an independent statement of hemispheric significance, even in the strict context of her autobiography, it functions as a clause that is subordinate to the reality of racial discord in the Americas, which intensified rather than diminished with the advent of *mestizaje*. In Hurston's novel, Janie's new autonomy and capacity for self-determination represents what Hurston desired most for the Caribbean and especially for Haiti's newfound freedom after the U.S. occupation. Like Eatonville, Haiti—what in Hurston's novel is clearly “some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power”—must become the autonomous state it was always meant to *be* but couldn't *become* due to the limiting ideologies of colonial racialization.<sup>132</sup> And given that, in the U.S. too, “the mixed blood negroes of education and property ... were [just] as prejudiced against ... lowly blacks,”<sup>133</sup> Hurston rethinks how to surmount transnationally the strictures of the present—together with their endless reiterations into the future—by surmounting the historical past that created them. It is not surprising, therefore, that Hurston leveraged narrative diachronicity and mythic cyclicity to critique the scientific racialism and evolutionary biologism that she acknowledged in the racial discourses that she encountered across the Caribbean and the U.S. South. Taking this nexus of hemispheric culture as an object of study, reflection, and artistic expression, Hurston's novel demonstrates a mediation of the present impasse that we have been analyzing in other chapters. But unlike the poetics of history that we have seen so far, it leverages cyclicity not only to critique the reproduction of empire but also to affirm the potentiality enabled by negation itself. Much like the end of Hurston's primitivist

*Bildung* and the beginning of Janie's new horizon, the end of the U.S. occupation in Haiti signaled for Hurston the "end of the Revolution," i.e., the end of a long history writ large, and the beginning of a local, autonomous space from which to found a reparative, if untimely, commons in the future. It is through this anti-colonial and anti-racist mediation of conflict that *Their Eyes Were Watching God* emerges as a radically unusual, yet deeply incisive, protest novel *in reverse*, i.e., not by showing how determining structures confine and oppress the race but rather by imagining how they may be dissolved to liberate it.

## References

<sup>1</sup> In her ethnographic work, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), Zora Neale Hurston refers to Haitian voduists, or “servants of the spirits,” as practitioners of “paganism” and denotes their religion using the anglicized spelling “voodoo.” Given its West African origins and syncretic morphologies in the Caribbean, however, this religion is elsewhere signified as vodou, vodun, vodoun, vodu, vudú, and vaudoux. Whenever this term appears in a quotation by Hurston, I use her own spelling, but as for my own usage, I will employ “vodou” to match the present Haitian spelling.

<sup>2</sup> Although this critical recovery and reappraisal began within the field of literary studies in the mid-1980s, the last few years have seen a widening of interest in historical, cultural, and social scientific fields that are now affording interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Hurston’s work. See, for example, Tammie Jenkins, “Writing Vodou into Literature: Exploring Diasporic Religious Symbols and Lore in Zora Neale Hurston’s ‘Sweat’ and Jonah’s Gourd Vine,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 4, no. 2 (June 24, 2016): 215–24; Diana Burnett, “Illuminating the Legacy of Zora Neale Hurston: Visionary, Architect, and Anthropologist of Africana Religious Subjectivities,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 4, no. 2 (June 24, 2016): 253–66; La Vinia Delois Jennings, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston, Haiti, and Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013); Elaine J. Lawless, “What Zora Knew: A Crossroads, a Bargain with the Devil, and a Late Witness,” *Journal of American Folklore* 126, no. 500 (May 12, 2013): 152–73; Patricia Stuelke, “Finding Haiti, Finding History in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” *Modernism/Modernity* 19, no. 4 (2012): 755–74; Kurt Eisen, “Theatrical Ethnography and Modernist Primitivism in Eugene O’Neill and Zora Neale Hurston,” *South Central Review* 25, no. 1 (March 18, 2008): 56–73; Rosemary V. Hathaway, “The Unbearable Weight of Authenticity: Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and a Theory of ‘Touristic Reading,’” *Journal of American Folklore* 117, no. 464 (April 20, 2004): 168–90; Kirby Olson, “Surrealism, Haiti, and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” *Real: The Journal of Liberal Arts* 25, no. 2 (2000): 80–93; Cyrena N. Pondrom, “The Role of Myth in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” *American Literature* 58, no. 2 (1986): 181–202.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 64–65. Hurston’s narrative of the U.S. occupation of Haiti, covered later in this chapter, uses rhetorical devices of temporal compression and reverse causation to achieve not only the formal effect but also the narrative argument of swift and calculated occupation. To be sure, Hurston’s own political views, as we will see later in this chapter, were complex; she criticized the occupation yet also embraced what new potentialities this kind of international conflict could offer Haiti’s own national cause after the U.S. marines withdrew in 1934.

<sup>4</sup> Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 10–11.

<sup>5</sup> Hazel B. Carby, “The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston,” in *Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 131. For more on the negative reception of Hurston’s international politics, especially as it appears in *Tell My Horse*, see Annette Trefzer, “Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Tell My Horse*,” *African American Review* 34, no. 2 (2000): 308; John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 280.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Heady, “Vaudou and the Marine: Jacques-Stéphen Alexis and Zora Neale Hurston on the American Occupation of Haiti,” *Atlantic Studies* 13, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 282–300; Leigh Anne Duck, “‘Rebirth of a Nation’: Hurston in Haiti,” *Journal of American Folklore* 117, no. 464 (April 20, 2004): 127–46; Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, “Insider and Outsider, Black and American: Rethinking Zora Neale Hurston’s Caribbean Ethnography,” *Radical History Review* 87, no. 1 (October 9, 2003): 49–77; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Chuck Jackson, “Waste and Whiteness: Zora Neale Hurston and the Politics of Eugenics,” *African American Review* 34, no. 4 (2000): 639–60.

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<sup>7</sup> As I am applying it to Hurston, here the term “hemispheric parallax” refers to a transnational triangulation of race consciousness, labeled as such—although for different purposes—in Paul Giles, “Hemispheric Parallax: South America and the American South,” in *The Global Remapping of American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 183–222. To be sure, I do not mean to claim that Hurston’s transnational views are themselves contrary to the whole of the Harlem Renaissance; nor do I intend to reference her parallax perspective here as exclusive or exceptional to other forms of transnationalism across the varied cultural production of the black diaspora during the interwar years, which has been well documented, for example, in Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (New York: Verso, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Alice Walker, “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston,” *Ms. Magazine* 74 (1975); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Zora Neale Hurston: ‘A Negro Way of Saying,’” in *Tell My Horse*, by Zora Neale Hurston (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 290.

<sup>9</sup> Walker, “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston.”

<sup>10</sup> James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948–1985* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 31.

<sup>11</sup> Albert Murray, *The Omni-Americans: New Perspectives on Black Experience and American Culture* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970); Gates, Jr., “Zora Neale Hurston: ‘A Negro Way of Saying,’” 293.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Wright, “Review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston [1937],” in *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (New York: Amistad, 1993), 16–17.

<sup>13</sup> Alain Locke, “Jingo, Counter-Jingo, and Us,” *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* 16, no. 1 (January 1938): 10.

<sup>14</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 189–90.

<sup>15</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” *The World Tomorrow* 11, no. May (1928): 215.

<sup>16</sup> Gates, Jr., “Zora Neale Hurston: ‘A Negro Way of Saying,’” 290; Keiko Dilbeck, “Symbolic Representation of Identity in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” *Explicator* 66 (December 1, 2008): 102–4; Peter Messent, “A Medley of Voices: Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” in *New Readings of the American Novel* (London: Palgrave, 1990), 243–87; Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892–1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Cheryl A. Wall, “Zora Neale Hurston: Changing Her Own Words,” in *Zora Neale Hurston*, by Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 101–28; Pearlle Mae Fisher Peters, *The Assertive Woman in Zora Neale Hurston’s Fiction, Folklore, and Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2015); S. Jay Walker, “Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: Black Novel of Sexism,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 20, no. 4 (1974): 519–27; Madhu Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Miriam DeCosta Willis, “Folklore and the Creative Artist: Lydia Cabrera and Zora Neale Hurston,” *CLA Journal* 27, no. 1 (1983): 81–90.

<sup>17</sup> Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” 216.

<sup>18</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 178–79.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 184–85.

<sup>23</sup> Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” 216.

<sup>24</sup> In *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Library of America, 2009), 6, W.E.B. Du Bois writes: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” Although it is not the subject of this chapter, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* may be said to enact, through Janie Crawford’s free indirect discourse, a double consciousness that at once rejects the gender ideology encoded in Du Bois’ text, i.e., his linguistic ascription of this “two-ness” to men and not necessarily to women. See Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Brittney C. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” 215.

<sup>26</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 46.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>30</sup> Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” 215.

<sup>31</sup> For Hurston’s own account and interpretation of the settling of Eatonville and its relation to neighboring settlements such as Maitland, see Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 2–6. Although Hurston’s narrative does justice to the autonomous efforts of her black community, it is unclear whether the state capital granted the charter for Eatonville to advance the aims of white separatism, rather than enable the advancement of former slaves. Both, of course, are not mutually exclusive, but Hurston’s account highlights the latter while leaving the possibility of the former unaddressed.

<sup>32</sup> Pondrom, “The Role of Myth in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” 184. Boas was the first anthropologist to ever take a stand against the then-dominant view of scientific racism, which leveraged the pseudo-science of eugenics to enact anti-immigration and pro-segregation laws. In 1908, the United States Immigration Commission was set up to determine whether any of the sixteen million immigrants being processed at the turn of the century were biologically inferior and therefore should not be allowed to enter the country. Boas took a job as a medical examiner on Ellis Island, collecting metrics based precisely on the prevailing standards of craniology, biological evolutionism, and social Darwinism not to endorse them but, on the contrary, to show how their use actually disproved Western ideologies of biological difference based on racial categories. Using the tools of scientific racism to mount his own immanent critique against it, Boas published findings that became crucial to current debates concerning whether racial characteristics determined the limits of one’s human potential. See Ned Blackhawk and Isaiah Lorado Wilner, eds., *Indigenous Visions: Rediscovering the World of Franz Boas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). In *Rethinking Race: Franz Boas and His Contemporaries* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), Williams offers an important qualification to the more heroic portrayal of Boas, which positions him as “a man who never fully escaped the racist assumptions of 19th-century anthropology but nevertheless successfully argued that African Americans could assimilate into American society and that the chief obstacle facing them was not heredity but the prejudice of white America.” In tandem with this difficulty in Boas’ work, much has been written about the complexity of his assumptions from within the standpoint of his own

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Jewish ethnicity. Nevertheless, it becomes clear in Hurston's own writings that his attack on scientific racism deeply influenced her own racial discourse in the years following their working relationship.

<sup>33</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 140.

<sup>34</sup> See Lisa Lindquist Dorr, "Arm in Arm: Gender, Eugenics, and Virginia's Racial Integrity Acts of the 1920s," *Journal of Women's History* 11, no. 1 (1999): 143–66.

<sup>35</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 171.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>37</sup> See Carby, *Race Men*.

<sup>38</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> A term devised by Hurston herself, this was the name given to the "Harlem Renaissance's inner bohemian circle" of which Hurston was a part when she "defied the black bourgeoisie [for] imitating the white man's acquisitive ethos and Eurocentric culture." Roy Kotynek and John Cohassey, *American Cultural Rebels: Avant-Garde and Bohemian Artists, Writers, and Musicians from the 1850s through the 1960s* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008), 128.

<sup>45</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings: Mules and Men, Tell My Horse, Dust Tracks on a Road, Selected Articles*, ed. Cheryl Wall (New York: Library of America, 1995), 909.

<sup>46</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 14.

<sup>47</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 65.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 69, 72.

<sup>50</sup> Here my point is not so much to endorse or repudiate Hurston's treatment of the U.S. occupation, so much as to understand it through her encounter with Caribbean racial dynamics. For two contrasting viewpoints that further elaborate Hurston's treatment of the occupation in greater detail, see Heady, "Vaudou and the Marine"; Duck, "Rebirth of a Nation."

<sup>51</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 72.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 76–77.

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<sup>54</sup> Hurston, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 908.

<sup>55</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 259.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 262–63. Emphasis original.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 72.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 264–65.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>65</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 87.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 74, 91.

<sup>69</sup> Although she does not reference Antonio Gramsci by name, Hurston's "group of intelligent young Haitians" represent for Haiti precisely what Gramsci described as the "organic intellectual": one who instills in a given social group an "awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields," i.e., one who is to "disarticulate the ruling discursive structures that guarantee the reproduction of relations" and "rearticulate these structures in the perspective of social transformation" for national liberation. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 5. Utz Maas, "Gramsci the Linguist," in *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*, ed. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), 92. To be sure, Gramsci and Hurston were writing about vastly different geographies with distinct historical, political, and socioeconomic issues; however, considering that Gramsci was deeply cognizant of the "passive revolution" carried forth by the Italian colonization of North Africa, not to mention the social tensions between North and South Italy, there is room for considerable intersection between his work and Hurston's, which denounced what, in Haiti, could be called its own passive revolution.

<sup>70</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 92.

<sup>71</sup> See Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 39–40.

<sup>72</sup> Specifically see Pondrom, "The Role of Myth in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*"; Olson, "Surrealism, Haiti, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*"; Stuelke, "Finding Haiti, Finding History in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*"; Trefzer, "Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*." However, these are only a select few, especially in comparative relation to the larger interest in Hurston's "mythic realism" and "black modernism" since her revival in the late 1970s. See Philip

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Goldstein, "Critical Realism or Black Modernism?: The Reception of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Reader; Houghton, Mich.* 41 (Spring 1999): 54–73.

<sup>73</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 14.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>78</sup> "Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget." Ibid., 1; "They bowed down to him rather, because he was all of these things, and then again he was all of these things because the town bowed down" Ibid., 50. In "Zora Neale Hurston and the Speakerly Text," in *Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*, ed. Cheryl A. Wall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61–62, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes how Hurston's first chiasmus is "similar in structure to Frederick Douglass's famous chiasmus, 'You have seen how a man became a slave, you will see how a slave became a man.' Indeed, Douglass's ... major contribution to the slave's narrative was to make chiasmus the central trope of slave narration, in which a slave-object writes himself or herself into a human-subject." Gates, however, is noting that this similarity represents "one mode of tacit commentary about the shape and status of received tradition," whereas my aim is to show that the logic of reverse parallelism that governs the chiasmus also governs Hurston's narrative discourse on a macro-structural scale. In this sense, one could even say that for Hurston, the sentence-level chiasmus holds a metonymic relation to a much larger chiasmus that, in my point of view, *is* the embedded narrative itself. And as I will show later, this logic of reversal in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is entirely coextensive with Douglass's aim to represent the transformation from object to subject.

<sup>79</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 247. Emphasis original.

<sup>80</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 11.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>86</sup> See Thomas Mitchell, "From Reconstruction to Deconstruction: Undermining Black Landownership, Political Independence, and Community through Partition Sales of Tenancies in Common," *Northwestern University Law Review*, January 1, 2001, 505–80.

<sup>87</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 28.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>97</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 75.

<sup>98</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 114.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 139. Hurston's representation of dancing here signals yet another way in which she mediated her experience in the Caribbean, thereby triangulating race, politics, and culture: she found herself "entranced [by] this music of the Bahamian Negroes, [which] was more original, dynamic and African than American negro songs." Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 157. After returning to New York in 1932, Hurston "introduced Bahamian songs and dances to a New York audience.... [She] aimed to show what beauty and appeal there was in genuine Negro material, as against the Broadway concept"; in doing so, she "aroused tremendous interest in primitive Negro dancing" among audiences in the North. Ibid., 159. Note how Hurston not only continued to fashion her own primitivism well into the 1930s but also attempted to leverage aesthetic practices that she considered primitive, i.e., "more original, dynamic" Caribbean "Negro dancing," to imbue and enrich the Northern landscape with a "genuine" past that was present only in the peripheral South. Hurston's playwriting and choreography, therefore, tend toward the very same artistic inclinations that I am noting here as a primitivist *Bildung*.

<sup>102</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 154.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>105</sup> Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," 215.

<sup>106</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 156.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 139, 142.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 140–41.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 141, 144.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>117</sup> See Cynthia Davis and Verner D. Mitchell, *Zora Neale Hurston: An Annotated Bibliography of Works and Criticism* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 2013).

<sup>118</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 155–56.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 155, 158.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 158–59.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 159. Emphasis original.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>126</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 230.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>130</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 160–61.

<sup>131</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 254.

<sup>132</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 14.

<sup>133</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 159.

## **Coda: Toward a Hemispheric American Modernism**

Together, the preceding chapters offer a triangulation of transnational cultural production that gives legibility to a form of global modernism unlike the European and Anglo-American modernisms with which Carpentier, Rechy, and Hurston were acquainted, e.g., those of Eliot, Pound, Woolf, and the like. Of course, many American modernists, such as Langston Hughes, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, and William Faulkner, among others, established their own field of influence within the modernist canon. In fact, these authors held a closer relationship to what I am here heuristically calling a hemispheric American modernism because they found themselves to be relatively marginalized for reasons relating to race, ethnicity, class, or geography, despite writing to and for the high modernist call to “make it new.” Whereas these authors responded to the formal experimentation of high modernism with equal measure, they did so not from the same cultural vantage point of New England-educated expatriates, but rather from positions modulated by their racially, ethnically, and geographically-inflected minoritarian identities: African American, Puerto Rican, Jewish, and Southern lowly-educated white. They often addressed not only the troubled history of “America” but also the complexities and difficulties of accessing this history cohesively from a position of fragmentation and loss, i.e., from the inheritance of empire and slavery; exploitative capitalism and class distinction, failed Reconstruction and low mobility; and the racialization and proletarianization of immigrant and diasporic communities.

Moving further south and beyond the national imaginary, what could be considered a hemispheric American modernism was born of similar preoccupations. In this case, we often encounter a form of internationalism that also accords with the continental gaze of the high modernists. But a major divergence is introduced by the African American, African diasporic, Asian diasporic, Latinx, Chicanx, Caribbean, and Latin American voices that reconfigured late modernism not only in relation to a different continent—the Americas—but also from a pre- and early postcolonial perspective that aligns modernity not with the First World War, industrialization, secularization, or even alienation, but rather with the historical reproduction of empire, together with forms of colonial governance that are perpetually revived by inter-imperial cross-currents. Here modernist themes and literary devices take many forms. But most prominent, as I have shown here, is a preoccupation with the course of history and the legacy of a colonial enlightenment that places a singular burden on the epistemology of a narrative poetics of history. As I mentioned earlier, this form of modernist cultural production can be, if only heuristically, termed a hemispheric American modernism. After all, the authors that I examine here—aside from a number of other authors to which the scope of this project could extend, such as William Faulkner, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Aimé Césaire, among others—all share a common geographical expanse, a common transnational experience, a common poetics of narrative emplotment, a common form of representation that does not always adhere to traditional modes of realism, and of course a common degree of contact with the history of empire in the peripheral zones of the hemispheric American South: precisely what Glissant termed “the Other America.”

This cultural understanding of a transnational inter-American periphery has been reformulated in the last decade under the subfield of Hemispheric American Studies: a critical framework and methodological apparatus devised by literary historians and critics seeking to fashion an approach with which to compare disparate geographies of the U.S. South, the Caribbean, and Latin America by elucidating the value of the cross-regional and transnational culture and history that interconnects them. But this "hemispheric" idiom, as useful as it has been—and continues to be—is commonly thought to emerge as a response to literary production, not in and from literary form. For example, a work of fiction that falls under the critical purview of this field is not considered a "hemispheric novel" but rather a novel that may be profitably investigated using the critical lens afforded by Hemispheric American Studies. The authors that I examine here, however, together with other authors that I intend to consider thoroughly for the book project that will follow this dissertation, forged their own Hemispheric American approach to history and culture. In fact, this phenomenon, as we saw in the introduction and across each following chapter, amounts precisely to what Glissant termed "the novel of the Other America." And yet, few attempts have been made to take Glissant's incisive vision and develop a broader and more comprehensive understanding of it. As we have seen, many of these works construct their own hemispheric imaginaries—even when attempting to dissolve a national imaginary. They do so, moreover, not simply because they were written transnationally in the hemispheric South but also because they speak to a historical condition that impacts a common hemispheric geography founded in and through a colonial modernity that has, in distinct yet analogous ways, *returned*. As such, these works evince a special relationship not to the history of the current critical field but rather to the history that the field queries: a history that locates the core of modernity at its peripheries.

And they do so, as we have seen, by mediating literary form and historical representation to disclose the problematic that renders their commonalities visible. In this figuration, two aspects of literary production that have traditionally called for diametrically opposed approaches to reading, i.e., reading for *form* and reading for *history*, find themselves in a symbiotic relationship with one another, thereby affording a symbiotic critical approach that merges the advantages of both formalism and historicism to generate a different approach to the age-old conflict between aesthetics and politics in the broader field of literary studies. This capacity to read for form and history in a specific way, underwritten by what we can understand as a hemispheric American modernism, has been demonstrated here by bringing these works into comparative relief. As we saw earlier, Carpentier rejected the interiority of "the psychological novel" to render historical events legible on a larger scale. Rechy, on the other hand, privileged interiority but only in so far as it could enrich, through the dialectical exchange of his own hermeneutic inquiry, the representation of exteriority that Carpentier endorsed. A negotiation of the two, in fact, illuminates for Rechy not only the relationship between the individual and the collective, but also the intersectionality of multiple, often conflicting, intersectional identities. Hurston, like Rechy, found the need to shift between the two modes of this historical imagination and affective phenomenology of time experience. But she did so using a radically different form of free indirect discourse that recasts a rich African American heteroglossia, which we find lacking in Rechy's and Carpentier's work. This emphasis on characterological focalization and representation is rendered inseparable from the duality of narrative discourse that we have

experienced here as well, namely between a cyclical and a linear narrative time, which is mediated by a history that is intimate to the context and the emplotment, or poetic construction, of these works. This kind of duality is meant to generate a tension between the lived experience of imperial recurrence and its temporal other, i.e., its untimely, and deeply necessary alternative: what becomes, implicitly and by way of negation, a genuine vision of “progress” that had yet to be realized and given expression.

This duality speaks to a bifurcated existence, to a variegated double consciousness constructed by ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, class or other markers of identity. But it is “the shaping force of landscape,” as Glissant notes, that brings this existential duality together with the *muthos* of emplotment and the mimesis of representation in the works we have discussed here. It is a riven geographical experience that puts Carpentier between Europe and Latin America while negotiating the advent of U.S. empire as it recycles Spanish and French colonial orders in Cuba and Haiti. It is a peripheral existence that puts Rechy between the United States and Mexico amid a violent militarization of the borderlands while reprising the legacy of troubled migrations from the Spanish conquest to the Mexican Revolution to the Cristero War. It is a U.S. nation divided by internalized racism that puts Hurston not only between the North and South but also between the peripheral U.S. and the Caribbean to rethink the racial dynamics of a French and British imperial past. These geographical—and geopolitical—interpenetrations, together with many others that may expand my heuristic here, amount to a literary crystallization of temporal experience by way of spatial mediation. And in doing so, they disclose the call from a future that the present cannot recognize because it is beholden to a past that is inextricable from the antinomies of autonomy and dependence, emancipation and bondage, progress and regress: those which mark “the present impasse” in the hemispheric American South. Perhaps what becomes all the more important, then, is not the kind of closure that these works imagined by envisioning an untimely rupture from their present, but rather the way in which this closure, to our present, offers a proliferation of openings with which to rethink the future, i.e., with which to ask how to begin anew without allowing a new beginning to constitute another end; how to disclose and render intelligible not only a textual poetics of history—as we have done here—but also how to disclose the fissures and openings through which to enact a contextual poetics of the present.

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