SYMBOLIC CITIES IN CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

CHRISTOPHER WINKS

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Christopher Winks

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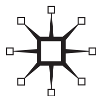

SYMBOLIC CITIES IN CARIBBEAN LITERATURE
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For my mother, Patricia Winks

and for Kamau Brathwaite, poet and teacher

La mar inmóvil y el aire sin sus aves,
dulce horror el nacimiento de la ciudad
apenas recordada.

José Lezama Lima, “Noche insular, jardines invisibles”

i would take you into the home of the brick
the flat foot of the mortar
the spinning industrial space of the spider
the houmforts of favela vision

i would ask you to walk the four corners
of your understanding
rum cocksblood spirit liberation

Kamau Brathwaite, “Conqueror”

Eia pour la joie
Eia pour l’amour
Eia pour la douleur aux pis de larmes reincarnées
et voici au bout de ce petit matin ma prière virile
que je n’entende ni les rires ni les cris, les yeux fixés
sur cette ville que je prophétise, belle . . .

Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*

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To have partaken of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's exemplary intellectual presence is a privilege I have shared with many, but to have received his support for my work is a precious gift, which I hope in some small part to have reciprocated here.

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For any errors, omissions, and unintended opacities in what follows, I assume all responsibility.

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Preface

The following study is a work of thematic criticism, grounded in comparatist readings of Caribbean literature, that plays changes on (creatively explores and reworks) the notion of the city as simultaneously an instituted (social) space and an imaginary (invisible, magic) community, and its utopian dimension as a space of hope against heritages of oppression and anomie.

If at times, the usage of the word "city" here may appear excessively broad in its application, it should also be recalled that even that most systematic of twentieth-century Western sociologists, Max Weber, found it difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at a universally applicable definition of a city. Whatever typologies of urban life he attempted to formulate—trade city, merchant city, consumer city, patrician city, plebeian city—always required nuancing in view of this or that exception or anomaly. (In the end, one could just as usefully apply to the problem Italo Calvino's taxonomies in his 1972 text *Invisible Cities*—thin cities, trading cities, cities of memory and of desire . . .) Nor, for that matter—and in this respect he was like almost all European thinkers of his day—did Weber devote any space in his work to sub-Saharan city states, which, as this study attempts to show, played a significant part in the attempts by enslaved Africans in the New World to combat the horrors of the Plantation and its institutional sequels with communal practices of resistance and sociability. For the purposes of this discussion, then, and without pretending to supply more than a working definition of a social creation whose lineaments vary significantly over time and space, I consider that, in its ideal form, a city is an instituted or founded space where various peoples, cultures, traditions, and ways of knowing converge, encounter, coexist, and ultimately transform each other in the arduous realization of a *polis* or self-governing, self-naming (autonomous) community.

To be sure, the social reality of cities often falls considerably short of this ideal. And this is particularly the case in the Caribbean, subjected as it has been to centuries of despoliation, most grievously by the founders and perpetrators of the colonial enterprise of conquest and enslavement crystallized in the institution of the Plantation. The apocalyptic, Rastafarian-inspired image of the

Caribbean city as a foredoomed Babylon, descendant of the Plantation, and equally a locus of worldly corruption, evil, and rapacity, is perhaps the most powerful—and certainly the most widely disseminated—indictment of contemporary urban life in the region.

At the same time, however, it needs to be stressed that as part of the resistance to Plantation domination, the men and women of African descent conscripted into its soul-destroying mechanisms managed to devise and develop a range of invisible, even magic cities through which some form of individual and collective cohesion could be maintained against all odds. A striking example of this may be found in the historic (some say legendary, as there is no "hard" or written evidence to confirm its having occurred) August 14, 1791, meeting at Bois Caïman, Saint Domingue, of insurgent delegates from various plantations, who resolved upon the final arrangements for the insurrection that would mark the opening of the first and only successful slave revolution in the Americas. Technically an act of *petit marronage*, albeit one that ultimately resulted in the creation of a *maroon republic*, this assembly was the materialization of both a previously "invisible" city (the conspiracy that extended throughout the entire North Plain) and a "magic city" whose inhabitants were joined together by the Vodou rites celebrated on that tempestuous night. And as C. L. R. James points out in *The Black Jacobins*, "working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plain, they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time . . ."[1] In short, the kinds of "cities" created by insurgent ex-slaves out of various practices of (mental as well as physical) marronage were adumbrations, indeed harbingers, of new and (as James would argue) historically advanced forms of social organization.

There is thus a sense in which the Caribbean region has been the locus of a constant striving for a concrete utopia. Indeed, it could be said that Renaissance Europe, immediately upon its "discovery" of the Caribbean and the Americas, placed both regions under the sign of utopia. Both Thomas More's eponymous island and Francis Bacon's New Atlantis were situated in the New World, albeit in antipodal locations: More's somewhere in the Atlantic and Bacon's in the Pacific. Indeed, Christopher Columbus himself claimed to have encountered, during his third voyage, the Earthly Paradise on the South American coast of the Caribbean Sea. Though the "nonspace" of Utopia, at least in More's hands, was deployed as a way of criticizing the uses and customs of his own society, placed in negative relief against an ideal island commonwealth that nonetheless had its share of oppressive institutions and practices (including forced labor), it is also worth recalling the Greek pun More himself made, in the voice of Utopia's poet laureate, on "utopia" (no-place) and "eutopia" (good-place). The

Caribbean myth of El Dorado, an ultimately invisible city of gold that nonetheless has had the power over centuries to galvanize numerous unsuccessful quests for its site, points to the way in which utopia can, under the pressure of shared belief (however delusory in this case), metamorphose into a vision of eutopia. That in the end El Dorado was never encountered is a function of the way its conquistadorial would-be discoverers perceived it—as a static settlement somewhere "out there," passively awaiting the fulfillment of its destiny by the Europeans. However, this dream of an ordered ideal city, located in an indeterminate place somewhere in the rainforests of South America, would over time become translated into the Ibero-American city-seats of empire, which, as Angel Rama has observed in *The Lettered City* (1984), were imagined first, then designed on paper, and finally imposed on the conquered terrain.

At the same time, this classically "utopian" project, linked as it was to empire-building, revealed in short order its fundamentally *dystopic* qualities, notably in the depredations of the Plantation system, which at its paroxysmic heights engendered a horrific, parodic fusion of the pastoral and the proto-industrial. It was then left to those mobilized into this enterprise as forced labor-power—the enslaved Africans—to preserve and where possible enlarge, by dint of arduous and often terrible struggle, a counter-space in which a different kind of utopia could be forged. Modern theorists of utopia like Ernst Bloch, instead of stressing utopia as total social blueprint, grant more importance to the ways in which a specifically anticipatory consciousness can help subvert and transform existing conditions. In this perspective, a seemingly impossible future can become re-envisioned as a Not-Yet-Present, at once imminent and immanent, a product of the collective imagination with ramifications in the present moment.

Memories of a lost or legendary past can play a powerful role in the elaboration of these utopian aspirations. And where the enslaved Africans were concerned, these memories, having weathered the myriad ordeals of the Middle Passage, emerged as sustaining hopes and foundations for new intercultural ways of knowledge and anticipatory imaginings. Many of those who made the transatlantic crossing came from West and Central African city states that enjoyed a high level of cultural development and civic consciousness. Certain such cities (for example, Ilé-Ifé in Yorubaland, Allada in Dahomey/Benin, and Mbanza Kongo in the Kongo) were looked upon by their citizens as holy places where the world began and the ideals of good government and just living were established. Arguably, the bringing together via the slave trade of men and women from different, often contending African societies had the unintended (by the masters) effect of intensifying the spiritual power and connections of hitherto separate belief systems. In the diasporic Caribbean context, this confluence would

create a different kind of utopia, based on a recontextualization of memories within new communities of resistance.

The West African tale of Gassire's Lute, which tells of the alternately manifest and vanishing city of Wagadu, is used here as a trope for the Not-Yet-Present self-determined order toward which the Afro-Caribbeans aspired and strove, and which was crystallized in the maroon societies that sprang up throughout the region. To the extent that these insurgent communities had to be created literally from the ground up, in conditions of extreme peril and hardship, but governed by a desire for a free life, they represent an endeavor less to restore a remembered past than to create something new—a concrete utopia with *eutopian* intent—indeed, an El Dorado of sorts, but one that had to be built, not merely discovered, away from and against the overwhelming might of the Plantation. A similar inventive and unifying spirit animates the many illustrious Caribbean proponents of a wider Pan-African polity—from Edward Blyden to Marcus Garvey and C. L. R. James and Bob Marley.

The primary aim of this study, then, is to bring out some of the utopian dimensions of Caribbean thought as articulated through its literatures, mediated specifically through the image of the city—magic, invisible, and/or actually existing. My choice of a theme-and-variations method aims to fulfill what I consider comparative literary criticism's truest purpose: to tell stories about stories, to write poetically about poetry. I seek to craft a narrative that both testifies to my commitment to and care for this material and highlights the profundity of the theorizing that has been undertaken in the Caribbean for generations, not only by writers, artists, and intellectuals, but by the (un) common people of the region in their musicking, festive performances, oral traditions, and traditional belief systems and philosophies. That so many significant theorists of Caribbean histories and conditions have also been makers of literature—Kamau Brathwaite, Édouard Glissant, Jacques Roumain, Wilson Harris, C. L. R. James, José Lezama Lima, Sylvia Wynter, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, to name only a few—has not, I feel, been accorded sufficient critical justice so far. In this regard, to separate "creative" work from "theoretical" ventures perpetuates the kind of fragmentation that, as Brathwaite for one has made amply clear, the region needs to overcome. I have, therefore, endeavored to ground this study in the visionary insights of Caribbean writers and, more importantly perhaps, to make cross-lingual as well as cross-cultural juxtapositions, as a small contribution to the ongoing project of assembling the fragments, or rather, in Brathwaite's words, making them whole.

As part of this approach, I have chosen to present quotations from French and Spanish in English translations, many of them my own. Translation—a practice that has received increasing theoretical attention in recent years—remains, for

all its undeniable ambiguities and pitfalls, which so many have pointed out (often without, it might be added, ever trying it themselves), a necessary art and aid in furthering broader intercultural communication and knowledge.

This study takes its modest place in a burgeoning genre of Caribbean studies that seeks to view the region as an Atlantidean whole, hurled into history through the creation of the Plantation system and radically reshaping that history through movements of resistance, emancipation, and cultural transformation. Allowing for significant differences emerging from topography, modalities of colonial and slavocrat exploitation, forms of interculturation (linguistic and otherwise), etc., the Caribbean should still be seen as one and indivisible (which, obviously, should not be equated with monolithic and univocal).

However, it appears to be the fate of all studies with a goal of achieving or attesting to a Caribbean synthesis to end up focusing on literature in one particular language or from one particular nation, and this one is no exception insofar as it devotes a great deal of attention to Cuban literature. My reason for this emphasis is threefold: first, the immense scope and quality of Cuban literature have tended to pass unnoticed in the English-speaking world, beyond a few illustrious voices; second, considerations rooted in the geopolitics of the past fifty years have tended to reinforce (on both sides of the exilic divide) a kind of Cuban nationalist narrative that valorizes exceptionalism, even isolationism, and often avoids placing its cultural heritage in relation to other Caribbean societies.

The final reason is personal: I have family ties to the island through my maternal grandmother, and because I was not brought up with an awareness of that part of my own history, I have tried to partially re-establish that connection by studying and translating Cuban literature. Along the way, I discovered that my great-grandfather, Gustavo Enrique Mustelier, a career diplomat, wrote and published (in 1912, the year of the *guerrita* that ended in the massacre of thousands of black Cubans in Oriente province) a small pamphlet called *La extinción del negro: Apuntes politico-sociales*, a Social Darwinist tract advocating the progressive outbreeding (as one could call it) of the allegedly brutish and primitive Afro-Cuban by infusions of the "superior" blood of the white race, to the presumed ultimate benefit of Cuban society. As the great Cuban historian Manuel Moreno Fraginals (who, it turned out, had read the pamphlet) told me after a public lecture at the New York Historical Society in the mid-1990s, such racialist ideas were commonplace not only in Cuba (their most notable nineteenth-century exponent having been the anti-annexationist and historian of slavery José Antonio Saco) but in all of Latin America (to say nothing of the United States) at the turn of the twentieth century, reflected in the popularity of sociologists such as José Ingenieros and Herbert Spencer.

For a direct descendant of a Caribbean ideologue of racism to write a study grounded in large part on the depth and power of precisely those African-descended cultures his forebear had contemptuously dismissed a century before, involves much more than mere historical irony. This work, modest as it may be, is a result of—and owes everything to—the sustained efforts by generations of (un)common people and intellectuals in the Caribbean (and elsewhere) to narrate, analyze, and above all make a history their rulers, past and present, colonial and postcolonial, have sought to conceal or distort. These ongoing struggles have opened minds, inspired active solidarities, and swept away inherited prejudices, mine definitely included. And yet, as Aimé Césaire reminds us: "There still remains one sea to cross / oh still one sea to cross / that I may invent my lungs."[2] May what follows assist in that crossing and contribute a breath of air toward that invention.

CHAPTER 1

Thalassal Histories

Shortly before the triumph of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, and after ten years of exile in Europe and North America, the writer Calvert Casey returned to the island, seeking the primal "scene of discovery, where everything is given and nothing is in need of explanation."[1] The seeming ingenuousness of this yearning, at first glance uncomfortably reminiscent of the destructive innocence of Christopher Columbus, that first discoverer of the Caribbean for Europe, masks a deeper irony of which Casey was fully aware. For the seeker after discoveries finds the object of his quest not in an unfamiliar, forever-external world, but in the depths of his own self as a constituent (and constitutive) part of that world. Failure to come consciously to grips with such recognition condemns the explorer to "cement predatory blockages, predatory coherence."[2] Indeed, the more than five centuries of history subsequent to the Caribbean region's precipitation into a nascent world system have borne destructive witness to the origins and extent of such imposed and internalized blockages and false coherence.

Among Casey's intense, sparse body of work is a brief vignette entitled "In San Isidro,"[3] which appears in English translation in the 1998 U. S. edition of his *Collected Stories*, although (contrary to the U.S. editor's assertion) it is nowhere to be found either in the two Spanish-language collections of fiction published in Casey's lifetime, *El regreso* and *Notas de un simulador*, or in his collection of essays *Memorias de una isla*. In fact, it originally appeared in the valedictory January–March 1959 issue of the literary journal *Ciclón*, an important vehicle of cultural dissidence and experimental writing during the years of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship. Although, in his 1962 correspondence with the poet Fernando Palenzuela, Casey declared that the piece "has the most vitality of anything I've done," and hoped to see it reprinted in a second edition of his stories "as part of [my] right . . . to madness,"[4] it appears to have been submerged for almost forty years.

A three-part meditation that Casey described as "neither a poem nor a story, but a kind of desperate oratorio,"[5] "In San Isidro" unfolds in the charged hours before dawn (reminiscent of the "*au bout du petit matin*" that inaugurates Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*). It enacts the encounter, moving from revulsion to abjection to transcendence, of a solitary *flâneur*/narrator with the phantasmagoria of Caribbean history—the cumulative *social uncanny* that Alejo Carpentier explores in his novella *El acoso*—welling up from the depths of a shabby bayside neighborhood in Old Havana. (San Isidro, aside from having been a notorious red-light district until the Revolution, is also, perhaps not coincidentally given the story's preoccupation with history, where the Cuban National Archives are located.)

The opening sentences, "*Nobody comes to this part of Havana. It stinks too much of stale commercial coitus*" (13), announce the intertwined themes of willed repression and sexualized commerce. Both originate in a historical experience that, precisely because it is avoided, denied, and/or forgotten, manifests itself as phantasmal—in this case, as an all-encompassing olfactory palimpsest, each of whose component odors wafts nauseating evidence of a sequence of oppressions: the sweat first of African slaves and then Chinese indentured laborers in the holds of the ships that once docked there, the perfumes of pimps and whores, rotting food. In a statement that seems to anticipate V. S. Naipaul's notorious dismissal of the British West Indies ("How can the history of this West Indian futility be written? . . . The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation, and nothing was created in the West Indies"[6]), the narrator observes: "*What pours out over the street are the fumes of three centuries of futility . . . It smells of the blood of many layers of humanity, of millions of arms drained of life, of festering slime, of incurable tumors. . . . If this is the New World, the rest of the globe must be immensely old*" (13–14). Already, Casey is showing that if "discovery" is to be interpreted as something in which "everything is given," its prerequisite must be an *uncovering* and subsequent *recovery*, by way of comprehension, of the historical repressed. By boiling down into a single overpowering odor the immensity of the oppressions that have devastated the Caribbean, Casey alludes indirectly to a similar process of "refinement" undergone by virtually the entire region—the quasi-alchemical, proto-industrial transmutation of blood, misery, and exhaustion into the sweetly addictive, intoxicatingly toxic substance of sugar: "*It's really nothing but a marvelous smell of blood, orgasm, dirt, and human sweat, but so concentrated and distilled that our sense of smell no longer recognizes it, and it produces madness*" (14).

Contrary to Naipaul, however, who erects historical futility into an almost ontological category with which to judge the people and cultures of the Caribbean

in the name of a historical creation that is always elsewhere, in the imperial metropole, Casey explicitly links this Central Havana neighborhood to the self-proclaimed Eternal City, Rome. The overpowering smell assaulting the San Isidro *flâneur* originates in the gladiatorial games staged in the various circuses during Rome's imperial heyday. Like an aromatic projectile, the stench of decayed and vanished empire hurtles through historical epochs, across land and sea, and into the marginalized Havana neighborhood. Yet by manifesting itself as "*the breath of some carrion eater at the end of his feast*," its temporary triumph perhaps foreshadows its ultimate disappearance and thus the close of its banquet of humanity.

By placing Rome and Havana into what Édouard Glissant has termed Relation,[7] Casey achieves a jarring rhetorical effect comparable to Kamau Brathwaite's couplet "Rome burns / and our slavery begins"[8] and in the process parodies the Spenglerianism affected by an earlier generation of Cuban writers (among them Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillén), who viewed the "Twilight of the West" as a historically necessary prelude to a rising of peripheral regions such as the Caribbean. Here, both imperial center and (neo-)colonial capital exist in similar atmospheres of historical decay. The gladiators in the Roman circus were as much slaves as the generations of successively enslaved, indentured, and proletarianized workers who built empire-sustaining sacarocracies.

But Casey's introduction of Rome into the texture of his Caribbean tale also carries personal associations. During a period of Roman exile in the mid-1950s, he had a revelation that would eventually set him on the road back to Havana. In that heat-induced hallucination, the sight of a noisy crowd making its way through a Roman street dissolved into an apparitional memory of Havana. "On the arcades I had crossed moments before, I saw a crowd descending in the *portales* of the Calzada de la Reina. The balconies were the same cement balconies of the old avenue where I first contemplated the great spectacles of the world. The emotion this vision produced in me carried along an infinite panic. . . . Perhaps I had forever lost the paradise (and also hell) of my first vision."[9] In Casey's vision, Rome and Havana become not so much superimpositions as communicating vessels in a cross-cultural web, elements of what Wilson Harris calls "a hidden rapport between cultures, sovereign ego and foreign self, reaching into the depths of nature, [that] would begin to constellate itself in clusters of imageries and motifs which tend to be flattened out within conventional narrative."[10] Casey personified the so-called rootless cosmopolitan. Thus, he was aware that the kind of connectedness for which he yearned could not be attained by "filiation" in Glissant's sense, "its work setting out upon the fixed linearity of time, always toward a projection, a project."[11] Rather, Casey had to utilize a nonlinear deployment of "clusters of imageries and motifs."

The second part of Casey's "oratorio," "At 3 A.M.," begins as a lugubrious scherzo casting initial doubt on the reality of what has been previously told and seen within the neighborhood, presumably including the first part of the story as well: "*These visions are the ectoplasm of legend, which once it starts creates its own world and its emanations and its white foam. If you look carefully you don't see what you thought you saw*" (14). The city is forever revisioned and revisioning itself through popular legend (exemplified in this story by the stories told by the "*people from back in 1910, when the great pimp Yarini got killed*" [14][12]), becoming part of the seas surrounding it: the sea of people, the sea of time, the Atlantic Ocean and its shabby dockside bays, the shimmering heat that blurs all contours and softens all edges. To parody French Renaissance poet Joachim du Bellay, Rome is no longer in Rome, but can also be in Havana. For a few seconds, the Via Barbieri can become the Calzada de la Reina, with the same people crossing both streets. Likewise, an outlandishly fat woman seated on a street in San Isidro, her eyes shut, smiling "*with an expression of infinite pleasure . . . as though smiling at a vision seen only by her*" (14) can transcend the spectacle of indifference presented by a few monstrous, diseased women performing a *danzón* for a bored audience of "*men of a sickly white color . . . ruminating in their grotesque underwear*" (15).

But that *mise en abyme* constituted by the public's view of a woman in public engaged in a private vision may well be another fabulation or gateway to a different phantasmagorical representation of the abyss. A depopulated void of unnatural purity and cleanliness, "*an insane emptiness that no one has contaminated or spat into*" (15) metamorphoses immediately into an airless, infernal vacuum oscillating between extremes of excruciating heat and cold, scorching and blinding the unfortunate narrator. Akin to Salvador Dalí's painting "The Persistence of Memory," with its transformation of watches into biomorphs, the walls of the buildings, "*burn[ing] with their cold*" and "*trembl[ing] with their immobility*" (15) as if in mockery of Baroque oxymoronic rhetoric, become pliable, almost living forms. The outlandish notion of *cold* in the Caribbean acquires meaning as a kind of overdetermination, where excess of one quality passes into its opposite, and as an element in a word game like the one played by two characters in Édouard Glissant's novel *La case du commandeur*: "*summer* that's when you're so cold that your skin emits flames."[13]

In this pre-dawn inferno, "*not even Christopher Columbus's compass would work . . . and the admiral would wet his pants in fear*" (15). In connection with Cuba, Columbus's most famous observation (one that Cubans are fond of citing) was that it was "the most beautiful sight eyes had seen": "*es aquella isla la más hermosa que ojos ayan visto*."[14] Now, after several centuries' ascendancy of the "civilization" in whose name the hapless Admiral wished to take possession of the

island, one of his involuntary heirs staggers blindly through an urban environment whose "*exasperating vacuum*" (15), sanitized of all but searing extremes of temperature, can only be shattered by an immersion not into "beauty" or even that "marvelous real" extolled by Casey's elder Alejo Carpentier, but precisely into the foul odors with which the story began. Because such miasmas betoken at least some kind of presence, they "*soothe the soul and lead it down the consoling pathways of hope*" (15).

Initially, the final section appears as a recapitulation of what has gone before; the narrator excoriates San Isidro's sordid street corners and sewers, the first for the wounds they inflict (again, the uncanny treatment of the city as if it were an animate entity) and the second for the monument they present to collective impotence and historical waste, "*choked with the mournful semen of twenty despairing generations*" (16). Then, in an abrupt, impassioned peroration, the narrator entreats the befouled waters of the bay, which he personifies and apostrophizes in the name of its eponymous patron saint, the hermaphroditic mother/father San Isidro, both "*compassionate old whore*" and "*sublime toothless faggot*," to grant him refuge, solace, and redemption, even by the most abject and degrading means: "*Make me clean . . . with the pus of your monstrous wrinkled thighs, purify me with your secretions, wash me in the downpour of your urine, Don't exclude me from your pain, don't exclude me from your sorrow*" (16).

On one level, what is involved here is a parodic reworking of Sandor Ferenczi's psychoanalytical narrative of the "thalassal regressive trend," defined as "the striving towards the aquatic mode of existence abandoned in primeval times—and in particular those arguments which make probable the continued operation in the sphere of genitality of this regressive tendency, or better stated, this force of attraction."[15] Ferenczi states further that this trend "does not cease its activity even after birth, but manifests itself in various expressions of eroticism (especially those of coitus) and . . . in sleep and related states,"[16] and speculates that the phallus is an "organic symbol of the restoration—albeit only partial—of the foetal-infantile state of union with the mother and at the same time with the geological prototype thereof, existence in the sea."[17]

But whereas Ferenczi's concern (shared, incidentally, with many of his fellow psychoanalytic pioneers) is to define this yearning for a return to amniotic/oceanic engulfment in terms of a universal biological impulse (coining in the process the term "bioanalysis" for his theory), Casey is able to endow the so-called thalassal regression with nuances, however apparently sordid, of lived experience and remembered history. To the extent that he is among those Antonio Benítez-Rojo has called, with a specifically Caribbean resonance, the "Peoples of the Sea" (and here it is worth recalling that the Austrian Freud and his Hungarian friend and disciple Ferenczi were from landlocked regions and thus more

inclined to mythopoeticize their readings of seas and oceans), Casey shares in a culturally sustained, collectively shared knowledge of the "deep original genealogy that a marine provenance brings out: . . . the first protein in the oceanic womb, the fetus floating in the physiologic whey, the act of parturition, cosmogonic society . . . "[18] At the same time, Casey's relationship to the sea is mediated both by his half–North American, half-Cuban parentage—significantly, it was from his mother that he acquired his claim to a Cuban identity—and by the urban provenance of his tale. This contrasts with Caribbean writers brought up in rural areas like George Lamming (in *In the Castle of My Skin*) and Kamau Brathwaite (in *Sun Poem* and his unpublished early manuscript *The Boy and the Sea*, excerpted in *Barabajan Poems*), whose childhoods had the rhythms and thunders of the sea as constant accompaniments.

If the Greek word *thalassa* carries associations less with the unbounded "oceanic" than with the sea, which no matter how vast still maintains what Brathwaite would call a "tidalectical"[19] rapport with the (is)land(s) it encounters and shapes, then Casey's fragment of Havana Bay, contaminated by noxious human effluents, appears initially to be a mere stagnant receptacle of this centuries-old detritus, as well as of the miseries with which such leavings are laden. Indeed, his final location of a possible transcendence in the tumid waters of Havana Bay is as unexpected in its way as the sight of the Black Sea was for his predecessors of antiquity—the Greek soldiers of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, whose outcry "*Thalassa! Thalassa!*" marked the end of their overland quest, and who would become reincarnated many centuries later as disguised conquerors of an equally camouflaged Caribbean in St. John Perse's *Anabase*. (Arsenio Cué, in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's novel *Three Trapped Tigers*, would give Perse's game away in a bravura improvisation mingling parody and verbal seduction during a nocturnal drive through the streets of late-1950s Havana: "If you'd just say it, Beba, / . . . With Bathos, baby, not bathe in it: / Thalassa! Thalassa! / With Xenophon in the Grecian mode / . . . / Or if only / Even with / Saint / John / Perse / You'd say it / Ananabase."[20])

But while the discrepancy between the urgency of the narrator's final prayer to San Isidro and the squalor of the environment has a certain "camp" quality that certainly is part of the author's intention here (particularly considering the understated, almost self-effacing quality of his *oeuvre*), it would be unjust to label this torrent of words as *merely* melodramatic. Casey, a *santería* initiate (one of his lovers was a *babalawo* or diviner), would have known that San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of this area of Havana and, in the Catholic faith, protector of agrarian workers, was an avatar of the Yoruba Orishaoko. Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui describes this orisha as follows:

> Orishaoko is the deity of the earth, agriculture, and harvests . . . He is a zealous worker, who keeps secrets and is chaste, no matter that his testicles hang down to the ground . . . Sterile women resort to this orisha of fertility . . . He was Olokun's husband and they are always united (earth and sea). He told everyone that Olokun was a hermaphrodite and that was why she hid in the depths of the sea . . .
>
> He has two characteristics: day and night. By day he represents the perfect man and by night he personifies Death [under the name of] Kori Koto. . . .
>
> Kori Koto is a female orisha of fertility, intimately related to procreation and children who are born predestined . . . [21]

Bolívar Aróstegui also retells a *patakí* or legend about Kori Koto's accession to the veneration accorded her by present generations. Thousands of years ago, in Africa, a group of children were bathing close to the junction of the Ochún and Obba rivers, a point at which powerful whirlpools and currents formed. The woman Kori Koto heard their joyous laughter and saw their childish games, as well as the imminent danger lurking as they drew closer to the-place where the two onrushing rivers met. Suddenly, the children disappeared beneath the waters. Kori Koto dived into the water to rescue them one by one. "Her exhaustion was so great that, losing her strength, she surrendered to the silence of the waters, to peace and the world of the infinite. Her spirit arose in a whirlpool of crystalline drops, changing into the multicolored fragments of the imagination."[22]

With all these elements in play, Casey's final prayer—and he himself—can be seen as occupying a liminal or, more accurately, a multiple crossroads space propitious to spiritual revelation: between land and water, city and country, present and past, life and death, male and female. Within this quantum space, he is able to indicate—give voice to—unexpected bridges between mythic fragments. The "*tender, rheumy-eyed great mother*" he summons at the start of his plea who metamorphoses into "*father San Isidro, sublime toothless faggot*," is one and the same divine force—Kori Koto, the would-be rescuer of children who could not save herself and surrendered to the turbulent waters rushing toward the sea, and Orishaoko in his nocturnal transvestite disguise as death, always feminized in Hispanic cultures, yet himself wedded to the hermaphrodite Olokun who dwells in the ocean depths beyond the bay. In his prayer, Casey echoes the devotions of the infertile women who seek Orishaoko's blessing—"*Impregnate me, mother, with your smell of aromatic oils and cesspool, of patchouli and vomit*"—and, if the word "impregnate" may be taken literally as well as figuratively, Casey longs to place himself beyond gender in order to become the abject yet divine repository/womb of the effluent of the past: "*pour the putrid blood of your arteries into the putrid blood of mine*."

Again, however, while Casey's narrative bears some of the characteristics of the eternal quest for origins, it also subverts this quest by subjecting it to the literal contamination of the historical process of urbanization and its attendant oppressions. For example, he does not beg San Isidro (district or saint) to grant him a share of a trans-temporal, trans-spatial realm, but rather "*at my last hour . . . [to] plunge my swollen, rotten body into the waters they've assigned you in the old bay, there long to lick the pus of your ancient flank, along with the debris and the dead fish*" (16). Who are the "they" who have consigned San Isidro to a quasi-ghettoized abode in Havana Bay: conquistadores, cartographers, bureaucrats, slavers, or all of the above? Whoever they may be, their labors have resulted in nothing but "debris and dead fish," a desolate vision that lends another dimension to the opening quatrain of Derek Walcott's famous poem, "The Sea is History":

> Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
> Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
> in that gray vault. The sea. The sea
> has locked them up. The sea is History.[23]

If the enigmatic record of History lies beneath the waters, it is also true that its traces have been left behind on land, as well as in domesticated waters whose cloacal depths contain only the bodies of suicides, pus, garbage, and other types of urban effluent. But while the Biblical grandeur of Walcott's undersea treasures and wreckages may be absent from San Isidro, Casey shows that there are still possibilities of invoking deities and protective spirits even in those areas where sperm, not spume, floats atop the waters.

Casey likely wrote this text shortly after his return to Havana in 1958,[24] when the revolutionary movement against the Batista regime was in full swing, particularly (and most dangerously for its partisans) in the cities. "In San Isidro" draws up a scathing indictment of past oppression and its consequences in the present, but contrary to more programmatic literature, it provides neither any linear or resurrective solution nor any false nostalgia for an equally fictive past. Instead, it orchestrates phantasmagoric histories and subterranean/submarine memories into an uncompromising statement: to transform the city and the history it encloses, one must immerse, even immolate oneself in it. In this context, what Ferenczi would call "thalassal regression" can be considered more in terms of a movement forward, a descent that is also a moment of self-knowing.

Casey's friend Italo Calvino, Italian by nationality and Cuban by birth, understood this. After a 1964 visit to Havana, Calvino arranged for the Italian translation and publication of Casey's short story collection *El regreso*, for which he wrote a back-cover blurb that states in part: "Havana for [Casey] is not only

a matrix of images and language, but the object of an exclusive and meticulous cult: memories of Havana as a colony and of slavery, Havana of the brothels and black witchcraft, an uninterrupted ferment of sensuality and uninterrupted conversation with the dead . . . In recent years, [Casey's] nostalgia . . . compelled him to return to [Cuba], to submerge himself anew in the old city known stone by stone, ghost by ghost, ensuring never to be separated from her again."[25]

The aquatic metaphor of submersion is very much to the point given that Casey implores San Isidro to grant him a watery grave close to the piers or, as he puts it, "*your ancient flank*," so that he will belong both to city and bay, land and water. But as the phantasmagorically shifting landscape and temperatures of the first two sections of the story reveal, the narrator's ability to experience the past not just in terms of an architectural *lieu de mémoire* but as an "*ectoplasm of legend*" (14) literally oozing out of the walls and sidewalks, creates a potentially liquefiable environment where stone can melt into or be conquered by water. As Calvino recalls, "The cathedral of Havana is made of tiny fossilized shells, which Calvert showed us on the stone of the exterior walls that first afternoon, right after our arrival in Cuba."[26] Propitiation of the thalassal spirits, allegorized in the figure of the patroness of Havana: the *Virgen de Regla*, herself an avatar of the orisha of the seas, Yemayá.

What Virgilio Piñera described as the endemic plight of the Caribbean in the famous opening line of his long poem "*La isla en peso*"—"the accursed circumstance of water on all sides"[27]—is not solely a matter of circumference, but of depth as well. And in anticipation of that possible future moment when the primordial curse will be fulfilled and the island that once rose out of the water/womb will sink back into its source, the city wrested from centuries of oppression must reveal itself as a multiplicity of cities. The ghosts and memories belonging to each of these are not merely superimposed atop each other like a tropical Troy, but function as elements of what Wilson Harris envisages as "the trial and rebirth of community encompassing intimate strangers, in the Dream of space time . . . lost cities that vanish to reappear within the elements, muses, furies,"[28] engendered by the "uninterrupted conversation with the dead."

It was not Casey's destiny to remain in Havana; neither San Isidro nor the transformative history in which he wished to play a part answered his prayer. Although he had contributed much to the nascent revolutionary culture through his work on the journal *Lunes de Revolución* and for the Casa de las Américas in its formative stage, he ended up being persecuted by the Castro regime for his homosexuality. His friend Guillermo Cabrera Infante tells the story of his misfortunes in detail in the reminiscence "¿Quién mató a Calvert Casey?" Suffice it to say that after 1965, Casey wandered from continent to continent, from city to city, like a character out of Kafka, terrified that he was being followed or

targeted for reprisals by agents of Fidel Castro's State Security, until he finally settled in Rome, the site of his earlier premonitory vision of a return to Cuba.

His final work of fiction before his suicide in 1969, "Piazza Margana," a surviving fragment of a novel he destroyed, stands as a compelling sequel of sorts to "In San Isidro." Written in his paternal tongue of English, probably after he had received the news of his mother's death, it is a brief, intense description of the lover's physical entry into the beloved's bloodstream, where he will remain forever, exploring every detail, mysterious or repugnant, of the workings of the body. The abject, entreating tone of the earlier story's concluding passage gives way to a sense of triumph at having at last found a home, an ideal *piazza* from which exile is impossible. For Casey, this is less a thalassic regression than a progression—a sea, a universe of one, invisible to all (even its nominal owner) save himself. In what could well be a parody of John Donne's famous conflation of sexual and terrestrial discovery, "Oh my America! my new-found-land, / My kingdome, safest when with one man man'd"[29], Casey declares at the conclusion of the story: "This is Paradise. I have found it. Unlike Columbus I will not be shipped home in a hold with bound feet . . . I have entered the Kingdom of Heaven and taken proud possession of it. This is my private claim, my heritage, my fief. I am NOT leaving."[30]

Meditating on the untimely death of his friend, Italo Calvino wondered: "Did he wish, through the Babylon of the metropolis, to recover his Havana? Or an ideal Havana? We understood, too late, the true goal of his travels: the Havana of the beyond that he wished to reach."[31] This statement moves through two successively broached and discarded rhetorical questions to a conclusive (and concluding) revelation, which, however, is less decisive than it appears. For on the evidence of "In San Isidro," the triad of Havanas that Calvino enumerates—Casey's lived Havana, the ideal Havana, and the Havana of the beyond—are actually one and the same. Or more precisely—since "sameness" implies a uniformity of identity antithetical to the kind of multifaceted image of the city Casey is striving to convey—Havana as both an actual and imaginary topos constitutes and is shaped by a diversity of possible Havanas, no less powerful and present for being invisible.

Three years after Casey's suicide, Calvino published *Invisible Cities*, a prose-poetic sequence organized around tales told by the explorer and raconteur Marco Polo to the Tartar emperor Kublai Khan about the cities he has seen on his travels. Recognizing in short order that these cities are all fabulous incarnations of a single city—itself, perhaps, imaginary to the extent that it is being narrated and thus fictionalized, but bearing a certain resemblance to Polo's native Venice—the emperor is moved to meditate on the hidden structures and complex destinies of cities and the empires these cities sustain. The invisible

cities, each bearing a woman's name, are classified either by means of adjectival designations (e.g., thin cities, trading cities) or by being placed via the copula "and" in relation to another noun, initially abstract (memory, desire) and as the work progresses, increasingly concrete (the dead, the sky); and arranged according to permutations whose complexity is worthy of the *Oulipo* movement of experimental writers to which Calvino belonged.

If juxtaposed to Casey's "In San Isidro," *Invisible Cities* may, among other things, be read as a sustained response to and development of the themes explored by the Cuban writer. Here it is less a matter of establishing any literary-historical line of filiation or "influence" than of acknowledging the impact on Calvino both of Casey's writing and of the way he explored cities—Havana in particular. For Calvino, Havana had been a distantly remembered if not dreamed city associated with his childhood. Casey became the Virgil who introduced him to its mysteries, an archaeologist of the baroque spiral of the seashell embedded in the cathedral stone, revealing both the possible thalassic destiny whose eventuality Calvino's Kublai Khan laments at the close of *Invisible Cities*: "*the last landing place can only be the infernal city, and it is there that, in ever-narrowing circles, the current is drawing us*,"[32] and Polo's path beyond that desolate end: "*seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space*."[33] There is an oblique resonance with "Piazza Margana" here—coincidental, since Calvino could not at that point have read that posthumously published fragment—whose narrator, "emparadised" for eternity in the bloodstream of his lover, has escaped the world of "mutual hatred" (187) for the enduring, infinitely utopian space behind the skin, where "loneliness is gone forever" (189).

On the basis of Marco Polo's closing injunction to his imperial interlocutor, it is possible to go beyond mere ascription of *Invisible Cities*' link to Casey's work and posit it as fundamentally a Caribbean text. Calvino's Polo creates a framework of a *text of texts*: a sequence of stories that don't "add up" to a narrative *summa* or finality but that refract the same tale, the same city, into a multiplicity of fragments each of which speaks to rather than "completes" the others, and heralds as an ensemble a potentially noninfernal future. And what he calls for within this framework is something very close to Antonio Benítez-Rojo's description of Caribbean texts as "fugitive by nature, constituting a marginal catalog that involves a desire for nonviolence."[34]

By means of a method that could be termed *contrapuntal analogy*, Calvino's text may be provided with a Caribbean rhythmic ground. Here, it is worth mentioning Fernando Ortiz's famous structuring counterpoint between tobacco and sugar, a series of shaping antitheses that entwine or *entwin* throughout Cuban history, to a degree which moved Ortiz to comment, "the contrasting parallelism

between tobacco and sugar is so curious . . . that it goes beyond the limit of a social problem and touches upon the fringes of poetry."[35] Marco Polo's narration of his overland travels to Cipangu gained wide currency among the literate European public, both in his day (the thirteenth century CE) and thereafter. In fact, Polo was one of Christopher Columbus's main inspirations, and had composed his narration in Columbus's native Genoa with the aid of Rustichello of Pisa, whom he had met while in prison. It is even possible to discern in Calvino's text a parodic treatment of the *ghostwriter* as a spectrally doubled, scribal voice of the narrator.

Doubtless believing, in his quasi-messianic sense of predestined mission, that there was a filiation between Polo and himself, Columbus brought a copy of the *Travels* with him on his westward journey to what he initially thought was the Eastern empire of Cipangu described by Polo. In an ironic twist of history, prison was part of Columbus's destiny as it was of Polo's: following his third voyage to the Americas, Columbus was clapped in irons in San Domingo and sent back to Spain two months later. In the event, Polo's text contains a good deal of embellishment if not outright fabrication, as was known even to those of Polo's contemporaries who nicknamed him, half-derisively and half-admiringly, "Marco Millione" for his fictionalizing talents. Such a literary romanticization of the Khan's domains would later be paralleled by Columbus's own invention of the Caribbean, which predated his actual arrival there, and which would reach delirious proportions after his third voyage with his firm conviction of having found the outermost reaches of the Earthly Paradise on the shores of Venezuela—located, he believed, at the apex of the hemisphere, which he thought to have been shaped like a woman's breast.

The whole notion of the "invisible city" is unconsciously dramatized by Columbus in his narration of his arrival, during his first voyage, on the shores of Cuba, which he names "Juana" and mistakes for the mainland of a larger country, "the province of Catayo": "I went forward on the same course, thinking that I should not fail to find great cities and towns," and when weather stymies his efforts, "I sent two men inland to learn if there were a king or great cities."[36] In the end, it was Columbus himself who would build a fortified town, Villa de Navidad, on the island of Hispaniola—a "city" that, though destroyed by the time of his return voyage, nonetheless laid the foundation for future oppressive and all-too-visible Plantation city-machines. Angel Rama observes with regard to the Iberian imperial project: "Before their appearance as material entities, cities had to be constructed as symbolic representations."[37]

Other contrapuntal elements link Calvino's work to the Caribbean, notably the centrality of Venice, a city that not only finds its Caribbean counterpart in the mythic libidinal utopia of Nueva Venecia in Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá's novel *La*

noche oscura del Niño Avilés but is itself Caribbeanized—indeed, carnivalized—in Alejo Carpentier's novel *Concierto barocco* by the subversive music of the black manservant Filomeno, who disrupts an apocryphal "summit meeting" of European Baroque composers. Turning it into a jam session or *descarga* with his refrain "*Ca-la-ba-sòn, / Son-sòn*," Filomeno elicits a mock-exasperated reaction from Domenico Scarlatti that neatly sums up a vital dimension of the creolization process: "The devil take this black man! When I want to establish a rhythm, he imposes his own on me. I'll end up playing music for cannibals."[38]

Venice can certainly be considered a domain of those whom Benítez-Rojo calls the Peoples of the Sea. One may point to its carnival traditions and its annual ritual marriage to the sea, but also to its long-held powerful role in maritime trade gained at least in part through the traffic in humans beginning in the tenth century CE. Slavs, to whom Indo-European languages owe the word "slave," were shipped from Venice to North Africa and the Levant in what the economic historian Oliver Cromwell Cox calls "the first capitalistically organized commerce in human beings."[39] These points of comparison enter into an analogical and contrapuntal Relation between Venice and the Caribbean. The story goes that José Lezama Lima answered a traveler who marveled at Havana's resemblance to Venice: "It does . . . at dusk." In this laconic, suggestive riposte, Lezama, who never traveled to Europe and indeed left the island of Cuba only twice in his life, alludes to Hegel's philosophical owl of Minerva and its crepuscular flight in order to reunite two great maritime cities under the dual sign of decline and transition.

Polo/Calvino's "invisible cities" would therefore find their answering counterthemes not only in what Lezama Lima discerned in the pre-Columbian poetry of the Americas—"Maps of unknown cities, a delicate tracery of gardens which cities, the more oneiric they are, more clearly design"[40]—but in the very process of fabulation through which they come into existence. More than mere embellishments or variations on a "real" city ("the city must never be confused with the words that describe it. And yet between the one and the other there is a connection"[41]), Calvino/Polo's narrated realms, in their delicate traceries, illuminate not only the particular garden that forms the backdrop for Polo and Kublai's conversations, but also the deeper substrata of human experience, that "historical vision, which is that counterpoint or weave bestowed by the *imago*, by the image participating in history."[42]

Image and actuality, the volatile and the concrete, are woven into the oral performance of fabulation unfolding through time, where "the story itself instantly provides its own legitimacy whenever it is spoken in the present moment in the narrative's rhythmic voice, whose competence lies only in the speaker's having listened to the myth or the fable issuing from someone's mouth."[43] Storytelling's

complex and (to the extent that it engages a simultaneous rereading, reworking, and reinhabiting of the past) contrapuntal relationship to historiography is admirably summed up in complementary insights, both delivered in public contexts, by Lezama Lima and Kamau Brathwaite.

At first glance, the modes of presentation of these two Caribbean poet-critics appear diametrically opposed: Lezama the hyper-literary devotee of artifice and Brathwaite the proponent of demotic "nation language" and orature. But this is deceptive—not only because, as an asthmatic, Lezama was profoundly concerned in his poetics with *breath* and the irregular rhythms it could follow, but also because a cornerstone of Brathwaite's project of intellectual recovery is dedicated as much to the written word in the Caribbean as it is to previously submerged oral traditions. On a theoretical level, there is a provocative connection between Lezama Lima's observation, "A fictional technique must needs be indispensable when historical technique cannot establish the dominion of its precisions. Almost an obligation to go back and live that which cannot be made precise,"[44] and Kamau Brathwaite's historicization of the Caribbean voice that connects it to wider fields of aesthetic endeavor: "Caribbean speech as continuum: ancestral through creole to national and international forms."[45] Thus, as is frequently the case when speaking of Caribbean thought, the apparently paradoxical link between Lezama and Brathwaite—discerned as well by Édouard Glissant—can be specified in Glissant's terms as another "inextricable knot . . . within the realm of filiation"[46] resulting from the historical and cultural complexities that shatter Western missilic linearities.

Brathwaite's conception of voice-as-continuum, although deceptively articulated as if it were a progressive trajectory beginning in the "ancestral" and opening out toward the "international," must be understood in terms of a nonlinear movement transcending notions of "backward" and "forward" in favor of reinvented ways of writing that encompass *soundings*. Likewise, Lezama's demand on the poetic imagination—to "go back and live" that which, according to conventionally Western canons of history, exists only as a few discontinuous jottings on a blank page—resurrects the "imaginary eras" that in turn render the poetic act visible. Or, as Calvert Casey puts it, "*These visions are the ectoplasm of legend, which once it starts creates its own world and its emanations and its white foam.*"[47] In this parallel world or *submerged city of the imagination*, Lezama's *imago* participating in history metamorphoses into a thalassic movement of historical, psychic undercurrents whose outer manifestations are the "white foam" (at once generative fluid and visible signifier of madness) and the "emanations" of the *flatus dei*, the divine breath that (for example) animates participants in Afro-Caribbean possession rituals and transforms them into spirits incarnate within a communal celebration. What Casey identifies as

the world of legend and its ectoplasmic visions is precisely that parallel world that erupts into history—Caribbean history, specifically—and that, with varying results and from often disparate creative perspectives, the literatures of the Caribbean have attempted to articulate.

In this context, it is useful to engage Uruguayan critic Angel Rama's influential concept of the "lettered city" (*la ciudad letrada*), an institution that, summarily stated, is constituted by an urban-based elite stratum or "specialized social group" entrusted by the ruling circles (initially, the colonial regime; later, the semi-independent postcolonial *criollo* governments) with the task of constructing and enforcing ideological hegemony, in the same way as the colonial city imposed its cultural and political centrality on the unlettered, indigenous countryside. The intermediary position of the inhabitants of the lettered city, or *letrados*, is neatly expressed by Rama's observation: "Servants of power, in one sense, the letrados became masters of power, in another."[48] Yet, although Rama's theory provides a valuable overview of the conditions through which intellectual power is articulated in Hispano/Lusophone America, its very sweep requires considerable nuancing in a specifically Caribbean context. The warping power of the Plantation (an institution Rama does not explore) and its structures of enslaving domination, in tandem with the geophysical fragmentation of the region, could not fail to shape, in forms often quite distinct from those assumed in continental Latin/Lusoamerica, the various "lettered cities" that emerged unevenly (depending on historical circumstance) in the Caribbean.

For example, one cannot speak of the scribes and notaries who kept track of births, deaths, and labor-related behaviors of the enslaved plantation workers in the Anglophone Caribbean as a "lettered city" in Rama's sense. Most intellectual Anglophone commentators on plantation society were travelers from the distant colonial metropole (e.g., Matthew Lewis, Anthony Trollope, James Anthony Froude, and countless other writers of diaries, journals, travel accounts, and letters for metropolitan consumption). Closer to the term would be the group of writers associated with the literary journal *The Beacon* (C. L. R. James, Ralph de Boissière, Alfred Mendes, et al.) that emerged in 1930s Trinidad during a period of anti-colonial agitation and worker revolt and arrayed itself against the complacency, unimaginativeness, and philistinism of the colonized middle-class "intelligentsia" (of whom James would later say, "Read their speeches about the society in which they live. They have nothing to say. Not one of them. . . . What kind of society they hope to build they do not say because they do not know."[49]). Even here, though, racial divisions played a role in the eventual dissolution of the Beacon group, as James himself noted years afterward: "Albert Gomes told me the other day: 'You know the difference between all of you and me? You all went away; I stayed.' I didn't tell him what I could have told him:

'You stayed not only because your parents had money but because your skin was white; there was a chance for you, but for us there wasn't—except to be a civil servant and hand papers, take them from the men downstairs and hand them to the man upstairs.'"[50] Nonetheless, contestatory intellectual groups like the *Beacon*, and their counterparts in other Caribbean islands like the *Tropiques* group in Martinique and the *Avance* group in Cuba, did enter into explicit conflict with colonialism and/or imperialism, as well as with those forces, lettered and otherwise, that tended by virtue of complacency and corruption to support the domestic status quo.

In the twentieth century, perhaps the Haitian *noiriste* co-signers of the 1938 *Manifeste des Griots*, which included future dictator François Duvalier, best exemplified the kind of intellectual group Rama had in mind when he wrote about "the conservative influence of the city of letters, relatively static in social makeup and wedded to aesthetic models that kept the letrados constantly harkening back to the period of their collective origin."[51] However, there was an additional important proviso for Haitian intellectuals; namely, that the "period of their collective origin" was not the Spanish American Baroque but rather the revolutionary war of independence waged by formerly enslaved people against three empires—French, Spanish, and English—between 1791 and 1804, and whose triumph was used by subsequent rulers of Haiti to legitimize their corrupt and repressive regimes. In Michel-Rolph Trouillot's words, "The epic of 1791–1804 nurtures among [Haitian elites] a positive image of blackness quite useful in a white-dominated world. But the epic is equally useful on the home front. It is one of the rare historical alibis of these elites, an indispensable reference to their claims to power."[52]

Even in a context that more closely matches the social conditions and period Rama emphasizes in his study—Cuba in the first half of the nineteenth century, when independence movements were sweeping the Americas in the wake of the Haitian Revolution—such "enlightened" *criollo* literati as the participants in Domingo del Monte's salon could not simply argue for an independence that would bring about the self-emancipation of the (white) *criollo* class without at the same time acknowledging the depth of the problem of slavery. This conundrum demanded an act of recognition that was not fully forthcoming from those who, however advanced they may have been in comparison with other *criollos*, continued to fear the possibility of a "second Haiti" in a Cuba the majority of whose population was of African descent and who, on account of that descent, were not considered to be "Cubans." A white "lettered city" that admitted the presence in its midst, even on a token level, of Juan Francisco Manzano, a slave whose poetry led to the Del Monte circle's purchasing of his manumission, and whose autobiographical narrative detailing his tribulations

at the hands of a harsh slave mistress inspired several literary works by authors of that same circle, faced disruptive complexities of a different order than their counterparts elsewhere in the Americas.

On the one hand, Manzano's presence gave the Del Monte circle a certain legitimacy in terms of its "capacity, not only to adapt to change, but to keep that change within certain limits,"[53] if placed in the context of a moderate, gradualist abolitionism that would at once achieve independence from Spain and keep the slaves' desires for freedom from getting out of hand. On the other, the processes of emendation to which Manzano's manuscript of his narrative (never published in his lifetime) was subjected by his patrons, as well as the disappearance of a second part written later, indicate that even as his story was a vital source of inspiration to this "lettered city" and even though his personal views were far from being militantly abolitionist, Manzano himself, perhaps precisely because of the literacy that enabled him to write his experiences, could only be seen as *out of place* in that context. And in a historical moment like the 1830s and 1840s, when massive slave rebellion was a distinct possibility feared equally by benighted slave masters and enlightened *letrados*, opposition movements were necessarily on tenuous ground. With the betrayal of the "Ladder Conspiracy" in 1844 and the subsequent mass arrests, tortures, and killings of alleged ringleaders, participants, and "intellectual authors" of the rebellion such as the poet Plácido, even the relatively moderate dissenters of the Del Monte circle were forced into exile or silenced. As William Luis writes, "The [Ladder] conspiracy, which delivered a strong blow to a growing black professional class, also destroyed the environment which had produced . . . antislavery [literary] works."[54]

Giving a Caribbean turn to Rama's concept of the "lettered city," then, requires a more extended confrontation with the practices and multifaceted legacies of slavery and the Plantation, which results less in Rama's opposition of the city (where the *letrados* are based) to the countryside (considered by the *letrados* as the domain of ignorance, superstition, and illiteracy) than in the counterpoint of the city to the ostensibly rural Plantation, which Fernando Ortiz described in its modern form, the *central* or sugar-mill, as "a complete social organism, as live and complex as a city or municipality."[55] The *central* engenders a grotesque parody of the Marxist dream of the abolition of the distance between town and country, where "agriculture and industry are concentrated at the same spot"[56]—devouring, in the name of sugar, large stretches of forested area and contaminating the soil. Like the cities described by Marco Polo in Calvino's novel, *centrales*, like slave-ships (those floating Cities of Dis) even had names (of saints, of women, of aristocratic titles), which often changed depending on shifts of ownership and the conditions of the market. Manuel

Moreno Fraginals's observation, "Just as sugar unified the countryside, it served as a homogenizing influence on our cities,"[57] while expressed in a Cuban frame of reference, remains applicable to the Caribbean as a whole, as long as it is counterpointed to C. L. R. James's equally compelling truth: "when we made the Middle Passage and came to the Caribbean we went straight into a modern industry—the sugar plantation—and there we saw that to be a slave was the result of our being black."[58]

From the foundational rift between white and black, master and slave, Europe and Africa, that went into the making of the Caribbean region and the modern world system, emerged not only a range of oppressions and dystopic "cities" organized according to the dictates of the Plantation, but also an answering resistance. This creative, imaginative praxis, where cities both visible and invisible were forged and maintained even in the barracoons, took shape in the shadow of Plantation domination and often in moments of triumph was tragically marked by the lineaments of that domination. Maroon communities, mutual-aid societies, clandestine religious brotherhoods and sisterhoods, yards, *solares*, carnivals, *coumbites*—all corroborate Benítez-Rojo's insight, closely resembling Calvino's and fully anticipated by Casey, that "every Caribbean city carries deep within it other cities, which live as fetal, minuscule modes of turbulence that proliferate—each different from the last—through marinas, plazas, and alleys."[59] Indeed, as a corollary to Benítez-Rojo's now-famous concept of the "repeating island" as a description of the dynamic, outward-reaching unity of the Caribbean region, a "repeating city" might be posited as an exemplar of Rex Nettleford's definition of Caribbean movement as "inward stretch, outward reach."

In the Caribbean context of Plantation domination, Édouard Glissant defines literary creation in terms of a threefold process: "first . . . an act of survival, then as a dead end or a delusion, finally as an effort or passion of memory."[60] This encompasses respectively the oral traditions elaborated by the slaves, the scribal tradition associated with the Plantation and its apologists and tourists, and what Glissant calls the "creative *marronage*" exerted by the historical experience and tradition of lived marronage and whose "driving force and hidden design, is the derangement of the memory, which determines, along with imagination, our only way to tame time."[61] It is significant that Glissant should have recourse to the practice of marronage to define the contours of Caribbean literary creation, since the culmination of this form of revolt (generalized throughout the region when the Plantation held sway) was precisely the founding of new forms of settlement where dreamed-of (invisible) societies could encounter and inhabit a landscape that would be transformed by its fugitive creators from a hidden design into a space of hope.

Thus, the invisible city in the Caribbean can also be called a "magic city" both for its transformational nature and insofar as its potential (and protean) actuality extends and deepens Melville J. Herskovits's "inward-stretch" observation that "magic was almost by its very nature adapted to 'going underground,' and was the natural prop of revolt."[62] It presents itself as a social/discursive/ludic space that simultaneously complements, varies, refracts, and transcends the actually existing order of things. C. L. R. James said of the peoples of the Caribbean: "in the history of the West Indies there is one dominant fact and that is the desire, sometimes expressed, sometimes unexpressed, but always there, the desire for liberty; the ridding oneself of the particular burden which is the special inheritance of the black skin . . . They have been the most rebellious people in history and that is the reason."[63]

Looked at closely, this statement articulates a dialectic between being (the "dominant [historical] fact" of the desire for freedom) and becoming (the fact of desire itself, which is always a process of striving, a constant motion and emotion, a "ridding oneself of a burden," which unfolds over time and space to constitute or *constellate* a Caribbean *social imaginary*). Earlier in his speech, James declares that "when West Indians reach a certain stage they wish to make a complete change and that is because all of us come from abroad."[64] In other words, since the peoples of the Caribbean already embody a someplace else in the here and now, they are particularly capable of envisioning and creating transformative practices and theories that can concretize or instantiate that someplace else. Throughout their history, the here and now to which they have been subjected has been harshly oppressive and indeed dystopic; after all, the Plantation as a form of social organization has its own productivist and pseudo-humanist ideals, as befits a creation of what Brathwaite has termed the "alter-Renaissance." As a result, the cultural and spiritual resources on which they have drawn to nurture and sustain their rebellion have tended to be inspired by collective imaginings and practices—from stories to rituals—of the "abroad" of which James speaks, albeit endowed with new meanings in these new contexts. Just as the island fragments of the region are in permanent flux and transformation, open to the perilous play of the elements, so also do its heterogeneous cultures—and the forms of coexistence and community toward which they move—preserve an open-endedness, where everything is possible and nothing is finished, where every call encounters a response and every theme a variation.

As a city becomes instituted in time and space, it enters into a complex dialectic with its inhabitants, who at once shape and are shaped by it, to the degree that the city takes on a life of its own. This process is described by Cuban architect and urbanist Nicolás Quintana as: "the product of the vital integration of the environmental characteristics of the site, the constructed forms, and the

human activity that develops in and among them . . . a synthesis that enables the city to acquire its own character and collective personality."[65] Further developing this living quality of architecture, Wilson Harris speaks of variegated architectures (of body and bone, of consciousness, of imagination, of literature, of music, of mythic tradition, of space) and their capacity to enter into and playfully shape occult links and connections of which the individual is often at best only dimly aware: "We are involved . . .—if we can imaginatively grasp it—in iconic or plastic thresholds—in an architecture of consciousness or reconstitution of spaces in the West Indian psyche running through Negro limbo and vodun into sculptures or spaces equivalent to rooms of an Arawak cosmos . . ."[66] Calvert Casey, poised at the pier's edge in San Isidro, is among those capable of apprehending the threshold "signifying hidden perspectives"[67] between land and water, history and myth, fragile corporeal self and "delicate" (the Arawak term *seme*, cited by Harris) sea-womb of thalassic return.

In the conclusion to his essay, "Contradictory Omens," Kamau Brathwaite presents five theses summarizing his thoughts on the modalities of intercultural contact and exchange—otherwise known as "creolization." The final thesis, more of an aphorism, has been often cited since its appearance: "The unity is submarine"[68]. Given Brathwaite's meticulous attention in his *oeuvre* to punctuation as both meaningful sign and signifier, in the Caribbean writing traditions of Arawak *timehri* and Abakuá *anaforuana*, subsequent commentators have committed a consequential oversight by failing to take note of the absence of a period following the sentence. This lack is also a plenitude, as the original publication opens out onto more than half a page of blank space, which appears to enact the presence of the sea whose depths confer unity. And that the sentence does not close or, more accurately, does not come to a *full stop*, betokens the dynamic, "tidalectical" nature of Caribbean unity. Also noteworthy is Brathwaite's eschewal of the possessive pronomial "our" in favor of the definite article, which effectively posits a unity that transcends regional demarcations and evokes/invokes the depths of human experience in a manner resonating with Ferenczi's observation that "birth and antecedent existence in the amniotic fluid might themselves be an organic memory symbol of the great geological catastrophe and of the struggle to adapt to it."[69]

Whereas the "catastrophe" of which Ferenczi writes is defined by him as the emergence of land out of a water-covered planet, Brathwaite's mythopoetics of creation defines the Caribbean both as a stone skipped by the creator through the seas (a pebble/fragment moving upon the surface of the waters, like the Old Testament demiurge) and as a place of fragmentation striving toward a more profound unity, its own realized divinity and sense of (psychic, cultural, geophysical, cosmic) wholeness. Beyond the residual Darwinism of Ferenczi's theory of

thalassal regression, Brathwaite locates in the Caribbean both a reminder of the tectonic creation of the world out of water ("Underground and under the water there are larger forms which have deeper resonance and we haven't yet reached them"[70]) and a pre-eminently *historical* struggle, however inchoate at times, for a reconstructive life-way, what Rastafarians would call *livity*, that would enter into an *overstanding* of the tidalectical interactions of "water and sun and pebble continent and song and kinesis and an ever-widening unlocking of a central atomic *name* or *mane* or *nyam* or *nam*."[71] Both these aspects—the thalassal and the mytho-historical, along with the images of water, stone, and the human community—are fused in Jacques Roumain's deeply melancholic Vodou poem "Guinea," which depicts the submarine ancestral land of the dead, that Black Atlantis where the possessed journey upon being mounted by the *lwa*: "There, there awaits you beside the water a quiet village, / And the hut of your fathers, and the hard ancestral stone / where your head will rest at last."[72] This oneiric realm, which promises the hope of return and an end to wandering and loneliness, is less an afterlife in the strict sense than an ever-present possibility, like one of Lezama Lima's supernatural cities "which man reaches and cannot reconstruct afterwards. Cities built with millenarian slowness and cut down and destroyed from the ground up in the twinkling of an eye. Made and unmade with the rhythm of breathing."[73] In other words, not a single undifferentiated domain or totalitarian unity, but a repeating island (Benítez-Rojo), a chaos-world (Glissant) germinating out of a sense/sensibility of *nam* (Brathwaite) that endows individuals within communities with a sense of joy in the reconstructed image (Lezama Lima) whose ultimate power could be to restructure the dominant architectures of space and time (Harris).

And the awareness that flows from this revelation, however transitory, is cosmic in scope. Benítez-Rojo declares that the best graphic representation of the Caribbean is to be found in "the spiral chaos of the Milky Way, the unpredictable flux of transformative plasma that spins calmly in our globe's firmament."[74] And Shabine, the narrator and protagonist of Derek Walcott's poem "The Schooner *Flight*," having realized that his long-held dream of "one island that heals with its harbour" has been a chimera, finds consolation and wonder in the immensity of Caribbean space-time: "There are so many islands! / As many islands as the stars at night / on that branched tree from which meteors are shaken / like falling fruit around the schooner *Flight*. / . . . / this earth is one / island in archipelagoes of stars."[75] Likewise—inspired, significantly, by many hours of listening to a recording of Bach's *Art of the Fugue*, that European quintessence of counterpoint, whose equivalent in the Caribbean, as Benítez-Rojo has pointed out, is the *rumba*—José Lezama Lima walks out into a "starry, Pythagorean" Havana night in 1955. Upon encountering a funeral

home with all its lights aglow, he draws the infinite out of the foreboding of the end and finds in the stars what Harris has termed a "recovered gateway into the New World,"[76] much as Walcott's Shabine does in his valedictory lines: "At the very borders of death, the coordinates of the poetic system desperately strive, nature having been exhausted, super-nature subsists; the telluric image having been shattered, the unceasing images of the stellar begin. There, in the most unreachable distance, where the Pythagoreans situated a soul in the stars."[77] To the extent that it is a distillation of the human capacity to make and do, the poetic image possesses the power to fill all voids, to reconstruct what has been demolished or annihilated, and to instantiate what Benítez-Rojo has called "a poetic territory marked by an aesthetic of pleasure, or better, an aesthetic whose desire is nonviolence."[78]

The formation of the Caribbean can be interpreted in terms of cataclysmic sequences of big bangs or in Harris's terms *unfinished geneses*: from the originary world-creating explosion, to the massive tectonic shifts that submerged most of the region beneath the ocean, to the shattering impact on the indigenous peoples of the landing of the conquistadorial galleons, to the traumatic blow and scattering that marked the Middle Passage. One of the major accomplishments of the radical Caribbean imagination has been to gather together (by means of performances both artistic and historical) the radiant, charged fragments or *nams* deposited on land and sea by these successive disasters, in full awareness that there will always be more to recover, recompose, and reconstruct. Among these fragments is the concept of the invisible or magic city, itself an unfinished (contrapuntal, cross-rhythmic) genesis deriving from both the European quest for utopia (a region always located beyond all charted horizons) and the mythico-religious and cultural memories of an ideal instituted community that resided in the enslaved African imaginary. The deployment of these memories against the Plantation did not always involve open revolt, as C. L. R. James pointed out when, citing Richard Pares's study of plantations in the British Caribbean, he declared that "slave labour was not an advanced stage of labour, but those plantations created millions and from top to bottom slaves ran them."[79] But slave rebellions and marronage did owe much to the same modalities of self-organization that enabled the slaves to "run the plantations" in James's sense.

However, if the utopia of the West became transformed into the alter-Renaissance mercantilist Plantation machine once it landed in the Caribbean, it is also the case that such a transformation was not, could not have been, diametrically opposed to or completely other than the dreams that fueled it. Hidden in the tyranny and despoliation of conquest—at once indissolubly linked to and pointing beyond this authoritarian violence—are transformative possibilities,

distorted to be sure but nonetheless immanent, as will be seen in the analysis of the El Dorado myth in Chapter 2. Similarly, the attempts by enslaved peoples to recreate something of their lost societies could never be purely restorative; something new had to be forged from what they had endured. Even as it gestated in the depths of the workings of the Plantation machine, this transformative process had to be projected outward into the unknown, into that which was not Plantation, and thus involved acts of discovery and of founding.

What this study attempts to do is trace, within a number of literary works drawn from the magma of Caribbean creativity, the varying convergences and divergences of these two "adversarial twins" in Harris's sense: the search for El Dorado on the one hand and the reconstruction of remembered traditions of social being on the other, exemplified by "Gassire's Lute," a Soninke tale of the intricate weave bringing together violence, loss, creativity, and the now-vanishing, now-reappearing magic city of Wagadu. While both quests for imagined communities, epic in scale, may initially appear irreconcilable, it is through the cunning of historical (un)reason that their figures have become intertwined in Caribbean literatures like the genetic ladder of the double helix—or the serpents Damballah-Wedo and Ayida-Wedo in Vodou cosmology, or their counterparts on the Herme(neu)tic staff. If the legacy of El Dorado in its conquistadorial incarnation—untrammeled greed, ecological devastation, atrophied imagination, generalized reification, and globalized mercantilism—appears to have gained the upper hand and colonized or recolonized social space and time, the legacy of Wagadu—or of Ilé-Ifé, Usagaré, Ginen/Guinée, and Mbanza Kongo, to name other ancestral and ceremonial African magic cities with resonance in the diaspora—continues to "imply a creative breach in the seemingly invincible core-bias of communication"[80] that globalizing power has arrogated unto itself.

At the same time, it is worth emphasizing, as does Harris, that reducing the relationship of these two cities, at once metaphorical and actual, to a dualistic struggle of contending absolutes, is to reproduce a logic of self-imprisonment within the confines of what Harris terms "progressive realism." This and other self-defeating utilitarian logics are inimical not only to creative expression—founded in general and *a fortiori* in the Caribbean on open-ended, multiple, and contrapuntal ways of knowledge and livity—but to the cross-cultural diversity whose fragile web of correspondences, linkages, and dialogues remains both indispensable and imperiled.

This study aims to seek out the bridge between Wagadu and El Dorado, which, like Lezama's "great bridge that cannot be seen,"[81] appears "in the middle of the frozen or boiling waters" of Caribbean history and literature, and from whose vantage point the lineaments of destroyed, lost, remembered cities begin to assume their best definition (a continually unfinished process). In the lamentation

of Cuban poet José Triana for the death of his friend Calvert Casey, who well knew that the San Isidro pier on which he stood in the hours before dawn was a numinous bridge between cultures—one of those bridges that Wilson Harris describes as "sometimes precarious, never absolute, but which I think engender a profound awareness of the numinous solidity of space, inner space/outer space, space as the womb of simultaneous densities and transparencies in the language of originality"[82]—may be found one (particle) wave of the tidalectic: "Ah, falling shadows, falling shadows! / Beneath the water you can see his body."[83] And Kamau Brathwaite, himself ever attentive to the shifting frontiers between land and sea, wind and water, provides another: "the unity is submarine / breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments/whole."[84] The search for such a whole—of which the invisible/magic city is a metaphorical instance and microcosm—is not reflective of a will to imprison possibilities within a totalizing schema. Rather, it represents an attempt to locate oneself at the crossroads of history, if "history" may be understood as the realm in which humans express and develop their various powers to create, destroy, subvert, build, and in general make and do. This in turn involves undertaking the "archeology of selves" (Brathwaite) required for an overstanding of the Caribbean region not merely as a succession of colonized, post-colonized, and re-colonized fragments but as a dynamic cradle/bridge/womb of creation, dream, and possibility in the face of centuries of exploitation, misery, and defeat.

CHAPTER 2

Building the Magic City

The Guyanese poet Martin Carter writes that life is a matter of the "strength of the web of the ever weaving weaver / I know not how to speak of, caught as I am / in the great dark of the bright connection of words."[1] In this confession of inadequacy before an ineffability that he nonetheless has the power to render as a metaphoric image, the poet addresses his own plight in terms of a gnostic paradox—a primal darkness out of which flashes a spark illuminating the moment in which utterance is given shape and meaning as part of a process of juxtaposition, of weave, of "connection." Significantly, the poet is not caught in the strands of the "web," but in the "great dark," the mysteries of his own quest to approximate in the span of a human life the creative task undertaken on a cosmic level by the demiurgic "ever weaving weaver," whose web can be understood in the terms of Wilson Harris's "epitaph" to *The Age of the Rainmakers*: "Originality is the fragile yet indestructible arch of community whose web is akin to but other than space."[2] For the web woven by the tireless weaver—a Caribbean cross-cultural offspring of the Afro-diasporic trickster-spider Anancy and the Arawak arachnid whose "enduring web . . . [is] the only bridge to the stars"[3]—is the text (and texture) of storytelling, through which communities come to know themselves as part of the larger (hi)story. And in the end, the question remains: is it the strength of the web, the web itself, or the weaver that challenges the poet's powers of speech? The ambiguity of Carter's phrasing points toward the "great dark," the opacity of multivalence that must accompany any attempt to grapple critically with the complex patterns and apparently bright connections combining to form that ever-shifting entity of entities, the Caribbean.

The foundational text of the modern Caribbean, Christopher Columbus's *Diary*, introduces at the crucial moment of *discovery* a series of images or marvels that enters into the dialectic of darkness and light articulated by Carter in his tersely concentrated style. José Lezama Lima, appropriately at the very opening of

the prologue to his groundbreaking three-volume *Antología de la poesía cubana*, claims to glean a significant originary image from Columbus's text:

> Our island begins its history within poetry. Image, fable, and wonders establish their kingdom from the moment of our founding and discovery. And so Admiral Christopher Columbus wrote in his *Diary*, a book that ought to be on the threshold of our poetry, that as he drew near to our coasts, he saw a great flaming bough fall into the sea. At that moment, the seductions of our light began.[4]

However, Columbus's actual *Diary* entry for "Thursday, 11 October," a day on which it could be properly said that he was "drawing near" to a Caribbean coast, does not mention a "flaming bough." Rather, this phenomenon is said to have occurred almost a month earlier—on Saturday, September 15, scarcely a week after Columbus's three ships had left the island of Gomera in the Canaries for the open sea. Whether or not this miracle actually took place, its positioning in the text underscores its literally portentous nature, an omen of great deeds ahead. By telescoping space and time, Lezama undertakes a creative conflation or rather *sublation* of the "wonders" viewed by the Admiral and his crew. On October 11, "the crew of the caravel *Pinta* saw a piece of cane and a stick, and they also picked up another small stick that appeared to have been worked with a piece of iron, and a piece of cane and another plant that grows on land and a board. The crew of the caravel *Niña* also saw other signs of land and a small branch laden with barnacles."[5] After nightfall, "the Admiral, at ten o'clock . . . standing on the poop castle, saw a light, although it was so dim that he did not wish to declare that it was land. . . . After the Admiral had said [that he had seen a light], it was seen once or twice, and it was like a small wax candle rising and falling, which to a few of them seemed to be a sign of land . . ."[6]

What Lezama has done, from his perspective as a man of the Caribbean nearly five hundred years after this moment (rhetorically emphasized by his use of the first-person plural possessive "our" over and against the perspective of Columbus), is to create an ideogram melding the flaming bough heralding the future sighting of a new world with the dancing light of the distant candle in which Columbus and his crew saw the immediate harbinger of land. The entire colonial enterprise begins with an originary "seduction of our light"—a glow that from its nocturnal beginnings will become imprisoned in the gleam of gold and the material wealth it promises. Destined to be multiplied into the fires that blaze throughout the region's geography and history—flames of oppression and, eventually, of liberation—the "wax candle" becomes kin to the annunciatory burning brand. Indeed, the conjunction of earth, air, fire, and water in the image lends an apocalyptic tone to the moment that would not have been out of place in the millenarian Columbus's later musings.

In his 1959 essay "La imagen histórica," Lezama defines the image as a creation transcending both symbol and imagination, and states further: "The image extracts from the enigma a ray of light, into whose glow we are able to penetrate, or at least live while awaiting resurrection. The image, as we accept it here, thus pretends to reduce the supernatural to the transfigured senses of man."[7] Out of Columbus's enigmatic signs, Lezama has orchestrated a ray of light in which can be glimpsed—and poeticized—the Caribbean's multifarious historical legacies. Columbus and the conquistadores who followed him were thoroughly imbued with the fabulous inventions of medieval legends, and as Lezama observes, they were quick to see the new worlds before their eyes in terms of these stories: "imagination and reality blended, and the borders between fabulation and the immediate were erased."[8] To be sure, on one level this erasure was far more calculated than spontaneous, an integral element of the conquistadores' self-presentation and testimony to the imperial necessity and lucrative potential of their enterprise. At the same time, however, it would be reductive to underestimate the power of an inherited fabulist tradition to shape the conquistadores' gaze on wonders that, after all, were new to them.

But the true poetic image of the Caribbean in Lezama's sense, while certainly grounded in the "historic" origins birthed by Columbus, has to emerge from a (re)creative process, which Lezama instantiates in his novel *Paradiso* by naming his protagonist Cemí, after the Taino tutelary deities. New stories, then, must be built from the ashes of the burning brand, thereby bringing about a moment in the "resurrection" Lezama envisages. In a prose poem, "Resistance," which appeared in his 1949 collection *La fijeza* ("Fixity"), Lezama explicitly reads the miraculous phenomenon witnessed by Columbus's men as a sign of resistance: the crew, he claims, "could see a burning brand falling into the sea because they felt the history of many in a single vision."[9]

By finding a deeper truth through a creative response to Columbus's narration, Lezama corroborates Walter Benjamin's observation on the nature of the story: "A story . . . does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time."[10] In tune with Lezama's lead ("in the story it is support that ensures the revelation of the secret. There the image remains as a supported shadow"[11]), Kamau Brathwaite wrote for the 1992 Quincentenary celebrations and counter-celebrations an apocryphal letter from the Admiral, "I, Cristóbal Kamau," whose epigraph is precisely the *Diary*'s vignette describing the light faintly rising and falling from an invisible shore. Here, Brathwaite tells another, truer story of the Columbus enterprise, revisioned like Lezama's observations from the vantage point of its complex legacy. This time, however, the tale of consequences is ventriloquized in the prophetic voice of the Admiral himself, that unconscious inventor of

poetry and despoliation who now becomes cognate and kin to the poet Brathwaite, who "sees" and expresses the poetry and the history of that wavering light in which his doubtless unwilling European "ancestor"—rebaptized with his poet/descendant's name—could see only a hint of land and material wealth. In a mock-scholarly prefatory note, Brathwaite declares that Columbus "was not concerned with terrestrial or . . . pelagic issues at all since . . . the man crossed the Atlantic by growing into space."[12]

Columbus's tale becomes a metaphor for what Brathwaite has termed the "missilic" trajectory (one could say *e*jectory) of the Western enterprise of conquest: "the Niña Pinta & María crashing their / deep wound probings into this New Word World / you now call years . . . "[13] At the same time, just as Lezama locates the entry of the Caribbean into poetry with Columbus's incursion, Brathwaite has the Admiral, from his vantage point 500 years on, assume the full weight not only of the destruction he had helped wreak, but also of the People of the Sea and their artistic heritage emerging out of his primal encounter. Following the lines "But as I say I am only a sailor— // okay!—an Admiral—but seafaring nonetheless— / still seeking voyages of safeguarding progress"[14] comes a pantheon of various Caribbean culture heroes, as if to indicate that the "safeguarding of progress" can truly be accomplished through acknowledgment and recognition of what, *pace* V. S. Naipaul, has indeed been created in the Caribbean.

It must be added that what is today known as Columbus's *Diary* is actually a hybrid text based on a summary of the long-lost original made by Bartolomé de las Casas, who interpolated his own comments and added indirect third-person quotations. Therefore, by its very existence the text lends itself to Lezama and Brathwaite's improvisations. Just as oral performance subjects the raw material of the spoken story, whether invented or remembered, to variations and successive accretions of elements, so do these poets take the figure of "Columbus"—himself a figure swathed in the inventions and mystifications of (oral) legend—and send the words (which, though bearing his name on a title page, are not his "own") into new domains of meaning. This practice subverts Benjamin's observation on scribal versions of oral stories: "among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers"[15]; in these instances at least, the "truth" of Columbus's tale emerges precisely to the extent that the rewritings differ most from the "original" and take their place in Lezama's "imaginary eras."

The approach taken here to the stories of magical/invisible cities that serve as this study's cornerstones—the tale of Gassire's Lute and the legend of El Dorado—is characterized by similar interpretive liberties (perhaps "variations"

would be a more appropriate word in this context). The stories themselves are anomalies in terms of the common understanding of their respective cultural frameworks. From its introduction into early twentieth-century Europe in a version by the German Africanist ethnographer Leo Frobenius, "Gassire's Lute" was revisioned and reused by such iconic modernist writers as Ezra Pound, Pierre Jean Jouve, Robert Duncan, and Paul Blackburn, and has, in general, been seen in the "West" as an exemplar of the "African heroic epic tradition." However, the scholar of African epic Stephen Belcher has remarked that Frobenius, in all his travels through West Africa, was only able to find this story told in a Soninke community of Northern Benin. Therefore, "literary appreciation does seem the appropriate response" for such a "unique phenomen[on]"[16] in that, contrary to Douglas C. Fox's claim that "Gassire's Lute" is the sole surviving fragment of a larger epic cycle, the *Dausi* (which the tale references in a *mise-en-abyme* effect), available ethnographic evidence does not point to anything as "romantic" as "Soninke books of heroes"[17] ever having existed. Whereas Fox and Frobenius date the so-called *Dausi* from around the first millennium CE, they situate the historical time of the tale as far back as 500 BCE, adducing Herodotus as an authority for this, but provide no real support for this claim. It is clear in any case that "Gassire's Lute" comes from a pre-Islamic period, and Belcher's survey of the admittedly sparse historical record points to the city of Kumbi-Saleh in present-day Mauritania as the "Wagadu" that was the seat of the ancient Ghana Empire and whose rise and fall figures in so many Soninke oral tales.

As for the legend of El Dorado, while emerging from the kind of chivalric literary tradition against which Cervantes conceived the *Quixote*, its currency not just among such distinguished literati as Sir Walter Ralegh but also the various and sundry illiterate soldiers and *hidalgos* who sailed to the New World in search of limitless wealth, resulted as much from rumor and successively embellished hearsay as it did from published accounts (which in any case were only accessible to a few in the Europe of that day). It could be said that the El Dorado legend was part of an oral tradition that began in present-day Ecuador (or Colombia, by way of Ecuador) in the late 1530s, migrated to the north and northwest to cover Venezuela, Colombia, the Guyanas, and Brazil, and arguably has continued into the present. Though attributed to a dubiously authentic ritual practice of alleged Muisca/Chibcha provenance, the myth of a city of gold resonated with long-standing dreams of a return to paradisiacal origins haunting the nascent European imaginary, as well as with the more obvious mercantilist schemes of immediate material wealth.

Both tales—the one an example of the unique "literary" artifact created within the context of a "nonliterate" African society but recovered and put to use by exponents of Euro-American modernism, the other a perpetually evolving

story with apparent origins in Amerindian oral traditions but accorded most credence by the European conquerors for whom these traditions were generally ignored or dismissed—are thus always already interculturated. It is with the aim of setting this creolization into further interplay in a Caribbean context that these tales are now retold and reconsidered. Lezama Lima's observation on the transformations engendered on ancient myths in New World contexts is relevant here: "Everything will have to be reconstructed, invented anew, and the old myths, when they reappear anew, will with an unknown face offer us their spells and enigmas. The fiction of myths creates new myths, with new terrors and exhaustions."[18]

"Gassire's Lute" tells of the magical Wagadu, both goddess and city, fated to live and disappear four times through human frailties. Yet these very weaknesses endow Wagadu with a more resplendent beauty whenever she chooses to reappear. A prophet foretells to the ambitious hero Gassire that no matter how bravely he conducts himself in warfare, he will never inherit the sword and shield of his father the king. Instead, he will inherit a lute (or so Frobenius calls what is probably the *ngoni*) whose singing power, once liberated from its wood, will bring Gassire's name into the pantheon of heroes populating the *Dausi*, an epic tale that will endure beyond the life of Wagadu. Following a battle in which Gassire has distinguished himself beyond measure, an episode of the *Dausi* is sung to him by what Frobenius calls a "partridge" (more likely a guinea-fowl). But the price of Gassire's learning the *Dausi*, which the seer repeatedly warns him against, will be the end of Wagadu—because he will have abdicated his royal powers for the lower social status of a bard.

Carried away by his vanity, Gassire eagerly vows to barter Wagadu's existence for his own eternal glory. He commands a smith to make him a lute, but when the craftsman tells him that it cannot sing unless the blood of his sons penetrates the wood, he sacrifices the lives of seven of his sons in successive and increasingly futile battles. Finally, angered at his callously wasteful conduct, his fellow warriors exile him and his remaining family and retinue from Wagadu. One night, at his desert encampment, Gassire hears the lute sing the *Dausi*. At that moment, his father dies in the city, Gassire weeps, and Wagadu disappears for the first time. But when Wagadu returns, she will be blessed with the song of the bards, and the *Dausi* will become the common heritage of all. Falsehood and greed will then cause Wagadu to vanish twice more, but each subsequent resurrection will bring the people first wealth and then writing. "Dissension," says the tale, "will enable the fifth *Wagadu* to be as enduring as the rain of the south and as the rocks of the Sahara, for every man will then have *Wagadu* in his heart and every woman a *Wagadu* in her womb."[19]

This fragment, besides being, in Nathaniel Mackey's words, "a poem that alerts us to the dangers of poetry,"[20] may also be read as a parable of diaspora with particular prophetic resonance and warning for the millions of Africans caught and transported to the Americas during the many years of the slave trade. Wagadu, as it appears here, possesses many properties of the "invisible city"—using Italo Calvino's taxonomy, it qualifies as both a "hidden" and "continuous" city. Its five named incarnations, repeated as part of the incantatory mnemonic formula that marks the story as an oral narrative, "Hoooh! Dierra, Agada, Ganna, Silla! Hoooh! Fasa!"[21] function both as moments in a teleology to be fulfilled with the not-yet-present (invoked) appearance of Fasa (a place name that will coincide with the name of the *gens* who inhabit it) and as actual *topoi* cognate with the four cardinal points and, in the case of Fasa, the world that encompasses and thus supersedes these points. Fox and Frobenius purport to situate Dierra, Agada, Ganna, and Silla geographically within the West African Sahel region. While all these cities have individual names, at the same time they "are" Wagadu, characterized as the intangible moving force, at once social and mythopoetic, that make the city something more than just a settlement. "Wagadu is the strength that lives in the hearts of men," but a strength that is "sometimes invisible because the indomitability of men has overtired her, so that she sleeps."[22] Behind this apparent paradox—if Wagadu is strength, how can she be wearied by indomitability?—lies, not necessarily the "naiveté" of the storyteller, as Mackey calls it, but a veiled statement on behalf of a quality much prized in African lifeways: balance, an avoidance of extremes, a strength that does not always require warfare in order to express itself, and that is given an added dimension of complementarity by the desired presence of Wagadu in the wombs of women as well as in the hearts of men. Wagadu, in short, is not a prize to be conquered but a treasure that is "found," and the "forcefulness" with which it lives in men's minds once it is fully realized is clearly intended to be of another order than that conferred by physical prowess alone. It is this utopian quality that has attracted "Western" modernists like Pound and Duncan to the tale of Gassire's lute, whatever their creative misreadings of it may have been.

That there should be several existing "incomplete" avatars of Wagadu points toward the question of human action and the circumstances in which it is carried out. This tale, while certainly based on magical devices like the talking prophet-bird and the lute that sings on its own once it has been sufficiently steeped in blood, is notably free of divine intervention: human flaws, in this particular instance Gassire's vanity, are the motive forces that bring each incarnation of Wagadu to an end and prepare the path for its eventual reappearance. Fundamentally tragic in its emphasis on the cost in suffering entailed by every advance toward a desirable goal, "Gassire's Lute," by narrating only one of the

four examples of the "guilt of man" that contributed to moving history forward, and by calling out the names of each new city at each crucial juncture of the story, conveys a sense of the passing of the ages that resonates with the refrain of Martin Carter's poem "The University of Hunger": "O long is the march of men and long is the life / and wide is the span."[23]

As with many utopian imaginings, the vision of futurity that permeates the story is connected to a memory of a primordial unity, in this instance, less mythic than historical: the *in illo tempore* connected with the founding of Wagadu, not discussed in "Gassire's Lute," was evidently a period when the Soninke people were unified ("in the region between the middle Senegal and the Niger bend in the heartland of ancient Ghana"[24]) prior to its diaspora. Contrary to Fox and Frobenius's assertion that the *Dausi*—and by extension, the single culture whose book it allegedly was—vanished owing to "the culturally destructive influence of Islam and the increasing tendency to think more of agriculture than fighting,"[25] Stephen Belcher states: "The distribution of Soninke speakers supports the hypothesis of a period of unity in the north followed by fragmentation and southerly migration. The cause of such a movement was far more probably the changes in the Saharan climate than particular political conditions."[26] Philip Curtin corroborates this observation: "Soninke oral traditions tell of a time when all Soninke lived together in a place they remember as 'Wagadu,' but the displeasure of the gods stopped the rain for seven full years. 'Wagadu' turned to desert, and the people had to flee to the south."[27] Thereafter, this flight in the face of disaster and drought was to mark the Soninke among other West African peoples as a nomadic nation traveling everywhere in search of the wealth they had possessed and lost.

The desired situation where men and women will carry Wagadu in their hearts and wombs respectively, while certainly involving a restoration of a lost or sundered unity (not to mention the kind of wealth that transcends the strictly monetary), avoids what Wilson Harris would call "predatory coherence" (i.e., a closed totalitarian system that would purge the present of its corruption and deviation from the ancestral past) and enters into the creative, forward-seeking process that Ernst Bloch has ascribed to utopian dreams: "First the content of hope represents itself in ideas, essentially in those of the imagination. The ideas of the imagination stand in contrast to those of recollection, which merely reproduce perceptions of the past and thereby increasingly hide in the past. And in this instance the ideas of the imagination . . . carry on the existing facts toward their future potentiality of their otherness, of their better condition in an anticipatory way."[28]

If the utopian dimension of "Gassire's Lute" is foregrounded, certain elements in the tale may be discerned that are indicative of a critical perspective

toward both its protagonist Gassire and the society in which he lives. This (first) incarnation of Wagadu, Dierra, is clearly in a period of decline, for all the undeniable strength of the men, amply tested in the constant battles waged with neighboring tribes, and the beauty of the women. The Fasa of Wagadu enslave members of another tribe, who are deemed unworthy of being fought with the sword and are referred to throughout as the "doglike Boroma," identified by Frobenius and Fox as the "Bororo-Fulbe," who, ironically, inherited the heroic epic tradition in which "Gassire's Lute," fragment or not, may be included. That the ruler, Nganamba, is depicted as being in his dotage, and that his heir, Gassire, fights ferociously out of thwarted ambition at the king's refusal to die, indicate that the city is out of balance. How else to describe it when a son actively desires his father's death? When the sage pleads with Gassire to set aside his ambition to upset the social hierarchy by renouncing his position in the ruling caste in order to become one of the masters of the word, the griot caste ("now that you can no longer be the second of the first . . . [you] shall be the first of the second"[29]), Gassire openly declares that Wagadu's fate matters nothing to him when compared to the fame in song that will outlive deeds and hence the existence of the city.

Gassire's renunciatory act may be seen as a claim to the transcendent powers of poetry and creativity, as opposed to the destructive, warlike deed. Yet it is from such deeds that the web of the *Dausi* is woven, and what tempts Gassire in the song of the guinea fowl is less aesthetic revelation than the possibility that words confer greater immortality than the transitory actions they describe and praise. When Gassire goes to the smith to commission a lute, the smith warns him that the instrument will only sing—acquire a heart—if it is penetrated with the blood of his blood, even prophesying the death of his own son (although in the end, not one but seven sons ultimately fall in battle and drench the lute with their blood). Again, the prospect of fame blinds Gassire to whatever consequences might be derived from his abdication of his caste role. In Nathaniel Mackey's words: "Our inspiration is also our peril, a risk of inflation whose would-be rise can take us down into hell. The singer of the tale is caught between cosmology (the claim that for better or worse this is how it is) and morality (the claim that were it not for human vices, things would turn out well)."[30]

Manthia Diawara, a Malian cultural critic of Soninke ancestry, rewrites the tale of Gassire's *ngoni* to reflect his own preoccupations with the redemptive power of art within a modernist—and modernizing—context. Gassire becomes in Diawara's version a culture hero who realizes the superiority of art to the necessarily limited and momentary passions that drive individuals under the constraints of tradition. He renounces the strength in war that, while it may

have brought him fame in his lifetime, denied him a crown and led to the death of his sons. When he visits the old man for the first time, he is presented with a stark choice: "either be a warrior for the rest of his life; or change his world."[31] Gassire's entry into the *Dausi*, directly inspired by the song of the bird (here called a parrot), which in this retelling he hears only once, is thus considered a wholly positive act, unshadowed by tragedy. Unlike in Frobenius's version, where he does not weep until the moment the lute begins to sing, Gassire's capacity for emotional response is never at issue in Diawara's version, since he bitterly mourns the death of each of his sons. The end and successive reappearances and disappearances of Wagadu are never mentioned—indeed, the city's fate never enters into consideration, and Gassire's enforced exile from Wagadu never occurs. What Frobenius's version terms "vanity" becomes here a triumph of individuality. In Diawara's shaping of the Gassire tale, art is not specifically marked with the violence of its origins, beyond being a statement of earned transcendence. As Diawara puts it, "Art makes visible the need for change and social transformation,"[32] and it is with the intent of contributing to such far-reaching transformation in an African and a worldwide context that Diawara has creatively altered his ancestral tale. What his version loses in tragic complexity, it gains in redemptive relevance. And given that literary expression is the cornerstone of this study, it is undeniable that artistic creation possesses a unique power, characterized by Wilson Harris as "an extraordinary drama of consciousness whose figurative meaning lies beyond its *de facto* historical climate."[33] But the tale also indicates the limits and pitfalls of that power, well summarized by Mackey: "The artist . . . however much he or she might opt for insulation or exemption, cannot help but suffer the content of the art. This is partly the meaning of the blood feeding Gassire's lute . . . "[34] The context of Mackey's observation is his critical consideration of Robert Duncan's appropriation of the Wagadu legend in his "Passages 24":

> From house to house the armd men go,
> in Santo Domingo hired and conscripted killers
> against the power of an idea, against
> Gassire's lute, the song
> of Wagadu, household of the folk,
> commune of communes
> hidden seed in the hearts of men
> and in each woman's womb hidden.[35]

Mackey's larger point about Duncan's misprision of the tale is well taken; namely, that Duncan carries out an overly facile equation of "Gassire's lute" and the "song / of Wagadu" and resorts to a rather pat invocation of "the folk," with

whom Duncan, poetic magus, rarely concerned himself in his writings. But what is particularly striking in this fragment is Duncan's location of "the song / of Wagadu" in an explicitly Caribbean context. Inspired by anger at the televised images of the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic by U.S. Marines to suppress an armed uprising against a military dictatorship, Duncan intuits a Caribbean incarnation of Wagadu in precisely the island of Hispaniola, that foundational settlement of the Columbian project where "hired and conscripted killers" would descend first upon the Arawaks and Tainos and subsequently on the enslaved Africans brought across the ocean to take their places in the forced-labor enterprise of wealth creation. The West African legend, mediated by the in(ter)ventions first of Frobenius and foremost of Duncan's poetic teacher Ezra Pound (as well as the echo of T. S. Eliot in the first line of the extract), here finds a New World ground, no matter Duncan's tendency to equate Wagadu with a "commune of communes" even though, as the preceding analysis makes clear, this ideal condition is part of an anticipated futurity and is not necessarily assimilable to a transhistorical present.

For, like the "Tale of the Bida Dragon," which Diawara also retells as a foundational diasporic myth of the ever-wandering Soninke, "Gassire's Lute" ultimately speaks of dispersal and tragedy as constituents of the aesthetic dimension. Thus, it can be brought into Relation with the epic of the slave trade and its consequences in the Americas, specifically with the poetic traditions of the Caribbean, where so many enslaved Africans—surely including many Soninke—who survived the terrible crossing ended their voyage or endured the ordeal of "seasoning" prior to being shipped off to other locations on the mainland or in the archipelago. As cities were of great religious, ceremonial, political, and (in a word) civilizational importance to the West and Central Africans caught up in the transatlantic slave trade[36], a tale like "Gassire's Lute" may be seen as emblematic of a memory of lost grandeur as well as a promise of another, non-oppressive future. This emancipated condition would involve an initial imaginative recovery of the city through story, song, and ritual and its possible subsequent rediscovery in the hearts and wombs of men and women creating new forms of community founded not only on resistance, but also on renewal and synthesis.

Wilson Harris conceptualizes this process as "the gateway complex between cultures [that] implies a new catholic, unpredictable threshold that places a far greater emphasis on the integrity of the individual imagination."[37] That Harris should invoke gateways and thresholds indicates that the "catholic unpredictable" Yoruba/Fon trickster deity Esu-Elegbara presides over this transcultural crossing, in which "one must cultivate the art of recognizing significant communications, knowing what is truth and what is falsehood, or else the lessons

of the crossroads—the point where doors open or close, where persons have to make decisions that may forever after affect their lives—will be lost."[38] A poignant commentary on this description of proper conduct toward Esu-Elegbara may be found in the name bestowed on the threshold-spaces (on Gorée Island to the west of Senegal, and in the castles on the Ghana coast) through which so many souls passed into the unknown during the centuries of the slave trade: "Doors of No Return."

Similar thresholds lie within the depths of the phrase "the Middle Passage" and its endured "limbo condition" (which Harris defines as "a metamorphosis or new spatial character born of the Middle Passage"[39]) experienced by those who survived the slave ships. It is an agonized (and agonic) transition through disintegration and breakdown—recall Gassire and the remnants of his family and entourage huddled homeless in the cold of the desert night—into new landscapes fraught in equal measure with terror and possibility, where fragments of memory become seeds of a new creolized consciousness; what Harris calls, with reference to *vodun*, "an intertribal or cross-cultural community of families."[40] In some New World representations, notably in Haiti, Esu-Elegbara is depicted as a crippled, ragged old man, an embodiment of the psychic and physical torments undergone by the African arrivants in the New World. But this outward debilitation actually increases his power, in that he serves as a constant and indispensable reminder of *beginnings*.

In the Guyanese poet David Dabydeen's "El Dorado," a similar grandeur emerges out of attenuation and misery, this time from the deathbed of an indentured Indian "coolie." The first two stanzas establish the sheer ordinariness and squalor of the laborer Juncha's slow death from an undetermined malady of supernatural or immunological cause that has turned his skin yellow; children who gather at the threshold to look are shooed away by their mothers. Suddenly, the third and central stanza is bathed in a luminous aureole as the man passes away: "Skin flaking like goldleaf / Casts a halo round his bed. / He goes out in a puff of gold dust."[41] The startling opening simile of the tercet ironically fuses repellent dermatological symptom with the decaying veneer of, say, a piece of furniture, or perhaps a medieval European altarpiece fallen into disuse. It also conjures up a memory of the legend of *el dorado*, the monarch who (depending on the storyteller) either covered himself daily in gold dust and washed it off by night, or rowed out into the middle of a great lake and washed off the gold as an offering to the gods. In the poem, gold is initially yoked to disease, its gleam the sad commentary on a lifetime of defeat and exploitation as the flaking goldskin vanishes into the waters of time or night. However, the "halo" it casts is not, as cliché would have it, around the man's head but around his bed, which confers, like an early Van Gogh painting, an aura of transfiguration on the

entire scene rather than mere bathetic sainthood on the laborer. The moment of death subverts another cliché: Juncha goes out in a puff of gold dust rather than smoke, but the absent commonplace word acts as an invisible presence. Gold and smoke are linked in a common evanescence—that dust which (in the words of the liturgy) we are and to which we must return.

Having built the bridge between mortality and transcendence, the poem's fourth stanza, each of whose lines begins with a past participle that establishes the solemn finality of each ritual action ("Bathed," "Laid out," "Put out"), describes the loving care with which the women prepare the corpse for burial, in such a way as to confer upon him a new life. He is "bathed like a newborn child" and placed outside to "feel the last sun." With the concluding stanza, this meditation spells out the entire meaning of an individual human existence in conditions of indenture: "They bury him like treasure, / The coolie who worked two shillings all day / But kept his value from the overseer."[42] Juncha, the man turned golden by jaundice, to which his life of unending toil no doubt made him susceptible, dies as he had lived: in secret. Besides alluding to his intrinsic human value, his being buried "like treasure" implies an act carried out in mingled care and haste, as if the women were wary of being spotted by that overseer who controls only appearances. The poet's elision in the third line of the proposition "for" before the phrase "two shillings all day" turns the paltry monetary sum into the direct object of the laborer's work, thereby emphasizing the futility and repetitiveness of the daily round. The man's real value—as opposed to the exchange value materialized in his wage—is something of which he is sufficiently aware to keep deliberately withheld from the overseer, whose control he thus subverts.

The El Dorado legend in its numerous variants has, for writers like V. S. Naipaul, become synonymous with futility and defeat, undeniable elements of Dabydeen's poem. But insofar as it is the product of a misheard or falsified tale, told either by an alleged eyewitness to a willing listener who disseminated what he had heard to others, or a native (dis)informant whose words were (deliberately or not) misunderstood, and subsequently embellished by the delusions of participants in the conquistadorial enterprise, this invisible yet always sought-after city is the substance of a genuinely intercultural Caribbean myth. If it is not wholly Amerindian in its provenance, neither is it European. What is more, the substance of this myth, which has shown remarkable staying power in both its creative and destructive dimensions (both of which are inseparable from the circumstances of its birth), speaks eloquently to what Antonio Benítez Rojo has discerned as a larger quest: "the persistent discourse that travels toward a rediscovery of the divided self, or better, toward a Utopian territory with an Arcadia where one might reconstitute his Being, might all be explained in

relation to the known cultural fragmentation which, because of the Plantation, is the experience of every man and woman in the Caribbean."[43] To speak of El Dorado, then, is already to search for it. And El Dorado itself, like a land caravel that "seems to move and transplant itself within the great rain forests that lie between the Amazon and the Orinoco,"[44] travels through space and time, eluding fixity, vanishing and reappearing like Wagadu.

As the circumstances surrounding El Dorado's entry into the Caribbean imaginary make clear, there is no single *topos*, no originary source, to which its name can be conclusively attached. Born from the heroic questing tales that drove Don Quixote mad, El Dorado, like the Holy Grail of Christian legend, is always "out there," in an ever-shifting location. During the sixteenth century, it was sought after in Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia, and the Guyanas, and warred over by French, Dutch, Spaniards, and English; even modern scholars who try to sort out the various accounts surrounding the city end up with conflicting data and conclusions that compound rather than clarify the mystery. The subjunctive voice dominates these studies.

The tale of the mysterious Spaniard variously called "Juan Martines" (by Sir Walter Ralegh), Juan Martín de Albujar (by John Hemming), Albujar (by V. S. Naipaul), and Juan Martínez (by Charles Nicholl) is a case in point. It was reported that in the course of several years' wandering, during which he lived among the Indians as one of them, this man had actually seen Manoa (equated with El Dorado, but as Neil Whitehead notes, it was the name of a gold-trading tribe in the region). However, according to the chronicler Juan de Castellanos (cited by Hemming), "Martínez" discounted the entire story as a fraud. Since that did not jibe with the desires of the conquistadores, the story was simply changed to something straight out of a *canción de gesta*, with the wanderer blindfolded and led through the rain forest to the magic city, where he lived for several months in the monarch's palace. Upon his departure, he was laden down with treasure, which—it was conveniently claimed—had later been stolen from him. The tale of Martínez's life and death, as told to Ralegh by his aging Spanish competitor for El Dorado's wealth, Antonio de Berrio, fired Ralegh's imagination and spurred on his own unsuccessful journeys. Naipaul paraphrases de Berrio's story as Ralegh allegedly heard it, but he does so from Berrio's perspective, and having given that account, ends up questioning "Albujar's" very existence, given that all accounts of him were second-hand. When the tale of El Dorado began to be disseminated, discussed, and embellished by the conquistadores, accounts of its existence tended to be attributed to unnamed "Indians," so the corroborative presence of a European, even one who, if indeed he ever existed, had allegedly "gone native," would therefore serve the tale's audience as a guarantee of veracity.

El Dorado's instability could well find a place in Italo Calvino's parallel universe of invisible cities, alternately occupying the spaces allocated to "two species . . . those that through the years and the changes continue to give their form to desires, and those in which desires either erase the city or are erased by it."[45] Wilson Harris has seen vestiges of the quest for El Dorado in the saga of the Guyanese pork-knockers, black and mixed-race prospectors wandering the mountains and hinterlands in search of gold. Harris has found another link in the People's Temple saga of 1978, where under the leadership of a charismatic San Francisco preacher, thousands of mostly black devotees who had founded a "utopian" settlement in the Guyanese jungle were forced by their leader and his henchmen, fearing reprisals for a murder of an American Congressman at a jungle airstrip, to commit mass suicide by drinking a soft drink laced with cyanide. Nearly twenty years later, in 1995, hundreds of millions of gallons of this same poison, used to extract gold from water, would leach into Guyana's Essequibo River, killing untold numbers of fish and wildlife. For as it turns out—and as the Amerindians of Ralegh's time would surely have known—there is indeed much gold in the region, although the "cities" that in the late twentieth century have sprung up around its extraction are squalid and violent camps ripped out of the rain forest and populated with venal dreamers as obsessive as their conquistadorial forebears. And in a particularly macabre, blackly humorous stroke of historical irony, "El Dorado" is the name of a Venezuelan prison on the Guyana border, where during a riot in 2000, 29 prisoners were brutally slain by a group of their fellow inmates.

Given its legacy, then, El Dorado can be interpreted as a hallucinatory metaphor for the looting and ravaging of the Americas by the conquistadores, which would later find its true incarnation in the form of the "city of sugar"—the Plantation—built and worked by those Africans referred to in reified mercantilist terms as "black gold," "sacks of coal," and "ebony wood." Like the New World, El Dorado was perceived by its would-be discoverers as a static entity that would only really exist when it existed for the Europeans; until then, it would passively await the fulfillment of its destiny. In V. S. Naipaul's gloomy words—directed more at the Spanish than the English arm of the enterprise—El Dorado is inherently delusory, and its first and foremost victims are its inventors: "Untouched by imagination or intellect, great actions become mere activity; it is part of the Spanish waste. El Dorado becomes an abstraction; deaths become numbers."[46]

It can certainly be said, beyond the obvious matter of the name, that the city of El Dorado, as John Hemming has noted, "was the creation of the Spaniards themselves and not of any 'itinerant Indian,'"[47] though Neil Whitehead, in the context of a rehabilitation of the documentary validity of Sir Walter Ralegh's

narrative, claims that the tale is more or less a conflation of various indigenous practices connected to an "ancient tradition of gold working in northern South America . . . with all the attendant metallurgical knowledge that this implies, and the diverse symbolic and ritual uses to which such golden metals were put."[48] And Ralegh himself, with his grounding in Neo-Platonism and his acquaintance with John Dee, the alchemist and (according to some) putative model for the character of Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, introduces an intellectual and speculative element into the El Dorado legend. Following his return in 1595 from his first voyage to Guiana, Ralegh says in a letter to Sir Robert Cecil, "What becomes of Guiana I much desire to hear, whether it pass for history or a fable."[49]

While this is not the place to attempt a comprehensive or even partial account of the numerous quests for El Dorado, two episodes in particular merit comment. The first concerns the ill-fated 1542 expedition of the German nobleman Philip von Hutten, which followed the directions given by various Indian informants and guides who spoke of enormous towns possessing large caches of gold. When it reached the outskirts of the territory of the Omaguas, they "saw a town of disproportionate size, quite close. Although they were quite near, they could not see the far end of it. It was compact and well-ordered and in the middle was a house that greatly surpassed the rest in size and height."[50] Lured by the expectations of gold not only there but in larger towns that according to their guides lay beyond this one, the Europeans unsuccessfully launched an attack against what turned out to be a martial people, and were forced to turn back. On the journey homeward, the leaders lost their lives in an ambush by a rival expedition. The enduring mystery is: what did von Hutten and his men actually see, and what did they think they saw? Indeed, does the discrepancy matter? Perhaps they exaggerated the danger facing them in the persons of the combative Omagua Indians because they did not want to risk disappointment if the reality were not made to the measure of their dreams; in which case, behind the caution would lurk a will to renunciation. Or, as is more likely, that danger was, in fact, formidable and the settlement indeed grand by comparison with what they had been accustomed to seeing in their trek through the rain forest. Would this "El Dorado," in the end, refuse to abandon itself to their plunder? Antonio Benítez Rojo claims, without offering any supporting evidence, that von Hutten and his fellows did indeed see Manoa, and that they "did manage to catch a shattering vision of this marvelous space, but only for an instant."[51] While this may be an instance of critical fancy, belied by the pragmatic realities of von Hutten's situation, it does testify to the continuing hold of the *doradista* fable on even scholars of the region.

The second revelatory episode is the "mountaine of Chrystall" supposedly seen by Ralegh from a great distance while on his journey homeward, and which he claims not to have had the time, propitious conditions, or manpower to attempt to approach, let alone scale:

> it appeared like a white Church towre of an exceeding height. There falleth over it a mightie river which toucheth no part of the side of the mountaine, but rusheth over the toppe of it, and falleth to the grounde with a terrible noyse and clamor, as if 1000 great belles were knockt one against another. I think there is not in the worlde so straunge an overfall, nor so wonderfull to beholde: *Berreo* told mee that it hath Diamondes and other precious stones on it, and that they shined very farre off: but what it hath I know not . . . [52]

Charles Nicholl, who has attempted to retrace the path of Ralegh and other explorers toward where they thought El Dorado was, has determined that this mountain is an invention inserted by Ralegh into his travel narrative (whose intention was to drum up financial support for another journey to the region that would enable the English to take conclusive possession of the Guianas and Manoa most of all): "[it] is really only a refraction of what he has heard, first from Berrio, who had not himself seen it either, and now from the Indians of Emeria, some of whom doubtless had."[53] On one level of interpretation, this episode is another example of how the El Dorado myth was cobbled together from an assortment of oral legends, written invention, and tantalizingly evanescent geographies. Nicholl locates similarities between Ralegh's description and the mountain peaks of Roraima and Auyán Tepuy (known as "Devil Mountain"), only to conclude that the explorer was borrowing an Arawak account of "the extraordinary table mountains of the Gran Sábana,"[54] while Hemming, more matter-of-fact, omits the entire episode from his analysis. Characteristically, Naipaul, ever disdainful of dreams and fantasies of all kinds, entitles his chapter on Ralegh's first voyage in search of El Dorado, "The Mountain of Crystal," dismissing this fabulous sighting as a delusive emblem of a hopeless quest undertaken by a writer whose dreams of action, conquest, and riches betrayed a death wish that would at length be gratified with his terms of imprisonment in the Tower of London and ultimate execution.

On a metaphorical level, however, this mountain, supposedly sighted during a detour up the Caroni, can be seen as an incarnation of El Dorado itself, and as a testimony to how Ralegh, under the spell of the environment and his own imaginative reactions, was able unconsciously to articulate the elements of a cross-cultural perspective. That this tale should appear close to the end of his narrative indicates that he meant his readers to pay particular attention to this wonder less in terms of the riches it might promise—for while he reports Berrio's claim of immense mineral wealth on that mountain, he acknowledges that

he was not moved to pursue that trail—than of some less immediately graspable meaning, implicit in the adjectives "straunge" and "wonderfull" with which he designates the "overfall." After all, why mention such a mountain in the first place, particularly as his narrative as a whole contains only hearsay evidence—which he hopes his readers will find conclusive—of the existence of Manoa and its trove of gold? Further, although he recounts his Spanish rival Berrio's contention that the gleam of the diamonds could be seen from a great distance, he claims not to have seen it from his vantage point, while not entirely dismissing the possibility of its existence. Perhaps this episode is a way for Ralegh, the would-be possessor of the Empire of Guiana (which after all is "bewtiful" as well as "large and rich"), to articulate his possession/seduction by the landscape, an inchoate sense of himself as the "golden man" and object of his own heroic quest or spiritual pilgrimage.

By comparing the mountain to a church tower, Ralegh is already discerning in the living landscape a kind of sacred architecture that acts simultaneously as a bridge between earth and sky, human and divine (similar to the Mountain of Purgatory in Christian mythology), and as a materialized musical form, a "language akin to music threaded into space and time which is prior to human discourse";[55] the seeming chaos of the cascade's "terrible noyse and clamor" is rendered culturally comprehensible though no less monstrously sublime to Ralegh's readers by the sonic image of "1.000 great belles" colliding with each other as the water with the rocks. Wilson Harris, who spent long periods as a land surveyor in uncharted rain forest territory, has written of "the sleeping yet singing rocks of ancient Amerindian legend,"[56] and whether or not he actually hears them, Raleigh intuits these dream songs. The waterfall, which shelters the mountain without touching it, creates a kind of amniotic enclosure, a "womb of space" in Harris's phrase, out of which might emerge new imaginative creations—for example, those "cities [which] have come to nestle in branches of clay or stone in valleys or mountains"[57] of which Harris speaks.

Given Ralegh's own intellectual inclinations, an alchemical dimension to this invented sighting cannot be ruled out, It is one of the merits of Nicholl's analysis to devote some attention to the relationship between Ralegh's search for El Dorado and the arduous "chymical journey" toward the integrated personality required of all alchemists. At the same time, as Neil Whitehead has astutely remarked, exclusive concentration on the culturally rooted motivations of Raleigh's search for El Dorado tends to elide the complexities of his encounters with the indigenous peoples, whom, as the *Discoverie* testifies, he was able to see as sophisticated political actors and interlocutors. Following a journey that—beyond Ralegh's own rather sanitized account of some of the chicanery and double-dealing involved in it, which Naipaul pitilessly exposes—was far

from propitious (no gold was brought back), it would have been understandable for Ralegh to insert into his narrative, even as a compensatory move, some clues to the mystical/existential aspect of his travels.

These clues are made manifest in Ralegh's "The passionate mans Pilgrimage,"[58] a poem written in 1604 during one of his confinements in the Tower of London, at a moment in which he expected imminent execution on trumped-up charges of conspiracy. (In the event, and following a pardon and a disastrous expedition to Guiana, this execution would be carried out fourteen years later.) Here, the journey of exploration is refigured as a pilgrimage of the soul toward a heavenly destination, whose imagery echoes the poet's earlier description of the never-seen mountain of crystal: "the siluer mountaines / Where spring the Nectar fountaines"; the "Christall buckets" from which the welcoming saints slake the thirst of the hosts of pilgrim souls with draughts of immortality; and the description of the road to heaven as "Strewde with Rubies thicke as grauell, / Seelings of Diamonds, Saphire floores, / High walles of Corall and Pearle Bowers." This jewel-bedecked pathway with its palatial dazzle stands in striking contrast to the negative qualities to which the supreme justice of Christ "the Kings Attorney" in the hall of heaven is counterposed, and which parody the tendency of utopias to be described in terms of the evils absent from their realm: "no corrupted voyces brall, / No Conscience molten into gold, / Nor forg'd accusers bought and sold, / No cause deferd, nor vaine spent Jorney." Obviously, given the circumstances of the poem's composition, both self-serving pride and personal bitterness against those who have been suborned into falsely accusing the poet are bound to manifest themselves; what is noteworthy is that Ralegh makes reference to the deleterious powers of corruption, gold, forgery, and buying and selling to indict his prosecutors and judges and the narrowly mercantile spirit that drives them. Disillusion is here less the result of a vain and hopeless hunt for riches (Naipaul's perspective) than of repeated encounters with human greed and folly that obstruct the spiritual fulfillment of the quest.

On the basis of this poem, it is possible to conclude that the "gold" that was the object of Ralegh's venture was indeed linked more to the alchemical process of progressive experimental stages of purification and refinement of base matter, and to pagan notions of the Golden Age as an era in which there was no monetary value, no process of buying and selling, attached to gold. For Ralegh, with regard to El Dorado—which he described near the beginning of his *Discoverie* as "for the greatnes, for the richest, and for the excellent seate, it farre exceedeth any [Citie] of the world"[59]—the voyage is all, and fulfillment is found through the arduous completion of the trials of the inland *periplus* and the entry (as much symbolic as real) into the bejeweled mountain palace of the Golden King and an attendant spiritual liberation. And Ralegh's first request at the beginning

of the poem, "Give me my Scallop shell of quiet," which introduces a sequence of desired objects necessary for him to embark on his final pilgrimage, sets up a visual equivalence between the enclosing waterfall of the mountain of crystal and the amulet "Scallop shell of quiet" symbolic of the pilgrim's journey. However, at the same time as this more spiritualized, less materialistic side to Ralegh's expedition is acknowledged, the temptation to idealize it must be resisted, given Ralegh's tendency to sanitize his more ruthlessly pragmatic motives and actions. What matters is the complexity of his worldview, torn between entrepreneurial expectations and a creative imagination by and large lacking in his cohorts.

The image of the nameless Golden Man—itself an anomaly, in that cities are usually gendered as female (cf. Wagadu and Calvino's panoply of invisible cities)—thus represents a culmination of sorts. It resonates with Edenic notions that by Ralegh's time had become firmly lodged in the European imaginary. During the first wave of trans-Atlantic exploration, such paradisal hopes had become cognate with certain idyllic projections onto the indigenous peoples of the Americas, to which were contrasted assorted fearsome stereotypes of cannibals and acephalic man-monsters, which Ralegh accepts and even tries to ground empirically. But El Dorado also speaks to the desires for renewal and rejuvenation that inspired the pagan revival of the Renaissance.

In his monograph *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*, Harry Levin cites Giorgio Vasari's description of the lavish pageant held in Florence to mark the accession to power of Lorenzo de Medici in 1468, nearly three-quarters of a century before the appearance of the first printed account of El Dorado by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo:

> From the center of the [triumphal chariot of the age or epoch of gold] rose a great globe in the form of the world, upon which a man lay prostrate on his face as if dead, his armor all rusted, and from the open fissure of whose sundered back emerged a small boy all naked and gilded, representing the revival of the golden age and the end of the iron age, which expired and was reborn through the election of the pope . . . I should not omit the fact that the gilded infant, who was the child of a baker, died shortly afterward through the suffering that he endured in order to gain ten crowns.[60]

Levin remarks that Vasari was little concerned with the fate of the child. The boy had represented the future golden age, even if for a brief moment and small sum of money (which would nevertheless have purchased a great many golden loaves of bread from his father). This act of human sacrifice is described and carried out with striking casualness. Levin observes ironically, "Whether the gold paint poisoned the poor child or caused his body to suffocate, it must have taken a certain amount of incidental sacrifice to make a Florentine holiday."[61] In a sense, it is appropriate that the moment of death occur offstage (literally,

in an act of *obscenity*), as the existence of the boy emerging from the corpse of the Iron Age is less important than the allegorical image he provisionally enacts. His triumph is a death sentence akin to the fate of those youths in certain pre-Columbian societies of the Americas who for a given length of time were richly garbed and worshiped as divine before their hearts were torn out and fed to the sun to ensure the continued movement of time. But the golden Florentine boy's death is incidental, not central, to the pageant, though in both cases the purpose of sacrifice is to enable the life of the city to continue. Though the triumphal car aims to affirm precisely the opposite, this episode corroborates the cynical maxim of the English Renaissance man Francis Bacon, "Iron commands gold," and indeed it is a dramatic example of the "alter-Renaissance" lurking within an ostensibly glorious celebration of the Renaissance spirit.

It is worth comparing this performance with what was said to have been the ritual of the Golden King of El Dorado. The Golden King also goes about clothed in powdered gold, but his life is never endangered. In one version, he washes off at night what he puts on in the morning. In another, as part of his investiture as King, he is rowed out into the center of a lake (precisely *which* lake is in dispute), where he immerses himself, while his retinue tosses jewels and precious stones into the lake as people on shore chant. In this ritual, wealth is accumulated precisely in order to be squandered in a solemn act of expenditure: from being ornamental—at once more and less than a garment—gold dust is transmuted at nightfall into solar dust that vanishes into the heavens, or into glistening sand settling at the bottom of a lake. It is as if the exchange value of gold were exorcised by these ceremonies (and it is true that, as elsewhere in the Americas, the indigenous peoples in the areas variously designated as harboring El Dorado used gold as ornament and not as medium of exchange). On the one hand, this ritual served to lend credence to the conquistadorial notion that the Indians were living in a blissful state of nature from which all idea of *meum et tuum* was absent. But the legend's communal foundation, be it in a golden city with princely chambers whose floors were covered in gold shavings, or in a lakeside gathering, also reveals a longing of the Europeans for similar leisure and a wealth transcending lucre. It thus opens up what Harris would call a breach in the destructively one-sided coherence of imperial exploration and its attendant reified dualities like conqueror/conquered, civilized/savage, and so on. If, according to the dominant myth of the Christian West, "the Biblical story commences in a garden and concludes in a city,"[62] then the myth of El Dorado, in combining both garden and city, points beyond the Christian *telos*.

In *Tradition and the West Indian Novel*, Harris terms the legend of El Dorado an "open myth" whose fullest implications—its "residual pattern of illuminating correspondences"[63]—can best be explored in the contemporary era. Guyanese

poet and scholar Mark McWatt sees Harris's frequent recourse to images of El Dorado less in terms of an actual historical project than as a presentation of "illuminating adjustments of attitude and perspectives, because it calls into witness other myths and symbols within the context of literature in order to liberate the mind from the distress of loss and abandonment . . . "[64] While this insight has unquestionable validity in a literary-critical context, it tends to understate Harris's own active concern with the numerous psychic and political dangers to the survival of humanity and the planet. For Harris, a refigured and extended mythopoetic process must set forth, if not actual blueprints for communities (which would only reproduce the pitfalls of European utopias), then at least the liberating possibilities of cross-cultural consciousness and creative work. The knotted complexities of a body of work like Wilson Harris's often prevent readers from seeing the practical urgency that animates it. C. L. R. James's deep affinities with Harris likely proceeded from his own recognition that both of them were pursuing liberatory projects grounded in historical as well as poetic imagination.

While McWatt is certainly correct in affirming that "the myth of Eldorado [sic] has more to do with the limits of human desire than with a real golden city,"[65] Harris carries out his revisionary intervention into the myth in order to transcend the previous limitations both of the "golden city" and the human desires that fueled its elusive apparitions. The character Francisco Bone, in a letter to Wilson Harris that prefaces the novel *Jonestown*, posits a "Memory theatre" through which long-vanished worlds are resurrected in a carnival context, and, with specific reference to Guyana, speculates that "Elusive El Dorado (City of Gold? City of God?), whose masthead is consumed and refashioned on sacrificial altars in every country across the globe, may have a buried harbour in that compass or 'land of waters'!"[66] Here, in a complex series of metaphors, Harris figures the golden city as a ship sailing through a landscape of what he refers to elsewhere as "composite epic." This ship has many possible identities—it could be a political ship of state, a slave ship, a *timehri* petroglyph fashioned by a long-vanished Arawak on one of Guyana's singing riverine rocks, or a ship of fools or drunken boat similar to Rimbaud's (a comparison Harris evokes elsewhere). Most likely, given Harris's metamorphic layerings and refusal of univocality, this phantom ship has elements of all these images. Its synecdochal masthead becomes a sacrificial relic that is universally "consumed" (a word with overtones of fire) and "refashioned" (resurrected, not as gods are, but rebuilt as an artifact, doubtless preparatory to future voyages). And the land of Guyana—whose name derives from an Arawak word meaning "land of waters"—is revealed as the possible location of one among countless submerged resting places or "harbours." In short, all four elements (and, by implication, all points of that

compass which is Guyana) come into play in Bone/Harris's statement, charting a fractal (one could as well say microtonal) course of discovery potentially delinked from acknowledged exploitative legacies.

The center of the "land of waters" is in constant motion, propelling the El Dorado ship into new spatio-temporal territories—not only Lezama's imaginary eras but the transcultural process described by Kamau Brathwaite: "whenever two empires meet . . . the result of their *frisson* and fusion is a creole event. And . . . they can live together in the same space, even if they come from two different time centres. . . . Their cultures are informing each other, exchanging information."[67] A moment of this permeating is encapsulated in Harris's pun "City of God? City of Gold?" (which, since he also uses it in the essay "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," needs to be taken as more than a mere *trouvaille*). By bringing the thought of the North African St. Augustine, shaper of Christian doctrine, into the Caribbean and making his vision of Heavenly and Earthly Cities cognate with the conquistadorial dream, Harris briefly illuminates the sea changes undergone in the Caribbean by a foundational myth of the Christian West (a myth, not so incidentally, formulated in the same continent that would bear the brunt of the depredations wreaked by some of the doctrine's ostensibly most zealous adherents). At the same time, Harris's act of juxtaposition "reverses the 'given' condition of the past, freeing oneself from catastrophic idolatry to one's own historical and philosophical conceptions and misconceptions which may bind one within a statuesque present or a false future."[68] The utopia of a canonical work like Augustine's *City of God* tends to be locked into doctrinal rigidities by Christian orthodoxy. When read "in light of the Caribbean," this text, the product of a moment in the long decline of the Roman Empire, can open up new rapports between Heavenly and Earthly Cities.

First and foremost, Brathwaite's poetic aphorism invoked earlier, "Rome burns / and our slavery begins," serves to contextualize the Caribbean relocation of the City of God away from its so-called Western possessors or usurpers. In an interview, Brathwaite points to "the number of black people that come up . . . from northern Africa and colonize the imagination of Europe. . . . Rome in fact becomes the metropolis of the modern Caribbean."[69] Augustine, born of mixed Berber and Roman ancestry in what is now Tunisia, could be seen as one such "colonizer." *City of God* was written during a time of crisis, when Rome was in fact burning as a result of its invasion in 410 CE by Alaric's Goths, who sacked the city while sparing some of its holiest Christian sites (since they themselves were Christians). Broadly stated, it seeks to defend the Heavenly City sojourning in Rome against the paganism and cruelty of the Earthly City that, by and large, is coeval with Rome. For the purposes of this study, two

particularly revelatory passages in Book XV will serve as this City's introit into the Caribbean imaginary.

St. Augustine conceives of the Heavenly City as emerging within the world of the Earthly City, of which it is simultaneously the negation and transcendence. Haunted by the constructs of his former Manichaeanism, from which he broke dramatically, to the point of actively abetting the persecution of his erstwhile friends and co-religionists, St. Augustine oscillates between a proto-dialectic that situates and intermingles both cities in the sphere of human conduct, and a stark dualism. In the former, the Earthly City is seen as the totality of the given and the Heavenly City as "a kind of shadow and prophetic image"[70] of the eschatological City in its eternal, ideal form which its inhabitants, living according to divine will though not without bearing the burden of sin bequeathed by the Adamic fall from grace, carry with them on their pilgrimage through the world. Augustine's dualism, on the other hand, is crystallized in the following definition: "By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil."[71]

Book XV begins with an exegesis of two of the tales included in *Genesis*: Cain's murder of his brother Abel and the divinely induced pregnancy of Sarah, the aged, previously barren wife of the patriarch Abraham, followed by the subsequent banishment of the slave woman Hagar, who has given birth to Abraham's child. Augustine interprets both these stories of conflict as allegories of the Heavenly and Earthly City.

The story of Cain and Abel is a narrative of reversals: Cain the agriculturalist lives a settled life, bound to the soil and the changing of the seasons, while Abel the pastoralist is compelled by his herds to wander from place to place. Cain is the firstborn, but his first fruits, peacefully obtained from the earth, are disdained by God, whereas the younger's offerings, ritually slaughtered, are given pride of place, and Cain is rebuked by God for protesting his discrepant treatment. Cain kills Abel as if Abel were one of his own cattle, a resemblance accentuated by Cain's insolent challenge to God (and incidental reaffirmation of his primogeniture), "Am I my brother's keeper?" In other words, am I supposed to keep constant watch over my brother in the same way as he does his herds? Abel's blood "cries out" from the soil, which hitherto Cain has tilled and to which his dead brother has paid little attention. God punishes Cain by branding him with a mark, which upon Cain's pleas is transformed into a sign of holiness as well as horror, and condemning him to wander through the world. Yet it is Cain who founds the first city. By bringing the story of Cain and Abel into relation with another foundational fratricide, the murder of Remus by Romulus, his twin and eponymous co-founder of ancient Rome, Augustine

points to civilization's origins in a primal crime and, attentive to the reversals that compose the tale, turns it into a parable of the redemption through predestined grace of those who are strangers in the world yet eventual citizens of the celestial Kingdom. "Scripture tells us that Cain founded a city, whereas Abel, as a pilgrim, did not found one. For the City of the Saints is up above, although it produces citizens here below, and in their persons the City is on pilgrimage until the time of its kingdom come."[72]

This image of the citizens of an invisible city wandering the world with its promised fulfillment in their hearts resonates with the futurity that will witness the passing of Wagadu into its final incarnation. Yet a thousand years would elapse before Augustine's vision, itself a product of historical crisis, would undergo its own ironic reversals. The "pilgrim" Europeans founded what in Augustinian terms could be called an Earthly City in the Americas—a city of the God that was Gold—whose actuality opened up a radical disjuncture between a dystopic colonial Plantation-machine and the pastoral *locus amenus* of the Earthly Paradise that Columbus imagined having seen on the South American continent. But in so doing, these self-proclaimed heirs to the Christian tradition unwittingly surrendered Abel's birthright to Augustine's fellow Africans, whom they conscripted into a diasporic uprooting and involuntary pilgrimage. Augustine's own words could well serve to indict the imperial partners in this enterprise of *wealth creation*: "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale?"[73] And the founders of this Plantation-machine-city branded its builders with the twinned curses of Cain and Ham, with the aim of turning them into atomized, subhuman automatons: anti-citizens of no city.

Immediately following his discussion of the tale of Cain and Abel, Augustine undertakes an allegorical reading, as remarkable for what it elides as for what it includes, of an Old Testament tale: that of the two sons of the patriarch Abraham, one birthed by his aged wife Sarah, and the other by his slave and concubine Hagar. Throughout her life Sarah was unable to bear a child, so, out of solicitude for her husband, she offered the slave woman as a surrogate. But following the birth of Hagar's child, Sarah, through divine grace, had a child bestowed upon her. Since she was a "free-born" woman and the legitimate (first) wife of Abraham, she asserted the primogeniture rights of her son Isaac as superior to those of his elder half-brother Ishmael, and successfully prevailed uipon her husband to banish Hagar and Ishmael to the desert

Developing observations gleaned from the Apostle Paul's commentary on the story in the *Galatians* book of the New Testament, Augustine considers Ishmael and Isaac as respective incarnations of two covenants: the Earthly City that stands as a promise or shadow of the Heavenly City, and the fulfillment of that promise, which will occur beyond the reach of fallen nature and its burden

of original sin and lead to the formation of "a community where there is no love of a will that is personal and, as we may say, private, but a love that rejoices in a good that is at once shared by all and unchanging—a love that makes 'one heart' out of many . . . "[74] In this etherealized interpretation, the condition of "slavery" stands for a symbolization, an anticipation of that which is yet to be, and not for something that is free and sufficient unto itself, having emerged from the shadows into the light, to borrow Augustine's metaphor.

However, as is commonly the case with Biblical exegetes, Augustine does not concern himself with the human drama of the story, in this case the ability of the free-born woman to arbitrarily—and, one might add, cruelly—determine the fate of those who are in servitude to her once she has achieved her desire of motherhood, and the sequel to Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion. In the Old Testament, mother and son wander in the desert until God bestows wealth upon them—a dispensation consonant with Augustine's interpretation insofar as the wealth in question is material, not spiritual. But the true fulfillment of Ishmael's destiny lies outside the Bible: nearly two hundred years after Augustine's death, the Sacred Book of the new religion of Islam would give a fresh twist to the tale and not only restore Ishmael (now Ismail) unto Abraham's heritage, but make him into one of the prophets, on equal footing with his brother Ishaq, and the co-builder with his father of the house of Allah—in other words, a potential citizen of another Heavenly City. Yet Hagar and her story remain absent from the untroubled Koranic account, which stresses patriarchal continuity at the expense of a female presence.

What remains suggestive, albeit ultimately simplistic, in the Augustinian allegory is the association of slavery with some kind of anticipatory consciousness—limited in the sense that it can *only* be anticipatory, since fulfillment lies perpetually outside its grasp and ken. From this one can with some justice extrapolate that, for Augustine, the social condition of slavery could be seen as an intensification of Adam's curse, more or less attributable to the vagaries of Fortune. Freedom is ever outside this world, regardless of the degree to which it can be conceptualized. The pilgrimage of those who carry the City of God within them ends only with time itself. The bridge between pilgrims and celestial citizens appears with the Last Judgment that destroys all vestiges of the Earthly City. This is where Augustine's vision, for all its grandeur, petrifies into its own dogmatic certitudes, asserting a necessary (one could even say inevitable) split between sacred and secular, heaven and earth. Where Light alone reigns, there is no place for Shadow.

Against the delusory splendor of the Augustinian heaven, there is the voice of Wilson Harris's madwoman Ruth, a descendant of and sister to Hagar who has lost her child: "My child's death . . . is the quintessential hollow in the currency

of Light we have all worshipped as an absolute deity. Give us new Shadow, give us new Shadow, within the jaws of Light."[75] With the restoration of Shadow to Light, the promise of establishing connections between the two cities in the "kingdom of this world" emerges from the agonic drama of pilgrimage enacted in the Caribbean by the enslaved Africans and from the cultural memories with which they sought to ground themselves, first in the slave-ship City of Dis, and second in the crushing mechanisms of the Plantation-city. Not only did the African arrivants shoulder the buried legacy and living landscape of the massacred Amerindians whom they were brought to replace on the colonial *corvées*, theirs were the paradigmatic achievements that cleared the path for specifically Caribbean ways of imagining.

If vanity, falsehood, and greed—human failings that had brought each of Wagadu's incarnations to an end—had, through slavery, conquest, and exploitation, been erected into the cornerstones of a *system of accumulation*, then the enslaved Africans in the New World would, through artistically and philosophically grounded forms of dissension, embark on the long and perilous process of realizing Wagadu in its final splendor. And as this struggle unfolded over centuries, shaping and being shaped by the conditions of its emergence in the New World/Caribbean, the lineaments of the lost African city would be wrested from memory, revivified in and by an interplay of clandestine spiritual practices, conspiracies, revolts, maroon societies, wars of independence and respect and culture, migrations and other journeys, mass strikes, and aesthetic creations in all genres and fields.

Kamau Brathwaite explains the resilience and transforming expanse of the transported/transplanted African cultures in the New World in terms of the attunement of these cultures to the elemental breath and bone-structure seed/core he calls *nam*: "the word we give to the indestructible and atomic core of man's culture. . . . We are talking . . . of an indwelling, man-inhabiting (not hibiting) organic force (*orisha, loa*) capable of cosmological extension . . . which is or can be at the same time reductive like unto the shards of Kalahari sand."[76] Even the slightest breath bespeaks creative power, the *flatus dei*. The gods travel with their votaries, imprisoned in the holds and on the quarterdecks, and to a certain extent *share their tribulations* even while in a sense presiding with divine stoicism, if not indifference, over extremity, privation, disease, and mass death.

The pliancy—from utmost reduction to cosmic reach—of what Brathwaite often calls the "capsule" belief systems of the enslaved enabled the very integration of these traumatic experiences first into an initiatory framework (limbo) and subsequently into the ritual practices and mythic tales elaborated in the New World. It suffices to cite a single example pertaining to the sea goddess Yemayá: "One of her most singular avatars is that of Olokún, herself a deity who

lives at the bottom of the sea tied to a chain, the sight of whom can bring sudden death."[77] And further, from another source: "According to some, Obbatalá [creator of earth and sculptor of humankind] keeps [Olokún] tied to the bottom of the sea lest he destroy the world; in whatever form, all the riches of the ocean are his. Only in dreams is he seen without his mask, and then he appears with a round face marked with tribal scars and very white, bulging eyes, with brown pupils and plucked eyelashes."[78] It is not hard to see in this powerful androgynous orisha the presiding deity of the underwater city of the dead—cognate with Guinée/Ginen in Vodou—to which so many, living and dead, were sent. They too were often bound with chains to make them sink faster, particularly when a ship from a rival maritime power was seen approaching. Olokún is chained because, as the concentration of all the fear, rage, and anguish of the dead, her appearance in all her power would be literally impossible to endure; by confining her unadorned manifestations to dreams, she serves as a reminder to the survivors and their descendants of all the uncounted, nameless ancestors who never made the crossing, but who still exist as spiritual presences.

To consider the Middle Passage as a pilgrimage—keeping in mind Brathwaite's observation that "it is the dispossessed, les damnés de la terre, who know *orisha* best"[79]—one should recall Ralegh's "scallop shell of quiet" and set it in counterpoint with Kongo burial practices carried over to the New World, wherein seashells are said to enclose the soul in eternal quietude and thus in some way keep the dead from harming the living. Here is a more tranquil and placatory restraint than Olokún's chain. "The spiral is another symbol of the soul's endless journey—hence the importance attached to seashells in Kongo burials."[80] The seashell also functions as a symbolic materialization of "the capsule that made the journey of the culture of the circle possible: the hold of the slave-ship as creative space,"[81] and as a token of eternal return to the source (much could be said about the links between this symbol and the Caribbean *baroque*).

In the great Afro-diasporic religions, the ancestors, the spirits of the dead, are considered to be in a sense more alive than the living, as they have gone "ahead" into another realm: the magic city where the world began, suspended in its alter-, altered- or *altar*-state awaiting the drum-call to manifest itself for a charged moment in time and space. From there, they send messages to those who will eventually follow them. Contrary to the eternal forward motion of chronometric time, these repositories of culture and faith articulate a "tidalectical" (Brathwaite) sense of time, where past enters into present in a constant ebb-and-flow exchange. As Joan Dayan has shown, the *lived* past and its memories—that which is called "history"—were integral to this exchange: "Gods were born in the memories of those who served and rebelled, and they

not only took on the traits or dispositions of their servitors, but also those of the former masters, tough revenants housed in the memories of the descendants of slaves."[82] It is important to keep this in mind lest one unduly idealize—and thus simplify—the complex spiritual practices of the African diaspora, which remain powerful precisely because they reflect terror as well as glory, acknowledging that evil and good have their parts to play in the circle/capsule of life. The magic cities which the practitioners of these religions constitute, instantiate, and inhabit or rather *indwell* by means of altars, *oumforts*, *casas de Ocha*, and other communal creations and institutions, dissolve the Augustinian duality of Heavenly and Earthly Cities into a space in which the old saying of the Tabula Smaragdina—"as above, so below"—is reinterpreted as a process of continuous transmission, *capsulization*, of the polis and politic living.

As Robert Farris Thompson and others have emphasized, many of the enslaved Africans came from urban environments. In this case, however, the word "urban" must be dissociated from the Western tendency, reflected in so-called city planning, to oppose the city to the rural environment, which has led to a dominant misconception, manipulated for colonial purposes, that urban life was a European import. In Africa, "towns in a sense were overgrown rural villages. . . . Community layouts mirrored the laws of nature and the force of philosophical thought. So humane were African towns and cities that they were regarded by their inhabitants as concrete expressions of their inner thoughts about man, nature, and the cosmos."[83] As well, certain cities had ceremonial purposes deriving from their mythical origins (though again, the facile Western distinction between "myth" and "history" is misleading in this context), often reflected in their design.

For instance, the city of Mbanza Kongo (in present-day Angola) was structured according to Kongo conceptions of the cosmos as a reflection of the circular movement of the sun through the worlds of the living and the dead: "The Bakongo viewed their capital as an ideal realm in which images of centering prevailed. It was a world profoundly influenced by a cosmogram—an ideal balancing of the vitality of the world of the living with the visionariness of the world of the dead."[84] And Ilé-Ifé, the city "at the heart of the life of the Yoruba [where] all roads in their religion, history, government, and art seem to lead"[85]—indeed, the very fount of creation itself—was once to the pilgrim, according to theologian E. Bolaji Idowu, a city whose every site and monument was charged with associations with and manifestations of the power of the *orisa*. Beyond this legendary aura, as Idowu declares, "the work of scientific investigators has enhanced, rather than diminished, the significance of Ilé-Ifé with regard to the history and culture of the Yoruba. . . . It is now known for certain, through her traditions and the archeological discoveries made there from time to time, that

Ilé-Ifé was the home of a centuries-old culture."[86] Yet cosmic and cosmogenic associations of this exalted order are in no way encumbering. A sense of intimacy, proportion, and measure extends even to the names of these two cities: the "Ilé" in Ilé-Ifé, means "house," a word that also designates the New World communities of *ocha* devotees; and the "Mbanza" in Mbanza Kongo means "village of 200 huts."

In this light, a passage from Lydia Cabrera's classic 1954 study of the religious practices, tales, and philosophies of Afro-Cubans, *El Monte*, deserves particular attention. Cabrera decries the adverse effects on urban ecology of the uncontrolled expansion of 1950s Havana, in which modern housing construction destroyed the plots of land used by *santeros* and *santeras* to gather the herbs and plants required for their healing rituals, and failed to incorporate patios into their design—"the popular, traditional patios, reserves of coolness, brimful of plants and creepers, in which a large tree filled with birds sometimes grows."[87] She clearly delineates the conflict between the missilic culture of "development" (which in the Havana of the 1950s meant imitation of the United States) and the harmonious blend of town and country conducive to the flowering of Afro-Cuban cultures: "No doubt cement, which condemns a living land surface to death and silence, is the worst enemy of the rustic African divinities. Urbanism, without urbanity or faith, distances the orishas from the essence of Oshún, Oggun, and Ochosi, 'which need heat and the sap of the earth.'"[88] Yet even in these unpropitious circumstances, the votaries of the gods simply travel outside the city limits or to neighboring towns where patios and green spaces still exist, or at the minimum, bring the *manigua* or thicket into their homes, "at times situated in the midst of the turbulent heart of the city."[89] This is another example of what Brathwaite perceives as the capacity for extension and contraction stemming from the heritage of the Middle Passage. What appears small, sparse, even broken, can be the vessel of a power that can shake worlds—or subtly, interstitially, alter the urban environment, as do modern-day urban *santeros* and *paleros* in Havana, New York, and elsewhere who use clothes hampers, closets, and cabinets to conceal their altars or *prendas* (cauldrons filled with powerfully charged and activated objects and talismans) from uncomprehending or hostile gazes.

After all, the *monte* (a virtually untranslatable term conveying the combined meanings and associations of "wilderness," "jungle," and "mountain"), is itself a thronged, teeming, and sometimes monstrous and fearful place of healing, revelation, and sometimes retribution—qualities captured by Cuban artist Wifredo Lam in his famous gouache "The Jungle." But in the words of Cabrera's informants, the *monte* is cognate with sacred urban cities like Ilé-Ifé or Mbanza Kongo (which incidentally was sited on a hilltop): "[The *Monte*

e]ngenders life, 'we are sons of the *Monte* because life begins there; the Saints are born from the *Monte* and our religion is also born from the *Monte*,' says my old herbalist Sandoval . . . 'Everything can be found in the *Monte*,' the foundations of the cosmos, 'and everything must be asked for from the Monte, which gives us everything.'"[90] The *monte* is also the dwelling place of the orishas and numerous other spirits of various origins, whose powers are contained in the numerous herbs and plants that grow there, and to whom certain trees are sacred.

It should be emphasized that Cabrera's informants, whose voices take up almost the whole of *El Monte*, were dwellers in cities or towns and connected to the heritage of the *cabildos*. These urban mutual aid societies were organized during the colonial period and, according to Cabrera, lasted well into the post-independence republican era. Initially set up under a Christianizing aegis, the *cabildos* grouped together Cubans of African descent according to their ethno-linguistic "nation" and soon became organized vehicles for the transmission and preservation of ancestral African beliefs and values. At times, they fomented rebellions, as in the case of the conspiracy organized in 1812 by the free black carpenter José Antonio Aponte, a Freemason and son of Changó. Interestingly, the *cabildo* to which Aponte belonged, Changó Teddún (or as Cabrera spells it, Terddún), was, according to Cabrera, one of the most renowned and respected of its kind, fondly remembered by many of her older informants. Most likely, following the violent repression of the Aponte conspiracy by the colonial slavocracy, this particular *cabildo* was driven underground if not dissolved outright, and revived later by someone who had either kept its name in memory or had received it through oral traditions (still a generally unplumbed resource in Caribbean historical research).

David Brown remarks that "*cabildo* organization offered the foundation for the consolidation and emergence of the Afro-Cuban religions (Santería, Ifá, Palo Monte, Arará) and the Abakuá brotherhoods."[91] The relative protection that the Catholic Church extended to these micro-societies or (given their largely urban provenance) *micro-cities* was not an ironclad guarantee against state repression, and throughout the post-emancipation period in Cuba (from 1886 onward), independent forms of Afro-Cuban self-organization were in constant jeopardy, from the 1888 banning of *cabildos* to the dissolution of Afro-Cuban political groups following the murderous quelling of a 1912 uprising, to the persecution of Afro-Cuban religious associations during the 1920s and 1930s, to the often contradictory policies of the post-revolutionary regime, which from its inception in 1959 oscillated between repression, co-optation, and (most recently) packaging for tourist consumption of Afro-Cuban belief systems.

In this context, *El Monte* is more than a simple proclamation of Cuban culture's great (and greatly unrecognized) debt to the contributions of the African-descended

peoples. It is a literary manifestation of the invisible Afro-Cuban cities mediated not through the scribal authority of a trained anthropologist like Cabrera's brother-in-law Fernando Ortíz but through the transcribed voices of the practitioners themselves, often in glossed and occasionally even untranslated nation languages. For example, here is an excerpt from a spell aimed at creating a *prenda* for the creolized Congo spirit Zarabanda: "Ya cortamos luwanda, tu cuenda mensu, mambo que yo bobba Kindin Nsasi, ¡mal rayo parta lo ngangulero! Candela qu'indica yo bóbba congo cunambansa."[92]

Cabrera's designation of the project as "notes" should be connected with the neophyte's traditional literary practice of composing *libretas*: "among the most valuable resources for investigation into the field of orisha folklore and ritual are the *libretas sagradas*, notebooks and handwritten manuscripts containing personal treasuries of this sacred literature, written in part *cubano* and part *lucumí*."[93] Product of a social stage in which scribal forms enter into, without entirely supplanting, the transmission and alteration of oral explications, the *libreta* functions as combined dream-book, *aide-mémoire*, and course lecture notes, documenting the neophyte's gradual acquisition of knowledge of the fundamental tenets of neo-African religion. Statements not only in *cubano* and *lucumí*, but also in the Ejagham-based language of the Abakuá and in Cubanized Kongo, appear throughout. Myths, fables, legends, reminiscences, recipes, songs, and herbal remedies all enter into a choral framework in which the juxtaposed voices and overlapping accounts often differ with each other, as if to show (long before the idea of a postmodern anthropology ever appeared) that there is no single truth or orthodoxy in these belief systems: no Bible, in other words. Some elders lament the changes to the various religions engendered by creolization, which supposedly divests the faith of the purity of its foundations. Others casually incorporate spiritualist doctrines into their séances and Cuban historical figures into their pantheons. Cabrera also shows how the boundaries between the three great religious currents described in her work tend to become effaced, leading to the formation of new syncretic belief systems. (Doubtless such a process was, at least in urban settings, attributable in part to the 1888 decree dissolving the *cabildos* organized around affiliation by nation.) Even the alphabetized glossary of plants at the end of the work shows only a token adherence to the conventions of scientific terminology; here as well, the orality of the informants disrupts and challenges the customary sobriety of positivist discourse, transforming what is usually the pendant to an academic investigation into a book *within* a book that actually takes up more space than the main body of the text. In short, Cabrera's ethnopoetic work does not simply describe the *monte*; it is a literary incarnation of the *monte* itself.

The construction of altars in the Afro-Atlantic world, thoroughly documented by such scholars as Robert Farris Thompson, is another manifestation, simultaneously architectural, artistic, and textual (in that they are aesthetic metaphors radiating meanings capable of being read and interpreted), of a will-to-materialize, remember, and prefigure the magic city. The *monte* itself is one such altar, becoming so with the appropriate human intervention, which must always be prefaced with a humble plea for permission to enter this sacred wild. For the relationship between altar and officiant/worshiper is fundamentally dialogical; those who build the altars draw on rich artistic and iconographic lexicons, but the aim of combining these elements is to establish a means of communication with the spirits. Instead of the dichotomy between Heavenly and Earthly City, Kongo-inflected traditions of New World altar-making, for example, incorporate elements from the "cities of the dead" (bones, graveyard dirt) and from the sky (the crossroads guardian Lucero, the protective morning star, and the moon, guarantor of well-being) in affirmations of a communal ethos aptly summed up in a Kongo proverb glossed by K. K. Bunseki Fu-Kiau as "The community is a taboo: never can one throw it away, and never can one worship it."[94] The eternal cycle of life and death does not allow for a freezing of community into an external object to be worshiped or passively accepted. It would be akin to worshiping the altar in and of itself instead of using it as a mediation to gain access to the workings of the cosmos. Thus, the relationship between divine and earthly cities is always in motion, open to improvisatory play within the particular belief systems, themselves subject to alteration over time.

A result and sign of this dynamism is the sheer diversity of the panoply of orishas, lwas, and other spirits. Contrary to easy generalizations about polytheism vs. monotheism, African and neo-African diasporic religions can be characterized in terms of what E. Bolaji Idowu calls "Diffused Monotheism . . . a monotheism in which the good Deity delegates certain portions of His authority to certain divine functionaries who work as they are commissioned by Him."[95] However, this undeniably useful definition tends to underplay the extent to which, at least in the diaspora, the supreme authority (Olodumare, Nsambi Mpungu) functions as a kind of *dieu caché*, relatively unconcerned with the affairs of humans. This power's emanations or orisha can be seen less as part of a team of bureaucrats than as at once divinized humans (certainly the case with deities like Shango and Ogun) and humanized divinities. In the New World, with the interculturation *among the enslaved*,[96] a population of literally hundreds of deities and spirits emerged from the few that made the crossing in the slave-ships. For example, Milo Rigaud in his *Secrets of Voodoo* gives a six-page list of members of the Vodou pantheon, admitting that "it is impossible to name all the loas, especially since every day new ones are created out of the

spirits of dead initiates by Voodoo priests."[97] And in *santería*, each orisha has diverse *caminos* or pathways with their own distinctive traits. Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui lists several dozen *caminos* for Echú/Elegba alone. The networks of diffused monotheism are evidently unquantifiable!

Given the additive quality of Vodou in particular, with its multiplying crowd of spirits that potentially come into play with the commencement of a ritual, it is understandable that rural *oumforts* in Haiti should often be referred to as *la ville aux champs*, the city in the country, which Milo Rigaud defines as "the place where the Voodoo ancestral spirits have come to dwell since the days of slavery."[98] This counterpoints to Ifé or Ginen, the magical, alternately celestial and submarine city of the African ancestors where "resides the totality of magic powers personified by the mystère Damballah,"[99] the rainbow serpent of the waters that, with his female consort Ayda-Wedo, bodies forth the generative/diffusive principle from which the *lwa* emanate. And as Joan Dayan points out, *la ville aux champs* is both a kind of sacred tenement—"the loa do not have rooms of their own, for they are far too numerous . . . they don't mind sharing their rooms with other gods, as long as the altars are kept separate"[100]—and a participatory, cooperative institution open to all.

What joins the Heavenly to the Earthly City is the *poteau-mitan*, a lightning rod and bridge located in the precise center of the peristyle or ceremonial space. If Ginen, following a circular Kongo-derived cosmology in which a "horizontal line [of water] divides the mountain of the living world from its mirrored counterpart in the kingdom of the dead,"[101] is cognate with the land of the dead, *kalunga*, then the vertical line described by the *poteau-mitan* enters into a cruciform cosmogram in which "God is imagined at the top, the dead at the bottom, and water in between."[102] Thus, in Dayan's perceptive words, "Some writers have interpreted the post as the means of descent for the loa to earth. It would be more accurate to see the post as the place where the way up and the way down are no longer contradictory, for . . . the loa ascend *or* descend, coming up out of the waters and into the heads of their people."[103]

The actual journey to Ifé is ineffable, never consciously remembered, as witness Haitian writer Dany Laferrière's mingled surprise, consternation, and fascination when his aunt's godfather Lucrèce proposes to take him on a journey to the world of the dead: "To sojourn among the dead, then return to the living and give account. To tear through the veil of appearances. Live in the truest of the true for a time."[104] However, Milo Rigaud discusses a Vodou harvest rite called the *manger-yam* in which the ground of the peristyle is completely covered with green banana leaves on which the initiates sit to eat the new yams, and afterwards enact the voyage to Ifé on the green leaves, "thought to represent the surface of water which the magic bark of the loas crosses to reach the city of Ifé."

This rite resonates metaphorically with the creolized Cuban/Kongo practice of "mirror medicine," *vititi menso*, described by Robert Farris Thompson as follows: "when a novice is initiated into the preparation and care of *nkisi* [charm, amulet] and cow's horn [divination], the *nganga* [priest, sorcerer] may take leaves of the laurel, steep them in water, and wash the postulant's eyes in the mixture to make him clairvoyant. Hence *vititi menso*, literally 'green-about-the-eyes,' or 'leaves-in-the-eyes,' describes this medicine of vision."[105] This notion of seeing clearly is linked to self-assured conduct via a ritual chant: "Beneath the laurel I hold my confidence."[106]

Water, the dividing line between worlds, is also healing and capable of conferring prophetic powers based precisely on the knowledge of the cities of the living and the dead; and, in contrast to the Biblical myth of humanity's fall from grace, the serpent presides over a submerged mirror-city to which access can be gained by (in Vodou) eating from the (banana)-tree of knowledge or (in Kongo-influenced ritual) "opening the eyes" and heightening awareness of good and evil by means of anointment from the (laurel)-tree. *Monte* and water, trees and ocean, are poetically connected not only because water is at the source of all life, human and vegetal, but because, combined in mirror medicine and administered to the novice, they carry out what Wilson Harris calls "the ventriloquism of Spirit . . . the activation of inherent originality in the ramifications of apparently passive psyche in nature to break the hubris of one-sided human discourse."[107] Ifé is reached by means of a figurative boat, but also by the leaves that stand in for it, and Damballah the Lord of Waters is often depicted in Haiti as a grass snake. The *manger-yam* and the *vititi menso* rituals are also moments of transubstantiation[108] wherein the adepts make use of elements from the *monte* to, in a certain way, become the *monte*, embodiments of and living tributes to its power.

In *Down Among the Dead Men*, his fictionalized account of a return home to Haiti in 1996 after twenty years in exile, Dany Laferrière hears a tale of Bombardopolis, a village in the northwest part of the island that has caused consternation among U.S. government experts, army officers (the latest U.S. military occupation is in full swing), and social, natural, and physical scientists of all stripes, all paid by the State Department. In the context, this town's grandiose name, though bestowed on it in slavery times, ironically references the French scientist Alain Bombard, who experimented with physical privations in the early 1950s by casting himself away on a raft on the Atlantic Ocean for forty-five days with only a diet of plankton and seawater. Indeed, it seems that its inhabitants have all developed the extraordinary capacity of going without food for three months straight. The town is initially deemed dangerously subversive to the global order because of its potential threat to the profits of the

food multinationals; "for a while," says Laferrière's informant, "[the CIA] really did entertain the idea of killing off the population of Bombardopolis by inoculating them with disease. White plague, I believe."[109] But scientific curiosity prevails; after exhaustive investigations, duly carried out after the town has been cordoned off with barbed wire, it is determined that the citizens of Bombardopolis are constitutionally no different from people in the neighboring towns, but that they "have, in a certain way, become plants. . . . It's a kind of total union between man and nature. . . . [A Belgian linguist] pointed out the position of houses in Bombardopolis in relation to the sun, the fact that the inhabitants' teeth are generally green, and the constant humidity of the air there, despite the drought that punishes nearby villages."[110] In what the linguist views as a related phenomenon, the Bombardopolitans speak the purest Creole in Haiti.

This fabulous episode, whose corrosive humor has a decidedly Swiftian cast, reveals a magical city that, in order to guarantee its survival, has physically assimilated itself to the *monte*, to the point where the *ville aux champs* overflows the precincts of the *oumfort* and becomes an actual subversive space, Like the army of militant *lwas* challenging the forces of North American repression in René Depestre's epic poem *A Rainbow for the Christian West*, this town, for all its apparent silence, has defiantly turned privation into an advantage, thereby baffling its occupiers and "objective" investigators, who are one and the same. Along with Depestre's Cousin Zaka, Bombardopolis can proclaim to the invading forces of soldiers and *savants*: "The earth releasing its green angels / Its herb secrets and the green promise / That must sprout from the lips of our wounds / O Americans I am the water's cousin / Just a drop of water I am / The patience of a drop of green water."[111] In Harris's words, these hunger artists are activating an inherent originality—reflected in the purity of their Creole, which, as one of Laferrière's friends remarks, guarantees that this language will eventually become universal and thus put an end to hunger.

On an immediate level, Haitians may be deprived, impoverished, and hopeless—on another, they have hidden resources (and invisible cities in which these can be given free rein) that can intimidate and frustrate representatives of allegedly more "advanced" societies like that of the North American occupiers. While these resources may at times be defensively insisted upon and turned into evidence of some kind of innate superiority—a tendency among Haitians Laferrière does not hesitate to satirize—the apparition of Bombardopolis, at least, testifies to what Edouard Glissant would call the *opacity* of the culture of *la ville aux champs*, nicely summarized by Laferrière's chief informant, the psychiatrist Dr. Legrand Bijou: "Americans subtract their dead, while we continue adding ours up. Our characters are incompatible."[112]

According to Dr. Bijou, when the investigators first entered Bombardopolis, their questions were met with the customary evasive answers: "'What is your name?' 'You mean my real name, Inspector?' 'Yes, your name.' 'That's a secret.' 'A name can't be a secret.' 'Oh, yes, it can, Inspector.'"[113] Just as the power to name—or rather re-name—is integral to the twinned projects of enslavement and colonization, so also must the enslaved/colonized and their descendants deploy strategies of *counter-naming* in order to maintain a sense of individual and communal self. As Kamau Brathwaite puts it, "It was in language that the slave was most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his (mis)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled."[114]

This revolt on the terrain of language, however, sometimes went beyond creative misuse in those plantation societies where there was space to preserve and perpetuate classical African languages owing to varyingly sized concentrations in the barracoons of enslaved people from the same ethnolinguistic background. Equally, while Edouard Glissant's observation, "The Plantation, like a laboratory, displays most clearly the opposed forces of the oral and written at work,"[115] is broadly the case, it tends to minimize and downplay the vital importance of *lexical signs* in fostering a culture of resistance. Not only did Kongo arrivants in Cuba, for example, rename the flora and fauna in their nation language and confer new names on cities—"Havana they renamed Kuna Mbanza, 'the town over there'"[116]—they developed a complex system of *firmas* (literally, "signatures") that, like the *vèvès* in Haiti, are materializations of highly intricate grammars whose syntaxes are intended to summon the presence of the desired spirit, or to mark its presence in a given space. Through configurations of circles, crosses, arrows, triangles, and curves, these ideographic codes are signifiers of definite meanings, decipherable through the initiate's (and *a fortiori* the spirit's) act of reading.

Firmas can also be emblazoned on flags, which when fluttering in the wind activate spiritual powers. While such flags were most often found in clandestine or private spaces, overhanging or flanking altars and doorways, the use of flags in public spaces could carry significations recognizable to and readable by the initiates if not the casual passerby. As an example of the use of a conventional colonialist icon for concealed symbolic meanings, Thompson glosses a reminiscence, by one of Lydia Cabrera's informants, of a nineteenth-century Kongo funeral procession in Havana where the coffin was laid on the ground at various street intersections and Spanish flags brandished over it by some of the mourners: "Some would have seen patriotism here, but the celebrants themselves used street intersections as a chain of found cosmograms; waving flags, they voiced the 'victory' of a life of distinction."[117] Here is an example of Brathwaite's concept of the (mis)use of language by the socially subordinated, this time on a semiotic level.

In Cuba, as mentioned earlier, the need for clandestinity in the face of frequent campaigns of official repression that destroyed altars and masks and beat and arrested individual practitioners, encouraged the development of a powerful (and feared by outsiders) urban-based secret society among the black working class in Havana and nearby port towns like Matanzas, Regla, Guanabacoa, Marianao, and Cárdenas: the Abakuá. Rooted in the tradition of the Leopard Societies in the Cross River region of Southern Nigeria, the Abakuá society first appeared in Havana in 1836 (fifty years before the abolition of slavery, and not long before the 1844 Ladder Conspiracy). In 1863, one of the leading members of the confraternity, Andrés Petit, took the unprecedented step of admitting whites, although prior to that decision, even black *criollos* (those born on the island) were refused entry. One of Lydia Cabrera's informants speaks of this action as a betrayal: "Andrés Petit made a deal with the whites and sold the secret for five hundred pesos. Because of his betrayal, whites could be *ñáñigos* [adepts] and form their own *potencia* [lodge], which was called Acanarán Efó."[118] But it was precisely such a "sale" that marked an important transitional moment in the history of the Leopard Society in Calabar: "It was an Efut man from Usaha-Edet, an important cluster of three Efut villages along the creeks of northern Efut, who sold the secrets of the Ngbe Society to the Efik of Calabar c. 1750."[119] Under the name of Usagaré, Usaha-Edet became another sacred city of foundation and remembrance, the place where the first consecration of the Leopard Society took place.

Paradoxically, the notion of betrayal serves to weld the society together with even greater cohesiveness. The foundational myth, wherein Sikán, a princess of Efut, entraps (accidentally or by design, depending on the storyteller) a sacred fish when filling her calabash with river water and is sacrificed for her act after the fish dies, turns the young woman's (conscious or unconscious) betrayal of the divinity into a statement of complementarity. The fish's death in captivity enables the high priest of Efut to create the first seven founding clans of Ngbe, which will later develop into the seven totemic feathers of the Abakuá. The woman's punishment enables the fish's thunderous voice to sound again in the Ekué drum. However, another primary drum of the Abakuá is the plume-crowned silent drum, Sésé, "material writing, to be read, not heard."[120] Only men are permitted to join the Abakuá society, which in its heyday flourished in notably homosocial environments, to the point where for almost half a century it controlled hiring practices on urban docks. And yet, women's presence-absence subtends its power—the silence of the drum speaks of the prior existence of the Leopard Society as a female society. On a certain level, the fact that the closely guarded secrets of the Abakuá, including more than 500 ideographic signs or *anaforuana*, were revealed ("betrayed") for the first time to a woman—Lydia

Cabrera—could be considered as a rectification of the primal "theft" of the Leopard Society from its original female owners and its subsequent legitimation through the tale of Sikán.

Throughout the *anaforuana*, two symbols recur in innumerable permutations: the four eyes of the fish-deity and the princess Sikán, each a betrayed betrayer, both now united in a primal androgyne. (A fascinating interlingual pun emerges: the four eyes function as *anaphorical icons*, repeated throughout the system of signs as structuring principles along the lines of the rhetorical technique of *anaphor* in poetic writing.) These signs are as impenetrable to outsiders as the Kongo-derived *firmas*, with which *anaforuana* fruitfully creolized. Their purpose is manifold: they can be initiatory, admonitory, terrifying (particularly to the colonial or republican authorities who happened to seize these written symbols in a raid), or punitive (heralding fights with rival lodges in other *barrios*), depending on the context. In all cases, they are testaments to the writer's possession of secrets joining two worlds (note the recurrence of water imagery in the sign of the fish), the knowledge of watching and being watched by the ancestors, and the power of enforcement that accompanies this knowledge. In their earlier stages of development, these ideographs "had to do not only with priestly signatures but with the identification of entire towns . . . by [the late nineteenth century], men of Calabar descent not only had devised heraldic devices in their own calligraphic script to signify the sugar towns of western Cuba but had also renamed them, in creolized Efut. Havana became Nunkwe Amanison Yorama. Matanzas was renamed Itiá Fondaga. Cárdenas was called Itiá Kanima Usere."[121]

"A good memory," says Lydia Cabrera in her summary of her initial investigations into the Abakuá secret society, "is the indispensable condition; the *ñáñigo* 'game' is an imitation, a repetition of situations, a replica of the actions that took place at the origins of society, and 'nothing is done that is not founded in the knowledge of what was done in the beginning.' In other words, in the *illo tempore* of all myths."[122] This consciousness, doubly powerful given the traumas of the Middle Passage, was manifested in public festivities as well as in the secret shrine of the *famba*.

The Abakuá insistence on *fundamento* and the determination and strength of purpose with which its secrets and written and spoken languages were preserved, led one distinguished member of the Usagaré branch to declare of his lodge, "a *potencia ñáñiga* is this, the government of the Republic, a state in miniature, which must be a model. That is why we impose order in our *baroco*. And so that we can have order, we only admit serious and worthy men—worthy of being *ñáñigos*!"[123] Abakuá processions were intended as demonstrations of social cohesion and correction. Prominent in these performances were

the *iremé*, masked leopard messenger/dancers who represented "the spirit of the ancestors who are in the *monte*"[124] and recalled masking traditions from other African cultures like the Yoruba *egúngún*. Nineteenth-century accounts state that in the context of street carnivals and the festival of Three Kings' Day, the Abakuá *iremes* usually appeared at the height of the festivities and occasionally touched off violent confrontations.

From another perspective, it is possible to see this performance as the irruption into visibility of the invisible city of memory that rises out of ritual, something that is always disruptive to a social order based on racial subordination. Indeed, the violence, both rhetorical and physical, periodically meted out to the African-based religious groupings in the New World, extending well into the twentieth century, is a negative testimony of sorts to the persistent strength of these alter/native social structures against the dystopic Plantation-machine and its inheritors.

Nobody expressed it better than Dizzy Gillespie, connected to the Caribbean through his Cuban percussionist mentor, the Abakuá Chano Pozo. His lampoon of an African-American spiritual, "Swing Low, Sweet Cadillac," begins, appropriately, with a full-throated Abakuá chant, an invocation to Abasi, the Efik God Almighty, over a drum-bass-piano-bongó riff. Moving through parodic versions of other chants (e.g., "*Mo-lam-bo*!" answered by "*Yo-ma-mo*!") Gillespie finally sings the altered spiritual lyric: "Swing low, sweet Cadillac," followed by the chorus, "Comin' for to carry me home," and then the *da capo* repetition. Then he goes into the verse: "I looked over Jordan, and what did I see?" Chorus: "Comin' for to carry me home." Gillespie: "An Eldorado comin' after me." "Comin' for to carry me home."

As with many diasporic parodies, there is a thoroughly serious core to this lyric. Thompson notes that for the Cuban adepts of the Abakuá religion, the magic city of Usagaré/Usaha Edet is considered to be the place where "the first secrets of God were revealed by the banks of the Ndian creek (Abakuá Odán, imaginatively further creolized by Christian Abakuá as the River Jordan)."[125] And further, the moment in the eighteenth century when the secrets of Usaha-Edet were sold to Calabar coincided with a major upsurge in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. So that "Eldorado," an expensive car inordinately prized—and bought on credit at exorbitant interest rates—by African-Americans during the 1950s and 1960s (when Gillespie performed the piece), can be viewed as an avatar of that same promised land or El Dorado that the European slave traders hoped to find in the Caribbean through the enslaved labor of Africans. But the drums, described by George Lamming in another context as guardians of the day that follows a season of adventure, keep playing, summoning up visions of a different kind of El Dorado, a city "out there," built on the unknown ground reached through flight from the Plantation, into a maroon world.

CHAPTER 3

Containing the Ancestral House

The Literary Legacies of Marronage

The word "marronage" is used to designate both individual and collective flight from enforced servitude and the condition of self-emancipated life established outside and against the plantation system. Its most lasting manifestation has been the creation of numerous independent micro-societies throughout the Americas, many of which have survived until the present day, in some cases, as Francisco Pérez de la Riva remarks with respect to Cuba, "becom[ing] centers of urban population, which gave rise to several . . . contemporary rural towns."[1] Throughout their existence, however, they have been under varying degrees of pressure by outside "legally constituted" authorities desirous of annexing their territories, whether to crush their insurgency and bring them under the unchallenged sway of the state or, in more recent years, to domesticate them for tourist industries or expropriate them for multinational exploitation. While most of these communities, past and present, would be conventionally defined as villages, they may also be viewed as "invisible" cities of a particular sort. Indeed, they *were* all but invisible to the successive generations of militiamen and slave patrollers that sought to destroy them. This long-lasting impregnability was due to a complex system of fortifications where the outer "walls" common to ancient and medieval cities became the obstacles presented to invaders by the forbidding terrain, supplemented by concealed traps, trenches, and networks of lookouts.

Like all cities, maroon societies are populated by men and women of frequently diverse linguistic, ethnic, and social origins, however frequently one might point to the cultural predominance of, say, Akan/Ashanti traditions in Jamaican maroon societies, or Kongo traditions in the Cuban *palenques* of Bumba and Maluala. This was particularly evident in the case of those whom Richard Price characterizes as "among those most prone to marronage"[2]: African-born

bozales, who were less acculturated to the slave system and preserved vivid recollections of their free lives in Africa. But Price also points out that "an unusually high proportion of Creoles and highly acculturated African slaves ran off, though it was less often to maroon communities than to urban areas, where their independent skills and relative ease in speaking the colonial language often allowed them to masquerade as freemen."[3] Leaving aside for the moment Price's rather sketchy reading of the complex, less-often-studied phenomenon of urban marronage in terms of performance, it should also be emphasized that Creoles in some cases occupied key leadership positions within certain communities. A notable example of this was the Gran Palenque de Moa in eastern Cuba, commanded by a *habanero* named Sebastián, which grew into a population of over 300 men and women, including whites, before its destruction by military assault in 1815.

These attempts at reconstructing a remembered African community, then, amount to much more than merely "restorationist" actions as Eugene Genovese terms them in his useful though at times contradictory analysis of maroon societies within the overall development of a specifically New World social system. On the one hand, Genovese acknowledges that, "In different ways and in varying degrees, the maroon communities aimed at restoring a lost African world while incorporating features of Euro-American civilization and specifically plantation culture. The culture that arose on these foundations combined African, European, Amerindian, and slave-quarter elements into new and varied complexes. The Jamaican and Surinam maroons reworked their African inheritance by assimilating useful elements of their American experience; simultaneously, they filtered their American acquisitions through an African prism."[4] Yet he subsequently undercuts the potentially innovative, indeed revolutionary, cultural implications of this insightful synthesis by imprisoning it within a determinist orthodox-Marxist teleology: "Until Afro-American slave revolts and maroon movements merged with the trans-Atlantic bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century, they looked toward the restoration of as much of a traditional African way of life as could be remembered and copied. More accurately, they looked toward the consolidation of a circumscribed Afro-American world that remained 'traditional' in its minimum engagement with the politics, economy, and ideology of the emerging bourgeois world."[5]

Aside from the implicit condescension in the notion that slave revolts necessarily required the validating welcome of a "bourgeois-democratic" revolution in order for them to become properly integrated into the inevitable development of a capitalist world-system, Genovese (like all too many Euro-American scholars) arbitrarily posits a unitary category that he labels a "traditional African way of life" without even considering the often considerable cultural and social

variations in that "way of life" and the pressures these differences exerted on forging communal cohesion in the perilous circumstances of marronage. Additionally, the creative syncretisms in language, art, music, and cosmology that make up a continually vital maroon heritage demonstrate brilliantly and conclusively that the Afro-American maroon world was far from "circumscribed" in its modes of being and becoming. To cite Kamau Brathwaite's words on the Jamaican Maroons, it "was an active, complex, and highly integrated cultural system in successful, often victorious opposition to the Euro-plantation; and that it was this cultural authenticity which, more than anything else, accounts for the survival of the Maroons under extremely hazardous conditions."[6]

The experience of such enduring maroon societies as the Saramaka of Surinam (which, incidentally, contains in its cosmo/worldview Akan, Kongo, and Yoruba cultural elements) indicates that there were and are well-founded, historically based reasons for maintaining only a "minimum engagement with the politics, economy, and ideology of the bourgeois world," be the latter emerging or established. As Richard Price observes, "Saramakas are acutely conscious of living in history, of reaping each day the fruits of their ancestors' deeds, and of themselves possessing the potential, through their own acts, to change the shape of tomorrow's world. . . . In Saramaka, events are the very stuff of history."[7] And, as the Saramaka voices in Price's study testify, this history permeates social existence to a degree that goes beyond "storytelling." Rather, the knowledge of "First-Time," the era when the ancestors fought their wars of respect with the slavocracy armies and militias, is imparted indirectly and often after much effort and patience on the part of the listener/learner. This secrecy and indirection are clear holdovers from that decisive break in/out of the continuum of enslavement, and that this is no mere caprice of a "tradition" (in Genovese's scare-quotes) is admirably explained by the Saramaka Peléki: "This is the greatest fear of all Maroons: that those times shall come again," glossed by Price as "First-Time ideology lives in the minds of twentieth-century Saramaka men because it is relevant to their own life experience—it helps them make sense, on a daily basis, of the wider world in which they live."[8] Whereas much utopian ideology posits an idealized past to which the world and the affairs of humanity must return in order to achieve a state of happiness and well-being, the Saramakas, pragmatic in their dreaming, fear above all else the re-establishment of an enslaved condition prior to the moment when, for them, their true history began.

Other crucial factors elude Genovese's schematism, notably geography as a shaper of sociocultural organization. It is difficult to envision an easy "restorationist" tendency holding sway among maroon leaders given the formidable—and to them, unprecedented—obstacles presented by the inhospitable terrain in

which they were compelled to seek refuge. As Brathwaite aptly notes, "it should be remembered that there was nothing intrinsically mountaineering in the culture of the West Africans who were brought to the West Indies as slaves."[9] Creative adaptation to this daunting environment involved fulfilling the immediate needs for shelter and consistent sources of food and other provisions, developing military skills and prowess both for self-defense and for raids on plantations, organizing clandestine networks of exchange with pirates and smugglers, and transforming the harsh and initially alien terrain into a protective redoubt and home. Whether in the mountains of a Caribbean island or in the deepest recesses of the South American rainforests, the maroons had to avail themselves of "the full range of their collective cultural experience and creativity."[10] In a word, they had to make themselves *natives* of their surroundings, and surely in some situations they were guided in that endeavor by surviving Indians who had themselves deserted the looming Plantation.

Far from "discovering" their magic cities as the seekers of El Dorado had hoped to do while wandering around in the out-there-somewhere of *terra incognita*, the maroons had to deploy imagination, skills, and a labor that for the first time in many of their lives was aimed at constructing and preserving a space of liberty. In this anti-Plantation, privations and constraints were endured because the people felt closer to a remembered or never-before-experienced home, at once reconstructing and founding a Wagadu that, though constantly on the verge of vanishing as a result of the clash of weapons and the noise of battle, yet maintained a delicate balance between human and natural ecologies suitable to "small military-centered societ[ies] living in a state of almost perpetual crisis."[11] At the same time, during periods of war most maroon societies could never completely emancipate themselves from some level of economic dependency on the Plantation, which Price terms "the Achilles heel of maroon societies throughout the Americas"[12] while acknowledging that maroons often benefited from "collusion by members of almost all social classes with the rebels, whenever it served their individual self-interest."[13] As shown in César Leante's novel *Capitán de cimarrones*, such suppliers could also serve as intermediaries between the colonial government and the rebels, and thus were probably seen as less trustworthy than, say, the pirates and smugglers who had their own reasons for steering clear of officially constituted authority.

Finally, maroon settlements did not only exist in rural areas; the phenomenon of urban marronage, extensively documented in the various wanted posters circulated by owners searching for their escaped domestic slaves, was widespread during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in cities like Havana and Kingston. Jean Fouchard, in his authoritative history of the Haitian maroons, mentions the suburban areas of major towns as favored places of refuge for

runaways, e.g., "In Cap, Little Guinea was such a neighborhood, with its inns and shady cafés where . . . shelter and work were readily provided to Maroons disposed to participating in immoral acts."[14] In the case of Havana, Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux has shown that, though less of an immediate threat to the tranquility of the slave owners than the *palenques*, fugitive house slaves, who were often literate, forged notes of free passage or manumission in order to flee their masters' households for the community of "free people of color" located outside the city walls. Their "daily contact with the free blacks and mulattos, artisans, musicians, street vendors, and day-workers on the docks, stimulated flight to the areas beyond the walls, with their densely populated districts of free blacks, Africans of all tribal origins, and many Creoles. These districts (El Hercón, San Lázaro, Carraguao, Guadalupe, Jesús María—the last-named a traditionally Afro-Cuban district, with its famous and feared Manglar, the refuge of the so-called *black dandies* [*negros curros*]) were for the runaway slave what the *monte* was for the rural slave."[15] In short, the region beyond the walls became "a genuine urban *palenque*."[16]

This phenomenon was sufficiently generalized in Havana for Cirilo Villaverde to have included an urban maroon in his classic 1882 novel *Cecilia Valdés*, set in the 1830s during the rule of the notoriously repressive Captain-General (and ambitious urbanist) Miguel Tacón. Indeed, although the topography of Havana would change dramatically over the next century and a half, the Afro-Cuban neighborhoods maintained a definite degree of autonomy, and in their precincts was developed the basic core of a dynamic Africa-based culture that has bestowed its wealth on all the Americas, comparable in its ramifications only to another urban maroon phenomenon: the Rastafarians of Jamaica.

Accordingly, contrary to Genovese's assertions about maroons' tendency to be ensnared in backward glances and mentalities, marronage can be viewed as an eminently modern phenomenon, constitutive both of the most enduring revolts and of the possibilities for self-organization that continue to exist among the peoples of the Caribbean. Richard Price hints at this in his statement: "With a rare freedom to extrapolate African ideas and adapt them to changing circumstances, maroon groups include what are in many respects both the most meaningfully African and the most truly 'alive' of all Afro-American cultures,"[17] though perhaps such designations as "meaningfully" and "'alive'" could be contested for their relative imprecision. As will be seen, it is a mistake to romanticize maroon societies, which invariably suffered under the pressure of external circumstance and internal dissension, not to mention the profound ambiguities implicit in the practice of signing treaties with the colonial slavocracy's representatives, and the often tragic consequences of these pacts. Nevertheless, it remains important to restore and reaffirm the integrity of their fundamental

impulse to build community outside and against a social order that concentrated all its efforts on negating even the possibility of a collective enterprise unshaped by the demands of the Plantation-machine and its masters. This crucial self-instituting dimension is significantly absent from heroic mythologies about maroon societies, exemplified by Haitian sculptor Albert Mangonès's famous bronze of a well-muscled "Unknown Maroon of St. Domingue" blowing into an upraised conch shell. (Appropriately, this artwork was commissioned by the dictator François Duvalier, who had his own mythic aspirations.) An erasure of a different sort is carried out by those advocates of *créolité* who belittle the allegedly "primitive" maroons' decision to run away instead of directly confronting the supposed complexities of plantation life.[18] In this connection, it is important to emphasize the continued validity of Brathwaite's demand of Caribbean intellectuals: to "turn to our poets—and novelists . . . to restore our sense of an intimate, emotional connection with our past; to restore, in fact, our folk myths."[19] Not, it might be added, in order to accept these myths uncritically, but to use the "intimate, emotional connection" that literature provides to consider both the everyday-life paths toward the discovery/creation of a liberated territory and the obstacles that inhibit or undermine the journey down these paths.

In the first (1955) version of his poem "Le verbe marronner / à René Depestre, poète haïtien," published in the journal *Présence Africaine*, Aimé Césaire challenged the young Haitian poet's apparent rejection of his erstwhile surrealist/Négritude aesthetics in favor of an alignment with the conservative, metrically bound poetics prescribed and practiced by the leading French Communist *littérateur* and ex-Surrealist Louis Aragon, to whom Césaire vitriolically refers by name: "Whether the poem turns nicely or poorly on the oil of its hinge / kiss it off Depestre kiss it off let Aragon go on about it."[20] Exhorting Depestre to break with this party-line, colonial-metropole-based aesthetics, which he likens to a new form of slavery by comparing it with the "whip-wielding masters" of the past, Césaire declares that the best thing for both black poets to do is "go maroon on them" ("*marronnons-les Depestre marronnons-les*"). Yet in the revised version of the poem[21] Césaire included in the grouping "Noria" as part of the 1976 edition of his *Oeuvres complètes*, much of the immediately polemical scorn has been replaced with a more questioning though no less radical poetic perspective. Initially, Césaire had coined "the verb 'to maroon'" as a transitive verb whose objects were the new commissars and literary "masters" anxious to subordinate to their "enlightened" formalist tutelage any and all disruptive voices from the colonies. Now he resolves it into an intransitive verb, unbound by an object or goal and denotative of a consciousness as well as an action in space and time. In the process, an occasional poem is transformed from a time-bound curio into a meditation on the meaning of *marronage* as both poetic strategy

and existential decision, and specifically on how this experience and its linked states of mind can be *written*.

Addressing Depestre as a "Haitian poet," Césaire reminds him of the revolutionary tradition he inherits by virtue of his birthplace, which years earlier the *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* had hailed as "Haiti where negritude rose for the first time and stated it believed in its humanity."[22] It is a measure of the poem's pervasive irony that Césaire should be sending his words from Paris, the heart of the metropole, on "a Seine night," to a poet, a "courageous tom-tom rider" then residing in Bahia, a highly Africanized region of Brazil. And yet it is precisely Depestre's "drum skin" of a voice that is in danger of being "slackened" by the "rains of exile," even though the calls of other drums—onomatopoeticized by Césaire at the end of the poem as "bombaïa bombaïa"—are clearly audible over there in Bahia. The erstwhile exhortation "*marronons-les Depestre marronons-les*" becomes in this version a combined invitation and challenge, expressed with urgency and in the future tense: "*marronerons-nous Depestre marronerons-nous*?"

By translating this line as "shall we escape like slaves Depestre like slaves?," Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith sidestep not only Césaire's French neologism, but indeed the entire point of the poem, which (in keeping with Césaire's Caribbean Surrealist poetics) is founded in a radical transvaluation of language consonant with the kind of revolutionary defiance and leap into the unknown articulated by the individual who transforms himself/herself from runaway slave into *maroon*. Admittedly, when used as a verb, the English word "maroon" cannot escape its associations with buccaneering—castaways deliberately abandoned on remote islands—although in many respects this usage connotes a kind of helpless condition far-removed from the existential stakes involved in *marronage*. As both a willed escape *from* the intolerable exactions of the Plantation-machine and a flight *toward* an indefinable, unchartered (and often mobile) space of sanctuary and perilous freedom, marronage, expressed as desire, is a common possession not only of enslaved peoples but of their latter-day descendants. This is explicitly affirmed by Césaire in the lines following his proposition to Depestre: "Depestre I acknowledge the bad manners of our blood / is it our fault / if the squall hits / suddenly unteaching us to count on our fingers / to circle three times and bow."[23] Those who have been enslaved or who keep the mark and memory of that enslavement are also those to whom the gift of revolt has become a kind of second nature, what Jamaican author Vic Reid has called "noises in the blood." The "squall" of anger and necessary insurgency—or, alternatively, possession by the ancestral spirits—can strike at any time to undo or subvert the servile habits of polite deference to imposed authority. Equally, blood can move in a more hidden, subversively beautifying

stream, of the sort described in Nicolás Guillén's 1934 sonnet "The Grandfather," which apostrophizes an "angelic dame . . . / who lives by rhythms of her Northern blood," within whose "mysterious veins," the shadow of a fugitive black ancestor "rows the living stream, sees / float by the lily, lotus, rose of flames," whose legacy is "the curl in those blond locks of yours."[24]

In the following stanza, Césaire develops his insights into the ill-mannered, fugitive blood that he and Depestre share, describing it as "a thing that comes goes and returns / and ours I suppose comes back to us after spending some time / in some macumba. What to do? Blood / is truly a powerful vodun."[25] For the poet/maroon, this blood is both real (since the history of the Americas is awash in the blood of the enslaved) and metaphorical (in that it is a metonymy for a shared negritude). And just as the human organism is sustained by the blood pumped by the heart to circulate through the arteries, so also does the poet/maroon's blood embark on a journey of flight outward and return to the heart-source. This circular or *capsular* motion is described by an actual maroon, Esteban Montejo, in terms of a physical sound-force driving him toward marronage: "I was always thinking about escaping. It went round and round in my head and wouldn't leave me in peace. It was an idea that never left me and sometimes even sapped my energy."[26]

The possession of which Césaire speaks—represented by the macumba as site of revelation and communion with ancestral spirits—has always taken place in the head, considered in Yoruba culture as the locus of human power, intelligence, and imagination. For the duration of their possession, adepts of Africa-based spiritual practices cease to be themselves and become the deity who mounts them; hence Césaire's qualifying "I suppose" when he speaks of the blood's return to the "self." And if "blood is truly a powerful vodun"—something to which the frequent practice of animal sacrifice in Vodou and Santería ritual attests—then the desire to honor its call and follow its movement, when translated into action, becomes a moment of possession in which the maroon finds a truer self-in-revolt.

In comparison with this literally overpowering creative force, if black poets were to accede to the demand of their self-anointed masters to write according to strict poetic formulas, the results, products of a submission to white mythology, would be comparable only to that "sugary juice drooled . . . by the distilleries on the mornes." Against this stagnant literary plantation-machine presided over by "flies on ponds," Césaire once again calls upon his friend to "laugh, drink, and maroon" with him, hurling flesh-and-blood delights in the teeth of the grinding mechanism. Directly addressing the poet, he remembers Depestre as a "gentle heart" whose neck and arm are adorned with solar and lunar amulets or *minkisi* (known in Haiti as "makandals" in honor of the first great rebel against slavery)

and who bears tribal scars of night on his chest. Abruptly, he interrupts his praise with a brusque challenge to the younger man's historical memory, "as a matter of fact was Dessalines playing around at Vertieres." Vertieres marked the site of Dessalines' final victory over the French that cemented the triumph of the Haitian Revolution in 1803 and the resulting independence that had been heralded by Boukman, the maroon and *houngan* whom, at the beginning of the poem, Césaire praises for his "insane song . . . delivering your country / with the forceps of the storm." Indeed, the legendary meeting, convoked by Boukman, of delegates from various plantations held at Bois-Caïman on August 14, 1791 that gave birth to the Haitian Revolution was a massive act of petit-marronage: a short-term escape that made it possible for the revolutionary movement—grand-marronage in its most potent form—to emerge.

What is needed now, says Césaire, is precisely the intransigent resolve that Dessalines displayed on the day of victory, since nothing was ever won by cozying up to masters old and new. As if to emphasize that point, Césaire launches into a wicked parody of the wooden language of Communist pronouncements, complete with such catchwords as "comrade," "dialectical," and "form and content," again interrupting himself in mid-speech by declaring, "it's not my job to write the report / I'd rather look at the spring. Precisely / it's the revolution." Like every maroon, Césaire concentrates on the details and the overall (dialectical) movement of his environment, deciphering its signs and assimilating its meanings. No prefabricated poetics can do justice to the "forms which linger / humming in our ears." In Miguel Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave*, originally published in 1966, the aged Esteban Montejo tells of living alone in the woods as a maroon and listening to the birds and the trees, whose sounds he could still reproduce for his gestor Barnet eighty years later.

Toward the end of the poem, Césaire begins to play with Brazilian words and, calling on Depestre by name one last time, chants "bombaïa bombaïa," an allusion to the character of the Rebel in Césaire's earlier (1946) verse drama *And the Dogs Were Silent*, who used the same chant to call for a cleansing fire against oppression. If the drums are now to speak as they did during the great maroon revolts, Depestre must play on them in such a way as to "splash . . . their rancid night / with a succinct rutting of moudang stars." Here, the clipped "succinct" drumbeats link the cosmic sperm of the starry Sahel night[27] to the tapping of rainwater that washes away the accumulated rot of imposed tradition and submission. As elsewhere in Césaire's work, Africa is invoked as a source of strength—no mere solace for present misery but a memory kept alive through a struggle it nurtures (compare the outcry of *And the Dogs Were Silent*'s Rebel against his captivity: "Along with my heart I brought back the ancient flint, the old amadou deposited by Africa in the depths of my being"[28]).

Although marronage inflicted most damage on the slave system when it coalesced into communities (*palenques*), mass flights from the plantations, for obvious reasons, were highly exceptional occurrences except in times of general insurrection, notably during the Haitian Revolution, and as consequences of guerrilla attacks on individual plantations by armed detachments of maroons. For the most part, the decision to escape was an individual one—often encouraged, to be sure, by the knowledge that there were *palenques* out there (whether in the vicinity or at a great distance), beyond the immediate reach of the slave-owners and the militias, patrollers, and *rancheadores* with their trained mastiffs.

In "*Le verbe marronner*," Césaire's incitement to rebellion, while grounded in the collective memories and creations materialized in the sound of the drums, is from one individual to another and hence not rhetorical in the public sense of the word. Yet both this poem and Richard Price's observation that "marronage on the grand scale" and its continued threat to the smooth functioning of the Plantation-machine resulted from "individual fugitives banding together to create independent communities of their own,"[29] show that it is possible to speak of a *phenomenology of maroon spirit*. This process of achieving a realized consciousness of self requires the enslaved being to incite and undergo an immediate, fraught transformation into an active subject abandoning the life-structures and behaviors imposed by slavery. Martin Carter provides a lucid insight into this moment of truth: "this general flight from the plantation is not only a simple flight but also a profound search. It is, I contend, not only a search for identity as such, but indeed a search for the self lost in the circumstances of slavery."[30] And as with all profound searches, there is the possibility that its resolution might be illusory or deceptive, and thus fated to be taken up anew at a future moment.

The individual slave's passage from freedom as notion to freedom as the ground and goal of experience often involves committing an irrevocable act that places him or her outside the slavery system. Esteban Montejo recalls that following an initial abortive escape, "I . . . spent a number of years enslaved by the fear that they would put the shackles on me again" (44), locating the source of the slave condition in psychic submission to a fear of possible punishment—no small matter, as the penalties meted out to captured runaways often involved hamstringing, even amputation of limbs. As well, this caution is reinforced by other slaves who prefer the evils they know to those they do not: "The old blacks were not kindly towards running away. The women even less so" (44). Rejecting such stabilizing forces, the incessant drive for freedom becomes even stronger, eventually reaching the point where it can be easily and straightforwardly articulated against a specific power relation and the submissive routine

that sustains it, in the name of a possible life elsewhere: "I always had the fantasy that I would enjoy being in the forest. And I knew that working in the fields was like living in hell. You couldn't do anything on your own. Everything depended on the master's orders" (44). Biding his time, Montejo reverses the accepted order of surveillance and begins surreptitiously to "watch the overseer," a man he describes as someone whom "all the blacks had respect for . . . because one of the whippings he gave could strip the skin off of just about anybody" (44). That those condemned to undergo beatings at the overseer's hands should precisely be those who extend such a sentiment as "respect" to their tormentor, is an adequate measure of the degree of self-alienation that lies behind their reluctance to rebel and their lack of "kindly" feelings toward one who would propose escape. Montejo, on the other hand, rejects such domesticated "respect" and at the crucial moment spontaneously vents his anger: "one day I was just riled up, and I don't know what got into me, but I was mad, and just seeing him set me off."

> I whistled at him from a distance, and he looked around and then turned his back. That's when I picked up a rock and threw it at his head. I know it hit him because he shouted for someone to grab me. But he never saw me again because that day I made it into the woods. (44–45)

Instead of simply running off in stealthy silence, Montejo feels righteously compelled to express his defiance of the slave system by physically attacking its enforcer. It is appropriate as well as logical that the weapon through which the young maroon-to-be carries out his assault should be a rock, that microcosm of the Caribbean island, a hard, irreducible fragment-whole and building-block of consciousness. Upon striking the overseer's head and momentarily blinding his all-seeing eye ("he never saw me again"), this missile touches off Montejo's revolt and sends him into the *monte*/forest. Once safely concealed, he establishes a dwelling in a dark cave, which he abandons for the forest after eighteen months. There, he spends a period of his life upon which he will always look back with nostalgia: "Truth is that I lived well as a cimarrón, very hidden, very comfortable. I didn't even allow other cimarrones to spot me . . . '" (47).

Notably, throughout his marronage (and indeed throughout his life), Montejo chooses solitude over sociability. Although the Las Villas area in central Cuba where he was born had been the site in 1853 (seven years before his birth) of a particularly vicious massacre of maroons during a military operation, Montejo's life as he tells it (or as Barnet edits it) does not take this history into account. In his editorial work, Barnet tries to soften the old maroon's stubbornly individualistic perspective by means of a strategic footnote citing the Cuban geographer Antonio Núñez Jiménez's statement, *inter alia*, that "the fugitive runaways who obeyed individual impulses of freedom quickly became

groups organized to resist the owners"(210). Also, in an afterword to the 1994 English version, Barnet makes much of the testimonial genre's supposed rootedness in the "history of the people who couldn't tell their story" (208).

But it is precisely Esteban Montejo's determination to preserve and safeguard his "individual impulses of freedom" that tends to keep him apart from an explicitly instituted collectivity. While narrating his participation in the Cuban Independence War of 1895 to 1898, he declares, "The best thing for war times is not to trust anybody. The same for peacetime . . . You have to distrust men. That's not sad because it's true" (177). Such wariness clashes with the gestor's avowed intent to present, in the person of Montejo, a revolutionary exemplar and ancestor, and it marks an interesting aporia in Barnet's enterprise. Beyond that, however, it illuminates a deeply rooted and thus recurrent problem in the history of marronage: the fragility of solidarity in a permanently imperiled environment outside though never wholly removed from the Plantation, and the ever-present danger of betrayal from friends and allies as well as enemies. Montejo himself confirms this in a tragically apt proverb, whose textual appearance in quotation marks indicates that he had learned it from someone else in the past: "Cimarrón with cimarrón sells a cimarrón" (47).

In much of the literature of marronage, betrayal is a constant theme, whether as fear or actuality. A noteworthy counterpoint to Montejo's narrative is the Cuban author Reinaldo Arenas's posthumously published (in 1992) autobiography, *Before Night Falls*, which recounts the adventures and vicissitudes of a life spent in constant marronage, beginning in childhood when he would climb trees to get away from his strife-ridden family and impoverished surroundings, and enter into an unmediated, Edenic relationship with natural beauty. "To climb a tree," writes Arenas, "is to slowly discover a unique world, rhythmic, magical, and harmonious, with its worms, insects, birds, and other living things, all apparently insignificant creatures, telling us their secrets."[31] Throughout Arenas's creative work, his characters tend to be in perpetual flight from nightmarish, persecuting forces. This culminates in the most audacious and outlandish act of marronage of all: the moment in his posthumously published novel *The Color of Summer* (1991) when Cuba is cut loose from its rocky anchor (thanks to those who dive into the ocean and frenziedly gnaw at the island's coral foundation) and sails off into the chaotic unknown only to sink amidst the clamor of internal dissension.

As Arenas himself realizes upon beginning a prison term in Havana's El Morro, "I decided that in the future I would be more careful about what I wrote, because I seemed destined to live through whatever I had written" (198). Indeed, *Before Night Falls* is a memoir of one pursuit after another. In his indictment of Fidel Castro's repressive regime, Arenas affirms beauty's intimate links to

a marginal existence in constant flight from bureaucracy and the police: "Being independent and outside of their domain, beauty is so irritating to dictators that they attempt to destroy it whichever way they can. . . . [T]o a dictator and his agents, the attempt to create beauty is an escapist or reactionary act" (87).

On a deeper historical level, Arenas's account of his compulsory "volunteer" stint at the Manuel Sanguily Sugar Mill during 1970's catastrophically destructive drive to harvest "ten million tons of sugar" openly compares himself and his fellow laborers to the Indian and African slaves who in the past had been forced to do similar tasks: "I came to understand why the Indians had preferred suicide to working there as slaves, I understood why so many black men had killed themselves by suffocation. Now I was the Indian, I was the black slave, and I was not alone" (129). After this experience, Arenas is caught up in the wave of repression following the failure of the harvest, and within two years, he finds himself on the run from the authorities on charges of counterrevolution (read: publishing his books outside Cuba without prior official authorization). His incredible two-month odyssey takes him across the island to Guantánamo, where his attempted escape to the U.S. military base is frustrated by infrared lights from which his childhood tree-climbing skills save him, to his hometown in Oriente, back to Havana in the company of his mother, and finally to Lenin Park, where after several days eluding a police dragnet, he is finally captured and sent to the colonial-era prison of El Morro in Havana. During his term, he is interrogated by a high-ranking officer in State Security and learns that many of his trusted friends have been informing on him, a misery compounded when he himself is coerced into writing a full recantation of his alleged crimes against the Revolution. On several occasions in the memoir, Arenas, like Montejo before him, affirms that his peasant background has made him wary and mistrustful of people and their motives, but when he meditates on his capitulation to the authorities, he realizes: "Before my confession, I had a great companion, my pride. After the confession, I had nothing; I had lost my dignity and my rebellious spirit" (207). Thereafter, as he says in reference to abandoning Miami for New York after fleeing Cuba in the Mariel exodus of 1980, "I was . . . forever, running away from myself" (293).

In the period between his release from El Morro and his escape from Cuba, Arenas takes up residence at a rundown Havana hotel for marginals, delinquents, and dissidents, El Monserrate (whose name resonates ironically with the legendary mountain community of knights watching over the Holy Grail). A grotesque, violent urban *palenque* described by Arenas as "a real jungle on the far side of the law" (240), populated by bizarre characters of all backgrounds, informers and outlaws alike, its inhabitants plunder a nearby abandoned, boarded-up convent for furnishings, luxury items, and even fresh water; they

hustle, arrange multiple assignations, and rob, squabble with, and slander each other. Yet the shadow of state repression hovers over even the most transgressive happenings, as nobody can be sure of who is informing on or, in Montejo's words, "selling" whom.

Both Arenas and Montejo, in fact, respectively begin and end their memoirs with statements of militant defiance. Returning home to his New York apartment following his first hospitalization with the AIDS virus, Arenas painfully makes his way over to a portrait of Virgilio Piñera and demands from the image the gift of longer life: "I need three more years of life to finish my work, which is my vengeance against most of the human race" (xvii), while Montejo, after expressing his disappointment with the failures and compromises of the Cuban War of Independence, declares "I don't want to die so that I can fight all the battles yet to come. I won't get into the trenches or use any of those modern weapons. A machete will do for me" (200). Through such affirmations, these two great solitary figures of marronage point toward a relationship with Ogun, the Yoruba warrior deity who may be considered the tutelary spirit or numinous shaper of the maroon world.

Particularly with regard to the phenomenological dimension of maroon existence, Ogun is a powerful archetype. As Wole Soyinka, Ogun's most prominent intellectual champion, has noted, "Ogun is embodiment of Will and the Will is the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man."[32] Further, Ogun dares to venture into the perilous realm of transition between the worlds of the living, the dead, and the unborn. John Mason elaborates on this insight by singling out Ogun's role as "clearer of the path and creator of the road that allows both men and deities to travel from one level of reality to the next."[33] The importance of such a spirit for those venturing from the known, oppressive world of the Plantation into the uncharted terrors and opportunities of the forest and mountains can be readily apprehended: "they knew that if Ògún could survive in the forest, with his help so could they."[34] As the deity associated with iron, Ogun is present in Esteban Montejo's trusted machete, which clears away the obstructive underbrush, allows individual runaways to forge a path to freedom, and, when used to lethal effect against adversaries, safeguards that freedom: witness the fearsome machete charges of General Antonio Maceo's battalions against the well-armed but timorous and unmotivated Spanish conscripts during the Cuban Wars of Independence. This is the Ogun who animates Arenas in his quest for creative vengeance on the human race.

But given that Ogun is also associated with technology and mechanized force, he is the quintessentially urban *orisha*. In his Haitian guise as Ogou, "[in] cities he has a more prominent role, so that in Port-au-Prince, where no temple neglects him entirely, Ogou frequently is the major spirit of priests and

priestesses. Among Haitians who migrate to New York City, those who have Ogou as their . . . 'master of the head,' may well be in the majority,"[35] and further, "Ogou's way of being-in-the-world provides a cognitive map for Haitians who take up the challenges of contemporary life. . . . Ogou delineates both the possibilities and the potential hazards of doing business in the modern urban world."[36]

Ogun, then, is a founding spirit who institutes a community built on the paradox of the solitary impulse to freedom and the necessary solidarity to safeguard the collectivity of such individual impulses. If all foundational gestures that clear an earthly space of sociability mimic similar patterns or actions that occurred in the world of divine powers, then the maroon communities under Ogun's protection necessarily take upon themselves all the paradoxes of Ogun's multiple personae.

Reciprocally, Ogun of necessity reflects the human contradictions and failings of those who seek to establish a space consecrated to him, since religions of West African origin do not posit divine perfection but rather see the gods as exemplifying certain human characterological patterns in a larger-than-life, archetypal form. "All symbolic forms the deity takes are correct forms; . . . all of the personality traits or characteristics are correct, despite their seeming oppositions. Ògún is neither good nor bad. There is no moral evaluation of the deity's many characteristics in terms of right and wrong."[37] And Ogun's condition beyond good and evil is more pronounced than many deities, as befits the precariousness of maroon societies, figuratively balanced on the knife-edge (Ogun's tool of preference) of the Plantation and the Anti-Plantation, of externally directed violence and internally mandated nonviolence, of towering anger and healing calm, of initial isolation and ultimate community, of charismatic leadership and collective self-discipline, of fragmentation and cohesion.

In Haiti, Ogou expresses the complexities of power in all its worldly manifestations; if war is the continuation of politics by other means, he is both that war and that politics. Notably, he can at any moment turn on those who serve him and whom, therefore, he ostensibly protects. This is evident in Esteban Montejo's legend of how Africans were lured into enslavement:

> When the kings saw the white men, I think it was the Portuguese who were the first, pull out their red kerchiefs as if they were waving hello, they said to the blacks: "Go get one of those scarlet cloths, go on." And the blacks, excited by the red, ran like little lambs to the boats, and they were caught right there. Black men have always really liked red. That color is to blame for putting chains on them and sending them to Cuba.[38]

As red is a color associated with both the Yoruba Ògún and the Haitian Ogou, this tale becomes a parable of deception spearheaded apparently by the

West African rulers (it is said that Ogun in his human incarnation was a ruler and empire-builder) but ultimately by Ogun, who presides over roads, famished and otherwise, and whose swords are always two-edged. "Ògún, please don't drive me from anywhere,"[39] implores a Yoruba Ìjálá chant, mindful of the destruction that Ogun can wreak at the slightest provocation. Likewise, during the war to liberate Saint-Domingue, Toussaint Louverture, himself hostile to Vodou, took care to wear a red kerchief around his head so that his partisans would view him as a servant of Ogou Ferraille, the lord of iron, and Dessalines exploited the iconographical attributes of Ogou to the point where he himself (after his brutal murder-by-dismemberment) became a *lwa* associated with Ogou. Yet during his rule as Emperor of Haiti, Dessalines had not hesitated to build an army that, more often than not, was used against his own people, to reintroduce forced labor and beatings of recalcitrant workers, and to mete out the death penalty liberally. But like the vengeful Ogun of another Ìjálá chant, "the terrible one who strikes terror in men's minds,"[40] Dessalines is regarded by Haitians as a hero.

Given his devotees' profound awareness of Ogun's ambiguity (which perhaps it would be more accurate to term "multifacetedness" in order to avoid the too-facile binary) and its patterning influence over the entire spectrum of human affairs, it should not be surprising that Ogun's drive to liberate and unexpectedly punish should be found within the imaginative substance of the (infrequent) literary treatments of maroon societies. Betrayal, internecine conflict, wounded or sundered kinship—all have their part to play along with audacity, courage, and the epic aura of legend surrounding heroic deeds of resistance in historical past and present.

A novelistic account anchored in meticulous historical research is the Cuban César Leante's *Capitán de cimarrones*, which narrates the life of the early nineteenth-century maroon captain Ventura Sánchez (known as Coba), from his days on the plantation through his escape and subsequent participation in a series of increasingly powerful and populous maroon societies located in the mountainous eastern region of Cuba, and his ultimate betrayal and suicide following a negotiated settlement. Originally, Leante had titled the 1975 novel *Los guerrilleros negros*, but after going into exile in Spain in 1980, he revised the text slightly and gave it a title emphasizing the individual trajectory and specific heroic qualities of the "captain" at the narrative center. In a way, this novel—devoid of exoticizing effects though possessing a stylistic density worthy of William Faulkner, based on extensive archival research, thoroughly imbricated in the specificity of its historical moment, and punctuated with lengthy internal monologues—may be seen as a counterstatement to Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*, with its carefully calibrated structure and its

elaborate Nietzschean/Spenglerian thematics of eternal return. At one point, Leante moves from a description of the fears of Escudero, the military governor of Santiago, as he ponders the possible social consequences of a generalized slave uprising sparked by the Cuban maroons with the encouragement and support of the recently liberated Haitians, to an evocation of a group of Cuban maroons listening on the seashore to a Haitian sailor's tale of the Revolution that blossoms into a monologue spoken from beyond the grave by the Haitian maroon Makandal, whose final flight from and death at the stake forms one of the most famous scenes in Carpentier's novel. Rendered voiceless by Carpentier, Makandal "possesses" the sailor like a *lwa* and his tale becomes a permanent inspiration to the Cuban maroons, who feel themselves part of a genuine, not merely "imagined" community grounded in an incipient tradition of rebellion against the slave system: "And then resounded in their breasts, by the light of the sputtering flame, in the glow of the hills, the beach where the prodigious story had flowed from now-unchained black people, from black people in whom Makandal's prophecy had taken form—like his most glorious lycanthropy—and would eternally resound in the most unfathomable, most secret region of their souls, beyond the time of their lives, handed down from generation to generation like an unconquered, unsilenced cry: Makandal saved! Makandal saved![41]

Through such moments, Leante shows that the maroons of Oriente, for all their lack of book learning and their status in the eyes of the white slavocrats as stupid beasts worthy only of mockery for their "wild," disheveled appearance, had a definite grasp of the extent of their social power. Networks of oral communication joining town and country, island to island, and island to the African continent were vital in conveying a sense of a wider world that could sustain insurgent thought and action through victory and defeat alike.

Before Ventura becomes a captain of maroons in his own right, he learns of life in Africa and the circumstances and experience of the slave trade and Middle Passage through the old *bozal* Taita Quiala. He finally manages to carry out his plans of escape in circumstances strikingly similar to Esteban Montejo's, right down to the stone hurled at the overseer's head, as if Leante were paying tribute to Barnet and his vital protagonist. After an arduous journey, Ventura reaches the tiny *palenque* of Sigua, soon acting as the messenger entrusted with selling the beeswax collected by the maroons in the surrounding villages and ultimately in Santiago itself. Here, he befriends free people of color who tell him of the existence of other maroon societies, Brazil's vanished Palmares in particular, and of the need for black people, enslaved and free alike, to stake a claim to power on the island itself: "This was their land, their soil, their country, and they had as much right as anyone to live on equal terms with whites. . . . There were more than sufficient reasons for such an aspiration, as they had

contributed more to the country's prosperity than the whites" (41). Through a Haitian rebel, forcibly brought to Cuba by his master after the revolution, Ventura finds out about the existence of a self-governing, self-emancipated black society, and is moved to embark upon a similar endeavor in Cuba. Haiti's constant recurrence in the novel as an inspiration to enslaved and free blacks and a terror for white slave owners reveals that the rulers' widespread panic of the eruption of "another Haiti" in the Caribbean was no mere paranoid fantasy but grounded in objective possibility.

With the destruction of the *palenque* of Sigua, the survivors make their way further into the mountains and eventually reach the Gran Palenque de Moa, whose size and relative splendor in comparison to the tiny, hardscrabble village astonish them: from the carefully laid out and plentiful planting grounds to the town itself. Leante's detailed description of the town illustrates how a maroon community functions: a mixture of agriculture and small industry to guarantee both self-sufficiency and self-defense, the use of light machinery for the purpose of free labor instead of the slave labor customarily associated with the production of sugar, the production of beeswax and honey in surplus quantities for use in trade with nearby towns, an urban design conducive to sociability and public celebration. Not the least of its achievements is its power to awaken within the exhausted newcomers a remembrance and awareness of a lost African polity "where some of them had lived and to whose description others had listened with fascination in their eyes, and for all, through memory or imagination, it was the return to the native soil of the Great Continent, a return so often evoked in the dreams of slaves and fugitives " (77–78).

However, the arrival of the refugees from Sigua portends disaster for the Gran Palenque, as its leader Sebastián, a free black from Havana who had conspired with José Antonio Aponte to organize a general uprising of the slaves, realizes that the same troops and patrollers who destroyed the smaller settlement will eventually push on to Moa. After successfully repelling an initial incursion by the invading forces, the inhabitants abandon the *palenque* before the anticipated second assault, so that when the Governor's forces finally enter the town and find no one there to capture or kill in expectation of a reward, all they can do is destroy the crops and burn the dwellings.

For its leaders, Sebastián and the white priest Padre Antonio, the *Gran Palenque's* true purpose is to stand as a living example of what the eventual freedom of all the slaves could bring about, and thus as a beacon and incitement to that liberation. Yet the immense challenges involved in safeguarding it have unavoidably tended to isolate it from a wider movement for freedom; as Sebastián well knows, the maroons cannot depend on outside logistical or material support,

and their own limited means do not permit a sustained engagement with their enemies.

In this respect, Coba's flight from the plantation to a succession of *palenques* mirrors the complex trajectory of the armed resistance to the slave system. His sojourn in the *Gran Palenque* provides him with tactical and organizational skills to add to his physical and martial prowess. When the inhabitants of the Gran Palenque disperse, he and his blood brother Manuel Griñan (known as "Gallo") each form two separate *palenques* and, instead of organizing on a purely defensive basis like the Gran Palenque, conduct armed raids on plantations aimed not only at inciting mass escapes but at terrorizing the slavemasters. At the same time, Coba models his maroon society on the Gran Palenque, organizing networks of exchange with smugglers, pirates, and even a few white townspeople, in order to obtain basic supplies that the *palenque* cannot itself produce.

However, despite his enduring respect for the memory of the vanished Sebastián and Padre Antonio, Coba does not move beyond his earlier conception, learned from the captain of Sigua, that the only slaves worthy of freedom are those who fight for it, whereas the rest deserve their exploitation. While Sebastián, in his welcoming speech to the refugees from Sigua, declares that "they should not consider themselves anything other than soldiers of freedom, fighters for the emancipation of their brothers who were still enslaved. They were free and their duty was to enable all the slaves in Cuba to be likewise" (83), Coba, at the height of his power, believes, "He and the men who had joined him, followed him, obeyed him, were all that mattered to him. For them, for these black men, he would sacrifice his life; he cared nothing for the others" (133). Ironically, because of their relative isolation, Sebastián and Padre Antonio can only articulate their universalist vision as a utopian hope without the desired means to realize it beyond the undeniable success of the Gran Palenque itself. Sebastián keeps a portrait of the Haitian Emperor Henri Christophe in his hut as a hopeful talisman, but he also knows that material assistance from that quarter, which would enable him to carry out Aponte's emancipatory plan, is unlikely to arrive. Coba, on the other hand, by virtue of the fame (or notoriety) which his brilliance as a guerrilla fighter has gained him, becomes involved in an ultimately political situation with the authorities in which he briefly and fatally cedes the advantage, and much of this has to do with his near-aristocratic contempt for those who have not chosen his particular means of struggle. While he, like Sebastián, is a *criollo*, he conceals this from his fellow maroons: "for most of his men, Coba was not a *criollo* but an African king who had been conquered by a rival tribe and sold as a slave to the slave traders. Only a few knew his true origins . . . but out of respect and fear of Coba, they kept the secret quiet as the grave" (132).

Escudero, the governor of Santiago, resolves to approach the maroons for negotiations. While he has no intention of honoring any agreement, he nonetheless has to confront the opposition of the central government, which desires only the immediate extermination of every last black rebel in the country, regardless of the logistical impossibility of such a course of action. Through mediators, he proposes to the various maroon captains in the region a treaty (similar to many previous such pacts in the Americas) whereby the maroon leaders would obtain immediate freedom, to be extended to their followers after a two-to-five-year period of "good behavior," on condition that the leaders hunt down other maroons. The governor invites the various captains to a formal negotiating meeting in the town, where they are treated with an ostentatious and feigned honor that nonetheless causes them to waver and, upon their return, to sow the seeds of division among the maroon communities.

It is Gallo who resolutely refuses all negotiations and the Governor's terms, precisely because he believes that unless all slaves are freed, there is nothing to discuss. And the trump card he plays in his discussion with the local priest who is the Governor's chief mediator is a historical one: "Listen, Father . . . more than half a century ago the locals of El Cobre, black slaves who worked in the mines, rebelled and became maroons like ourselves, they set up *palenques* in the mountains and in that way they obtained complete freedom from the King. By the King's order, *all* of them were declared free from all service to their masters" (173–4). This, he declares, is a fact known to all maroon captains.

But Coba, accustomed to acting on his own, and anticipating a fresh wave of repression, hopes to gain time by signing a treaty that guarantees only his freedom and that of his closest aide. In so doing, he breaks the oath of solidarity he swore with his blood brother Gallo. Significantly, he dismisses his fellow maroons from the proceedings, much to their unease and suspicion, and even though he has no intention of complying with the treaty's demand to organize expeditions against other maroon communities, the damage has been done.

By retreating into solitude, however provisional and tactical, Coba shows himself to be a true son of Ogun/Ogou: "Theirs is a solitary, individual power, not the collective power of close-knit groups, not the power of the united family. . . . The loneliness of those who seize Ogou power is thus another form of self-destruction or self-wounding."[42] Presiding over a now-demoralized and hunger-stricken community, he begins to sink into delusions of omnipotence that nonetheless express: "the legitimate demand of an offended and subjugated people. . . . However, his acceptance of entering into treaties with the government had isolated him to a certain extent" (201). Such isolation will eventually bring about his death, because he finds himself ostracized by all of his erstwhile informants, messengers, and confidants. Like Ogun, he retreats into his wrath

and solitude, and lives only on memories, refusing to talk with his people, many of whom have in any case abandoned the community. But in a moment of revelation, he realizes that he is inextricably linked to the mountainous, forbidding world into which he fled when he was a youth: "he was the tree, the mountain crag; his destiny was here and nowhere else. . . . The mountain environment was the mother of the defiant slave, yes, but only under the condition that the slave knew how to rise up and equal its grandeur. . . . He had been blind, maddened, he had done a lot of damage without being aware of it, but once again he would unite his solitary steps with those of the troop and everything would be as it once was, as it had always been" (207–8).

In an impulsive attempt to rejoin his blood brother, he is surprised by a troop of patrollers and leaps to his death from a cliff: a frequent action of cornered maroons who would rather face death than renewed slavery. His head is displayed in a cage hanging in the Santiago public square, but instead of serving as a deterrent, it becomes an inspiration to the multitudes that walk past it (conscious as they are of the spiritual power of the head). From the mountains, Gallo orders that all the drums in all the *palenques* be sounded in Coba's honor.

Coba's fundamental tragedy is that his indomitable strength and stubborn individuality, the very qualities that made him rebel against slavery and organize a fighting community, prevent him from grounding himself in the historical consciousness that, in their own ways, Sebastián and Gallo possess. In death, he comes into his own; like Ogun, "he did for humans what he did for the divinities; he showed them the way to live on earth."[43] And the urban masses of Santiago, with ancestors from all parts of Africa, are able to see his decapitated head not as a rotting piece of flesh but as the incarnation of power and necessary resistance. Gallo's all-night drums of tribute, resounding from the hills and disturbing the maddened governor's sleep, herald the audible presence of eight invisible maroon cities whose sounds will move across the island and be heard once again in dances and songs of rebellion invading the uncomprehending ears of the masters. Historically, these same maroon towns made important contributions to the three Independence Wars of 1868 to 1878, 1879 to 1880, and 1895 to 1898, and Oriente itself was the starting point of the revolutionary movement that culminated in the triumph of January 1, 1959. Thus, the struggles of Gallo and Coba in the period between 1815 and 1819 can be termed inaugural moments in a long (and still unfinished) emancipatory process.

Yet the triumphant note on which Leante ends his novel cannot entirely displace the wounded kinship that results from Coba's turning his back, even momentarily, on his fellow fighters and his blood brother Gallo in particular. Leante himself, with his frequent recourse to internal monologues and his emphasis on individual personages, tends to downplay or understate the

collective life of the *palenques*—perhaps because he is relying on official documents which are obviously quite hostile to the rebels, and is therefore more concerned with imaginatively reading them against the grain than with speculating other than cautiously about how these communities functioned on a day-to-day basis. For example, even allowing for the relative scarcity of women in the Oriente *palenques*, it is remarkable that, in the novel, women practically do not exist as full characters, other than a girl with whom Coba falls in love and who dies during the exodus from the Gran Palenque. Neither is there a sense of how judgments are carried out, how important decisions are made—how, in short, *civilian* life is led, beyond the idyllic picture of the Gran Palenque as it presents itself to the fugitives from Sigua.

One of the most signal achievements of *Black Albino*, the Jamaican writer Namba Roy's 1961 historical novel of a fictional maroon society in the first half of the eighteenth century, is precisely its successful portrayal of an integrated communal way of life. In fact, Roy's primary intention in writing the novel was to convey the richness of his own cultural and historical heritage; notably, he insists on the linguistic and cultural importance of the Bantu/Bakongo component in the fictional Twin Sisters community, as well as certain derivations from Ashanti culture (the most important of which is the ceremonial stool) customarily seen as preponderant by historians analyzing maroon lifeways. That the warring protagonists of the novel are named Tomaso and Lago (though both are *bozales*) indicates that they were transported on a Spanish or Portuguese slave ship, which would have been more likely to have been present on the Congo coasts.

As a Jamaican Maroon himself, with roots in the town (some nowadays call it an autonomous republic) of Accompong, whose official representative he was in London, he is able to transcend the picturesque or merely ethnographic and tell a story with only the minimum necessary explanatory material. Even more remarkably, while conferring a certain romantic and at times sentimental aura on the experience, Roy does not hesitate to depict grim and disturbing aspects of maroon society and to explore its contradictions. Although initially the rather high-flown dialogue might appear uncomfortably reminiscent of passages in Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (e.g., "Aye, even thy enemies shall pity thee, O traitor, and thy own mouth shall call the monster death as if he were thy greatest friend"[44]), Roy's attempt to convey the grandeur of the African-based *lingua franca* that eighteenth-century Maroon communities, most of which were populated by *bozales*, would surely have developed, is, for all its clumsiness, touchingly *right* in its way and certainly preferable to a manufactured "dialect."

In examining *Black Albino*, it is important to keep in mind that Namba Roy was also a carver from generations of carvers, and hence a son of Ogun, who

presides over wood and calabash carvers both in Africa and in the Americas. This may account for his choice of internecine strife as a theme for the novel. Indeed, the history of the Jamaican Maroons has been particularly marked, if not riven, by such internal tensions. Their continued independence, while a tribute to a tradition of protracted, bitter wars against both Spanish and English colonial slavocracies, has also been guaranteed through its own participation in repressing various non-Maroon revolts. The massacres and other atrocities committed by Maroons against Sam Sharpe's 1832 uprising and particularly the Morant Bay uprising of 1865 cannot easily be explained away by arguments of expediency; in a way, they might well reflect the attitude César Leante ascribes to Coba (and which, as it happens, he learns from another maroon)—that only those who have gone into marronage are worthy to be considered complete human beings. Even allowing for this possibility, the various Jamaican Maroon settlements themselves have often been in conflict with each other; in the 1720s (the period in which *Black Albino* is set), the Leeward maroons became unified under the famed Cudjoe's leadership only after fierce internal battles, and in 1735, at the height of the protracted First Maroon War, Cudjoe refused to ally himself with the Windward maroons from the northeast coast. That Roy, then, should choose, in a version of the Cain and Abel myth, to base his tale on a bitter conflict between two warrior blood brothers dwelling in the same town would appear to indicate a serious attempt to come to terms with the ambiguities of maroon history instead of relying on a mere recital of glorious deeds against white slavemasters (though these are also present, as the historical record demands).

Broadly, the narrative of *Black Albino* revolves around the tensions in the community engendered by the birth of an albino boy to the almost impossibly noble chief Tomaso and his *criolla* wife Kisanka after a long period of childlessness, and fanned by Tomaso's ill-tempered, malevolent blood brother Lago, who covets his chieftaincy and incessantly mocks and slanders him. Lago's utter inability to curb his tongue provokes, at the outset of the novel, a hand-to-hand combat with Tomaso in which he is critically injured and turned into a hunchback. This disability, incidentally, Lago shares with the Trelawny maroon chief Cudjoe, who, though renowned for his bravery and determination, not only signed but actively implemented a 1738 treaty with the British that required him and his men to pursue runaways and destroy other maroon communities. Later in the novel, it becomes clear that Lago's constant jeering at both Tomaso and Kisanka (whose death his threatening words will indirectly cause) is a form of psychological compensation for an earlier betrayal under torture of a large-scale slave conspiracy involving the young Kisanka, a house slave who carried messages between plantations and refused to divulge any information even

under the torture that permanently mutilated her foot. (Kisanka's role as messenger indicates one of many possible ways in which women acted as a crucial support for and liaison with the maroons within the plantation household.)

Lago orchestrates a campaign of vilification against Tomaso and his young albino son Tamba in particular, whom he accuses of bringing misfortune to the town. He incites the people to shun, even physically assault the boy. Yet Tomaso refuses to kill his blood brother even when he has the power to do so, preferring instead to abdicate his leadership position, leave the village, and build a smaller maroon settlement with his followers. Lago is unable ever to acquire power directly, except behind the scenes, through a figurehead chief.

Meanwhile, in one of the more sentimental twists in the tale, Lago's illegitimate daughter, a blind girl, forms an enduring friendship with Tamba, who shows every sign of becoming a warrior like his father. Through a series of events, Tomaso's wife dies, heartbroken at her son's pariah condition, and Lago tries to carry out an individual raid on a plantation, but is caught and once again under torture betrays his fellows, this time with more catastrophic results in that he reveals the location of the maroon town, which the British troops immediately attack. But rather than endure the name of traitor—with which the community healer has already branded him in private for his earlier betrayal—Lago sacrifices himself for the sake of the village, and in a spectacular action destroys many of the raiding party and himself, and cripples Tomaso, who loses his reason as well. As the battle rages, the village's children form their own maroon settlement under the leadership of Tamba, and when they are finally discovered, malnourished and ill, the shock is enough to restore Tomaso's sanity, and a happy ending (of sorts) ensues.

Beneath the melodramatic trappings of the tale, Roy engages in some interesting reflections about the organization of power in maroon towns, and on the harm caused by those like Lago who act on their own, driven by selfish motives. As a chief, Tomaso governs by example and without a narrow regard for tradition; as Lago complains, "Whoever heard of a chief calling himself a leader, living in a hut like any common person, going out with the warriors on raids, and eating no more than his men?" (13). He acquires an intimate knowledge of all the natural fortifications that the topography offers, and organizes a solid system of lookouts against any possible invasion. Under Tomaso's leadership, all decisions in Twin Sisters are taken in public, in "a clearing used as a market where the people exchanged their goods and which was also used on great ceremonial occasions" (54). At the first such meeting depicted in the novel, Tomaso announces that he wishes to enact new laws severely punishing any murderous acts against any "bakra" in the course of any military action aimed at liberating slaves or destroying property, other than in self-defense, because, as

he puts it, "badness breeds badness, and a leader full of evil weed cannot think for his people" (62). But when Tomaso learns that a boy who left Twin Sisters to see his family on a plantation in the area has been captured and tortured to death despite promises by a "bakra" priest to spare his life, he voluntarily gives up his power, retracts the law he has just enacted, and goes off to kill the plantation master.

On the other hand, when Lago comes close to the absolute power he has long desired, he divides the people against each other, distracts and softens them with frequent wasteful feasts, relaxes the vigilance around the town, and in general thinks only of taking steps that boost his own personal prestige, of which he can never be entirely secure. As a result, the town falls into demoralized neglect and disease begins to strike some of the children, which Lago blames on the alleged evil power of the albino child rather than on his own failure to ensure the maintenance of the drainage system. Roy perceptively shows the harm caused to a permanently imperiled community when power is exercised in the absence of accountability:

> [The people] had suffered disaster after disaster since that night when Tomaso abdicated. Hunger and want was now always with them. Many of the elders in good standing had resigned in disgust when they saw that Lago and his puppet chief had no intention of consulting them on important matters. Rarely had there been a meeting at the place known as The-Place-of-Talks, and the great clearing opposite was only used when there was some celebration inspired by Lago as a kind of balm to soothe the grumbling population. (103)

The deed that precipitates the near-destruction of the community, Lago's abortive single-handed raid on a plantation, emerges from a sequence of individual actions taken without thought of their consequences. Out of personal rancor, the old obeahman Tahta, a close friend and ally of Tomaso and his people, and Lago's enemy, threatens to expose him publicly for his earlier betrayal. Through a campaign of psychological warfare, Tahta reduces Lago to a state of paranoid terror. In desperation at the prospect of losing the respect of his family and political supporters, Lago embarks on his dangerous mission without informing anyone in the community of his scheme: "He would show them all that he was no coward, for he would return with people whom he would rescue single-handed. His sons would look at him once more with respect, and the people would admit that whatever he had done when he was young could be forgiven because of his daring. If he brought it off they might think him greater than Tomaso" (139–40). But once he is caught, he is horribly tortured and, brought face to face as before with the specter of his imminent death in the shape of a prisoner devoured by fire ants, breaks down and reveals everything.

Throughout the novel, isolation from others is constantly linked with disaster and misery, not only with respect to actions taken without community support, but as a mode of existence. Kisanka's greatest fear is that her albino child will be shunned and abandoned by the community, and despite Tomaso's loving reassurance and support, she blames herself for the misfortune that has struck them. Thus, Lago's malicious prophecy to her, "Thy child shall die alone, Kisanka! And not even the dog shall wish to die with him! It will be a great day for the picnies of the village when they learn that the monster who is of no race no longer lives, to bring fear and curse upon them!" (104–05)—is enough to bring about her slow death. When the child overhears her repeating this curse as she dies, his sudden access of fear and agony is tempered by the knowledge that at least he has one friend, Lago's blind daughter, Manda, who tells him, "'I thought how lonely it would be if you did not want me any more. Then I would wish to die. . . . Will you promise that you will never leave me?" (120–21). With her, he will build and lead the third maroon society in the novel, after Twin Sisters and Tomaso's exile community, which is strengthened by fighters loyal to him—the *palenque* of children, including Lago's sons, seeking refuge from the British soldiers. Those children who bullied and scorned him as a freak are now dependent on him, and their loyalty grows to the point that, when Tamba erroneously believes he has contracted leprosy, they all choose to "infect" themselves with it by touching him rather than leave him in isolation.

The children's community offers a possibility for healing the wounded kinship that has led to the grievous sundering of the blood brotherhood of Lago and Tomaso. While Lago invariably uses the honorific "blood brother" in a mocking way, he is nonetheless moved when Tomaso reminds him of the oath they swore. But as an embodiment of the fear, mistrust, guilt, and resentment that haunts all those subjected to the violence of slavery, Lago can only isolate himself and brood over his own weakness. Like Ogun, he "sentences himself to eternal isolation, in some versions [of the myth] going so far as to commit suicide, after unwittingly slaying his own people in a frenzy of rage . . . "[45] That Lago's children should unite with Tomaso's son, putting aside the malice and hurt they had inflicted on him earlier, betokens a possible healing; as the small band of children seeks refuge from slave-system terror in the mountains and caves, they experience all the agonies of wounded kinship: "It was not uncommon to hear someone weeping in the dark, remembering his or her experiences, or perhaps mourning the loss of loved parents" (189). As a counterpoint to the doomed blood brotherhood of Tomaso and Lago, Tamba and the blind Manda, whom the boy calls "Little Sister," form a bond all the more lasting for being tested by adversity and shared grief. The power of their love is great enough to

restore Tomaso's reason—and to bring their entire children's maroon society into the embrace of the elders.

But the memory and signs of devastation linger even in this resolution. During the course of the novel, virtually all the characters undergo some form of mutilation or already possess some type of physical disability: Lago's back is broken during hand-to-hand combat with Tomaso, and he is later subjected to ghastly torture; Kisanka is partially crippled after slave owners' henchmen burn her foot; Tamba is an albino; Manda is blind; and by the end of the novel, Tomaso has lost his arm (and temporarily, his reason), and Tahta an eye as a result of Lago's final suicidal act of deliverance (itself carried out partly to avoid his own assured death at his blood brother's hands). While this violence wreaked on the body is a sign of Ogun's presence and even, in the case of Tomaso, of his ambiguous blessing—"Ògún plays rough. The old Lùkùmí said that if Ògún liked you, he took only a leg or an arm"[46]—it is also the materialization of a haunting dilemma: while military might is necessary to safeguard a permanently endangered community, it also tends to create a condition of high tension inimical to the expression of love. Tomaso's final embrace of the children, with his single arm "opened wide as if he were about to gather together all the children of the world instead of ten" (205), heralds a transcendence of wounded kinship that recalls his own protection by the spirit of his dead wife, his "Little Shadow," It also brings to mind the tale of Ogun and Oshun the *orisha* of love, as told in a Cuban *pataki*: "In the *monte*, Oggún worked tirelessly, but he was very embittered. Besides producing iron, he sowed discord throughout the world. It was then that Ochún went to the *monte*, attracted him with her song, and made him taste the honey of life."[47] In the same way, the sight of not only his son but the community's lost children as well restores Tomaso—and by extension, the sundered Twin Sisters community—to a new harmony, echoed by the final affirming dialogue between the groups of *eketeh* or horns (more commonly known as *abeng*) through which geographically distant maroon communities communicate with each other.

Ultimately, what remains unsatisfying about Roy's novel is its reliance on certain conventions of the historical romance—a criticism that to some extent can be applied to Leante's novel, for all its stylistic superiority. In other words, both works, by focusing on times past, tend to stress the remoteness of the maroon impulse, as if it were a historically bound structure of feeling that has long been superseded by present conditions and reduced to a curio or at best a dim foreshadowing. And yet, as Kamau Brathwaite reveals in his poem "Veridian," the dream of a *republic in marronage* exerts a powerful and undiminished attraction on the Caribbean imaginary, well into the so-called technological age:

> at the bottom of this high world above it all we draw
> the lion picket our stand & make our testament
> boy girl woman warrior elder statesman gunsmith technician food
> engineer shamir shama shaman we are all gathered here[48]

At the same time, this vision risks being overwhelmed, reduced to mere "past," by the organized amnesia of contemporary life; as much as by outside invaders, the maroon sensibility is endangered by a development of underdevelopment in which memory and even elemental solidarity threaten to vanish. Borrowing and transforming Martin Carter's poetic image of the "strangled city," Brathwaite concludes his meditation on maroon society on an elegiac yet somehow affirmative note:

> look how our villages are grown up tall
> into this strangled city
> tales of another leader lost
> solares. bolivare. Palanquin
>
> washed away w/time & frogs & river & the mud & accompong[49]

Whereas Carter conceived of the "strangled city" in terms of abjection, lying prostrate at the outraged poet's feet, Brathwaite re-visions it as the result of the aborted autonomy of the maroon villages, but where a subversive seed from the past may yet take root; the phrase "look how our villages are grown up tall" has overtones of pride that the "strangled city" cannot entirely crush. Leaders vanish into lore and legend and names are washed away or altered by their uncomprehending—or inventive?—descendants: from solar to *solares*, the crowded urban tenements in Havana and elsewhere; from the one Bolívar to the plural "bolivare"; from *palenque* to the palanquin, that richly bedecked sedan-chair used to transport, among others, Ashanti potentates. The headlong torrent of progress that carries with it helter-skelter "time & frogs & river & the mud" concludes with the name (of town and Akan-descended maroon leader) "accompong," which disrupts the sequence and even holds back the movement toward oblivion, hanging in the air like a sustained pedal tone wafted from a no-longer-distant Africa. For Accompong remains a town with a definite degree of autonomy from the Jamaican central government, with its own system of government and an exemption from taxation. It is, in short, far from being "washed away." But what is endangered is the knowledge of the significance of such towns, and the culture of which they are still-vibrant expressions, for a Caribbean region under the multiple pressures of a modernity that seeks to turn everything into a "strangled city."

Such a project of recovery also involves a kind of cultural self-confrontation, a crucial conjuncture in the development of the phenomenology of maroon spirit. Simply to acknowledge or even uncritically celebrate maroon history and culture could easily lead to a kind of artificial preservationism (exemplified by "heritage tours") that tends to freeze the unfolding of potentialities toward what C. L. R. James describes as a "clear recognition that we [Caribbeans] are the product of a very complicated historical past and all of it is in us *striving or at any rate ready for expression*. We are an adventurous people, ready for anything. We are what we are because we have been what we have been. . . . We have a history, we don't know it, and we will never know it until we respect ourselves, and relate our present, our past, and our future."[50]

Notably, James insists here on the need for Caribbeans to locate themselves in historical space-time in order to realize the truth-in-action of their cumulative past—a "qualitative leap" or passage from imagination to expression. By asserting the attainment of individual and collective self-respect in a Caribbean context as indispensable to an adventurous historical consciousness capable of encompassing the interplay of present, past, and future, James takes up a theme that appears toward the end of Wilson Harris's 1962 novel *The Whole Armour*, articulated in an impassioned tirade by the fugitive Cristo to his lover Sharon:

> All the restless wayward spirits of all the aeons (who it was thought had been embalmed for good) are returning to roost in our blood. And we have to start all over again where they began to explore. We've got to pick up the seeds again where they left off. It's no use worshipping the rottenest *tacouba* and tree-trunk in the historic topsoil. There's a whole world of branches and sensations we've missed, and we've got to start again from the roots up even if they look like nothing. Blood, sap, flesh, veins, arteries, lungs, heart, the heartland, Sharon. *We're the first potential parents who can contain the ancestral house*. Too young? I don't know. Too much responsibility? Time will tell. Or else it will be too late to stop everything and everyone from running away and tumbling down. . . . What do you think they say when it happens, when the crops run away? They shrug and say they're expendable crops. They can't begin to see that it's *us*, our blood, running away all the time, in the river and the sea, everywhere, staining the bush. *Now* is the time to make a new-born stand . . . even if we fall on our knees and *creep* to anchor ourselves before we get up.[51]

Harris's Cristo, like Césaire in his poetic incitement to marronage, recognizes the power and mobility of blood, except that he links its shedding to a specific terrain: the heartland, seen in his emancipatory vision not as the raw material of exploitative profiteering or *privateering* but as an energizing source of gnosis. Cristo speaks in terms of a quest that is redemptive and renovating in both the architectural and conceptual sense. The returning ghosts/vodouns of history (over whom Ogun presides) rage in his blood with the same intensity as

Césaire's. Now, however, they call upon him not to abandon an oppressive state of affairs, but to build a rooted dwelling—an ancestral house—that reflects those who have gone before while moving into a depth of feeling and experience they had not been able to apprehend—the "world of branches and sensations," nerve-endings, trees and rivers, veins, all mirrored in the consciousness of a generation poised, as potential parents "adventurous and ready for anything" in James's terms, to give birth to a new mode of being-in-the-world.

Like Ogun, Cristo is prepared to venture into what Wole Soyinka would call the numinous realm of transition. This entails a downward journey to the roots and subsequent upward constructive movement toward the new realm to be birthed and built, the "new-born stand" wherein the anima or female principle embodied by Sharon/Oshún will unite with Cristo/Ogun and lead them both out of the forest, beyond the "everydayness" in which, as Martin Carter puts it, "the slave is still in headlong flight and the flight has not yet become the search."[52] The outcome of this search is *home*, a space of individual and historical fulfillment where the fear and defensiveness arising from a lifetime of headlong flight can be healed at last. In this conception, quite opposed to what the exponents of *créolité* propose, marronage is not a past-tense creation only fit to be consigned to a museum of Caribbean curiosities, but a mo(ve)ment that instantiates a deeper aspiration toward a fully realized "folk culture" in Brathwaite's sense: "by folk we mean not in-culturated, static groups, giving little; but a people who, from the centre of an oppressive system . . . have devised means of protecting what has been . . . gained (miraculous, precarious maronage), and who begin to offer in return some of this experience and vision."[53]

However, the means through which such "offerings" are made to the larger society are, within a context of capitalist modernization, invariably fraught with and productive of cultural misprisions. When maroon consciousness ventures out of its protective carapace, it is often owing to the encroachment of "modernization," which in turn skews the way in which their "experience and vision" may be perceived by those who are the agents of such unwanted (and unwonted) change.

In *The Secret Ladder* (1963), the concluding novel of Harris's *Guyana Quartet*, Cristo's passionately wished-for "newborn stand," tragically unrealized in *The Whole Armour*, is revealed as a possible outcome of a complex confrontation between Guyanese ancestral communities, represented by the Canje "river people" led by the ancient maroon Poseidon, and the forces of capitalist rationality embodied in the crew of surveyors headed by the engineer Russell Fenwick. As C. L. R. James has perceptively noted, *The Secret Ladder* is itself a phenomenological narration of Russell Fenwick's personal journey from inauthentic everydayness (and the related blind, quasi-conquistadorial belief

in progress and the domination of nature) to a deeper engagement with the historical and mythical lineaments of the land he has been sent out to—impossibly, as it turns out—charter and survey and hence domesticate. The landscape itself, with its hallucinatory juxtapositions of scorching, dissecting sun ("The sun shone through dark flesh to illuminated skeleton, the greenest garment to the whitest bone"[54]) and rainforest darkness ("the jungle turned blind as a shuttered place and the eye learnt to relinquish the neighboring sun for a tenebrous, almost electrical gloom" [359]), is a powerful factor in bringing about Fenwick's alteration of perspective.

But the novel is also a narrative of a clash between two different forms of organizing communal life and the possibilities, ever-present yet more often than not unrealized, of moving beyond this conflict into an illuminated awareness. "The instant the prison of the void was self-created, a breath of spirit knew how to open a single unconditional link in a chain of circumstances" (464), Harris writes at the conclusion, and indeed the entire novel concerns the process of opening a link in a chain, adding a rung in a secret ladder ("of conscience" [371]), bridging the everyday and the transcendent, and thus unlocking the prison of the void—an absence of ancestral ground—in which Fenwick has jailed himself.

Fenwick's crew, like others in Harris's work, is a microcosm of the various ethnic groups of Guyana. However, its inauthenticity as a community—defined as it is by the exigencies of a colonial "civilizing mission"—is reflected in the constant tensions and bickering among the men, the abuses of authority by those entrusted with positions further up the hierarchy, the alternately deferential and menacing character of Jordan, and the mutually exploitative relationships in which each is enmeshed under the guise of carrying out a job. In a moment of insight, Fenwick sees the crew as a "strange fellowship and barren condition" in comparison to "the divine promise, born of an underworld of half-forgotten sympathies" [379] apparently heralded by Poseidon. Fenwick's modernizing impulse justifies the flood-control project that will deprive the river people of their land and dwellings, as something carried out for their own ultimate good. But as he moves away from this technological pseudo-rationality toward a deeper engagement with the human and biotic ecologies of the region, he grows more exasperated with the petty intrigues and brutalities of the workforce, and refuses to play the conventionally authoritarian role of "skipper" expected of him. Fenwick's irrevocable step across the threshold of understanding occurs in a bitter exchange with the manipulative, ruthlessly pragmatic Jordan:

> "I telling you before and I telling you again, sir, you showing youself to be deeply involved . . . "
>
> "Deeply involved? But I am! I *am* involved."

> "You mustn't be. You never used to be before."
> "If I never used to be, I was crazy."
> "Excuse me, skipper, but you now showing the true sign of going mad." (424–25)

The allusion to Harris's friend and compatriot Martin Carter's poem "You Are Involved" is evident: "Like a jig / shakes the loom / like a web / is spun the pattern / all are involved! / all are consumed!"[55] Or, restated in James's terms: "There is no actual time or actual part of history which is to be taken away from the fact that man is living there in the stream of actual existence."[56] The images of stream and loom have particular resonance in the universe of *The Secret Ladder*. The titular ladder initially appears to Fenwick as "all the rivers of Guyana . . . on which one sets one's musing foot again and again, to climb into both the past and the future of the continent of mystery" (367), and the loom emerges from a midnight vision beside the Canje: "He shivered with the visionary tattoo of every branch and constellation, conscious of the threads which bound him to their enormous loom" (432).

At the same time, Poseidon and those who have rallied around him against the invading surveyors form a resistance destined for tragic failure on a specific and limited military level ("All were doomed to see themselves die to the basest as the loftiest motives of conspiracy" [455]), if not necessarily in the realm of what James calls "historicality." Poseidon initially appears as an aged hermit who is nevertheless willing to lodge Catalena Perez, the wife of one of the crewmembers, in his house. And as Nathaniel Mackey points out in a perceptive commentary on the novel: "The act of marronage at the root of Poseidon's presence in the Canje took place only two generations back and was a solitary rather than a collective undertaking."[57] In fact, it was not Poseidon but his grandfather who first ventured into the marshes of the Canje. Likewise, the actual "community" around Poseidon (as distinct from the "buried community he represented whose flight from slavery had ended right here, in the ground, under one's feet" [389]) is pretty much an *ad hoc* byproduct of Fenwick's mission, if the hostile Jordan is to be believed: "the fact is, the river people—all the black people from topside and bottomside the river—flocking around Poseidon. They ready to make trouble" (380). Their sabotage of one of the river gauges installed by the crew, and of a bridge across a stream, does not, as Fenwick comes to recognize, "constitute violence as I understand it. It's more a witness of protest, the spirit of protest" (427). But when Weng, the foreman, threatens some of them with brutal reprisals for their action, and when another crew member, Chiung, is assaulted after cheating two river people attempting to sell him a turtle, a small band flees to the bush to join Poseidon, fearing inevitable police repression.

With the sudden death of their leader from a stroke incurred in a fit of anger against two fleeing sympathizers he mistakenly perceives as interlopers because of their connections to the expedition, the rebels are powerless to act against the intruders in any but a retributive manner: "Bitterness had become their only treasure, the bitterness which instructed them to abandon everything, every plan of action, which paled into meaningless insignificance beside the overwhelming emotion of helpless hate" (457). Because the rebels conceive of their freedom in terms of a simple negation whose positive moment is incarnated solely in the ancient figure of the old man whose immortal name belies his mortal flesh, and not in their own practice (which, as Fenwick intuits, has the potential to "restore something we have all lost—the authority and the psyche of freedom" [386]), they only reproduce the curse discerned by Fenwick earlier in the novel: "Maybe it was all too emotional, too blinding, this freedom that has turned cruel, abortive, wooly and wild everywhere almost" (385). For they too, albeit sharing Poseidon's African descent, have—by conferring all their hopes in Poseidon—failed to understand "the real issue of genuine and worthwhile authority" (385), and thus end up as "frightened men" who abandon their dead leader when apparent danger threatens. This kind of charismatic thrall in which maroon leaders can hold their followers has its modern-day equivalent not only in the cult of the Leader that has undermined so many Caribbean movements for liberation, but in such phenomena as the allegiance of *marooned* shantytown dwellers in Kingston, Jamaica to local drug-trafficking gang potentates or Don Gorgons (at one point in *The Secret Ladder*, Poseidon is explicitly compared to Medusa) who guarantee them the survival that the "legal" authorities have long since shown their inability to provide.

The truth of the confrontation between Poseidon and Fenwick enters into the texture of another invisible city: that of ancestry. It should be noted that the revelatory final chapter of *Palace of the Peacock*, the first book in the *Guyana Quartet* that returns as the name given by Fenwick to his dinghy ("after the city of God, the city of gold set somewhere in the heart of Brazil and Guyana" [367]), is entitled "Paling of Ancestors," and the image of a palace or enclosed precinct, while resonating with *palenque*, also conjures up the presence of a temple. And Poseidon, derisively renamed in the same access of grotesque slavemaster mockery that conferred upon slaves such names from classical antiquity as "Scipio," "Cupidon," "Pompey," and "Caesar," rises into his divine kingship as "the black king of history whose sovereignty over the past was a fluid crown of possession and dispossession" (369) and hence into the tidal plenitude of his name.

Significantly, Fenwick cannot really "understand" Poseidon during their first encounter, in that he is struck by a discrepancy between what Poseidon is saying and the way in which the old man's lips move. And it is by experienc-

ing this "alien, painful, and extreme" (373) disjuncture between sound and motion, words and their sense, that Fenwick realizes that he "could never, any more, rid himself of the daemon of freedom and imagination and responsibility" (371). Poseidon's words evoke the specter of a wounded kinship, a half-forgotten ancestry, and they move Fenwick, while writing a letter to his mother, to a meditation on his long-dead father, an African-descended ancestor whose last remaining trace is significantly enclosed in a faded snapshot with a "subaqueous background look" (382). Appropriate, then, for Fenwick to assert and mend a kinship between his father and Poseidon, and to describe his meeting with Poseidon as the first stage in a process of recognition which, if not carried out, would unleash metaphorical though no less rapacious monsters from the psychic and political deep: "I wish I could truly grasp the importance of this meeting. If I do not—if my generation do not—leviathan will swallow us all" (384).

Fenwick's navigator Bryant, present at that initial meeting, makes an explicit claim to Poseidon's ancestry: "The old man look like my grandfather, too, and that is as far back in history as I could go" (375). Although Fenwick pretends at first to have understood Poseidon in the same way as Bryant, their second encounter points up the distance between them. While Fenwick berates the old man for embodying a false freedom that in actuality is only another form of slavery, Bryant challenges his superior and in so doing reveals a deeper comprehension of time, ancestry, and remembered community than the educated professional Fenwick: "The old man is no slave . . . He freer than you and me . . . When the time come he going return across the sea where his primitive freedom lie" (395). And yet it is Bryant, fleeing with Catalena Perez to what he hopes will be the freedom of the maroon society, who will indirectly cause the old man's death and send him back to his African home.

Desperate for recognition, "a declaration of kinship" (453) from Poseidon, Bryant, with Catalena, finds himself on trial for the murder of the ancestor, and his affirmations of the dead man as "the condition of universal freedom, the broad base of countless beings" are to no avail. Even Bryant's personal ancestral link to Poseidon is not exempt from a broader misunderstanding of his human divinity or divine humanity, well captured in the figurative funeral pyre that illuminates the dead Poseidon: "the fire that flickered within and without his countenance, streaked him only with the premature coming of the dawn, the false or early dawn dubbed upon the cheeks of men. It signified the lie in their hopes as well as the creation of a jewel of light without self-evident generation or action" (458)

Poseidon, then, is more than an ancestor, a reminder, a nemesis (as his Greek namesake was to Odysseus); his death, less a death of God than of an individual deity chosen to play a part in "an inquisition of dead gods and heroes" (464),

announces a necessary transcendence into a new realm of creation, beyond the destructive dualism of pursuer and pursued. It is not Poseidon the man but the protean powers that manifest themselves through him (and in which the disruptive and redemptive lovers, Bryant and Catalena, participate by ultimately escaping "upon another rung in the secret ladder" [463]) that can enter into the constitution of a "paling of ancestors"—a city both heavenly and earthly, whose gold is figured in the remembered ancestral wedding ring fished out of a cesspool by the crew member Van Brock and remorsefully restored to the dead fingers of his grandmother before her burial.

Though allusions to Greek mythology—Perseus and the Gorgon, Perseus and Andromeda, the elusive, shape-shifting sea-god Proteus—run throughout the novel, most obviously in Poseidon's name, it is also important to take seriously the repeated linkages of Poseidon to Africa, particularly as the old man bears an imposed name that conceals a deeper identity or avatar. In a conversation with the crew member Stoll, Fenwick alludes to his first meeting with Poseidon, which he says taught him that

> ". . . we'll all sink or swim together."
> "Sounds like Greek to me, Mr Fenwick."
> "Possibly it is," Fenwick smiled. "Maybe even further back than that, the mystery of a lost continent." (405)

Nathaniel Mackey establishes a link between this allusion to Atlantis—said by Plato to be the kingdom of Poseidon—and the work of Leo Frobenius, Wagadu's discoverer for Europe and a *savant* obsessed with the search for filiations between ancient Greece and Africa, with Greece predictably serving as the aesthetic and mythological lens through which to view and measure the African contributions. One of the crucial moments in Frobenius's African expeditions was his excavation of a terra-cotta head of the Yoruba sea-god Olokun, which he referred to as "'the Poseidon of the Atlantic Ocean.'"[58]

Notwithstanding Frobenius's dubious comparisons, in the context of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from which Harris's Poseidon emerged, it is fruitful to linger on the often subtle resonances of the old maroon with the Yoruba deity, in the sense that he belongs to an undersea world—an Atlantidean city—that haunts the inland region of Guyana, the "land of waters" where he has made his home. Of his dwelling, Fenwick wonders, "Had it been grafted above (unconscious of itself) on the land, or did it possess a self-conscious kinship and identity beneath?" (411). Olokun presides over that "beneath."

Encountered in hermaphroditic guise earlier in this study, Olokun is also sometimes represented as half man, half fish. When Fenwick first sees Poseidon, whose emergence from the forest is heralded by "the faint hoarse sound of an

approaching body swimming in the undergrowth" (370), he compares the old man's tattered trousers to fins. The Cuban scholar Lázaro Vidal, who has carried out studies of Olokun in an African context, says that the god's undersea dwelling is a cave "where his palace is surrounded by precious stones and ivory-covered walls."[59] This recalls the "jewel of light without self-evident generation or action"—all that remains of that erstwhile splendor following the contractions and oppressions of the Middle Passage and its aftermath. Indeed, Olokun is said to be the patron of beadmakers, fashioners of tiny spirit-capturing glimmers of light. According to some accounts, however, Olokun dwells on land: "Approximately two miles north of Ilé Ifé, there is a grove known as Igbó Olokun . . . In the Benin region, there is a mountain called Adura, in which it is believed this deity lived. Near the region of Iyesá there is a river called Oré, where it is said that Olokun dwells in its depths" (192).

A legend says that when the world was divided up among the various *orisas*, Olokun was allotted the World of Sand, and "there are those who believe that this land was ancient Atlantis" (193). Descriptions of the World of Sand—Aiyé Ekó—show it to have been an earthly paradise of sorts, with animals, fruits, and vegetables in abundant supply, and Olokun to have been the richest king on earth. "When human beings began to arrive at Aiyé Ekó to exploit its treasures, Olokun made his dominions inaccessible and sank them in the immense depths of the sea . . ." (193). In the African diaspora, the story goes that at the dawn of creation, Olokun fought with his sky-god brother Olorun over which one of them would rule over the earth. The conflict became so violent that Obatalá had to bind Olokun to the bottom of the sea with seven chains lest he drown all of humanity in his rage (compare the account of this imprisonment in Chapter 1 of this study). To this day, Olokun lives in the ocean depths next to a great sea serpent.

Like Olokun, Poseidon jealously guards his domain against those outsiders who would plunder and exploit it, and he has gathered around him the "river people," who extend worshipful devotion to him as the numinous embodiment of the river and the ocean into which it flows. After their first encounter with him, Fenwick and Bryant are caught in "a forest of rain" (372)—a brief, intense warning of the flood that is in Olokun's power to unleash. Poseidon's rage against his guest Catalena's supposed betrayal of his hiding place incites him to raise his serpentine pole against her: "The indomitable ardour and strength of years rediscovered their furious potency, the most frightful lover of age. He knew he would live forever in the minds of his people . . ." (456–57). Similar to the fraternal strife that led to Olokun's tragic imprisonment for the sake of humanity's survival, Poseidon's wrathful moment is at once his apotheosis—in that he will remain an eternal spiritual presence—and his downfall through the

inadvertent intercession of his spiritual grandson Bryant: a reminder that in the end he is all too human.

In the context of a discussion of Kamau Brathwaite's work, Harris notes that "fugitivity makes for overlap or gateway drama between Africa and the West Indies—*between sound and sight*."[60] Marronage—fugitive consciousness, fugitive community—is a gateway through which the intimations of an ideal Caribbean polity have been and continue to be articulated. And to the extent that it enacts a drama of recovery and return even in a condition of their ultimate impossibility (except, as Bryant notes with reference to Poseidon, with the death-induced journey back home to the submarine/maroon city of the ancestors), the maroon impulse shows the agonic nature of such a community. Yet in its deepest strivings, however thwarted and involuted their realization has been over the centuries, maroon society is an opening toward the fulfillment of Fenwick's hope that out of the "strange brooding murderous place" formed by the legacy of oppression, a "threat of uprising [that] can remain bloodless and still remain truly successful . . . may clear the air for good and restore something we have all lost—the authority and the psyche of freedom" (386). But this necessary beginning is just a single moment in the tidalectical process of transformation. Having moved outside the Plantation into the unknown and made a life "high up in this littered world of rock. stone,"[61] the culture and foundational consciousness clandestinely nurtured and sustained in these communities over the centuries flow inexorably back into the textures and lifeways of the cities of the Caribbean, marking a return that is also a newborn stand.

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CHAPTER 4

Two, Three, Many Havanas

Ventures into a Repeating City

The ancient city of Wagadu as it emerges from the tale "Gassire's Lute" is less a domain of conviviality than a backdrop for the human passions and frailties that cause it to vanish and later reappear. Fundamentally, while Wagadu's existence as metaphor defines each of its successive incarnations in terms of a specific discovery or achievement, its utopian content is only gestured toward without ever being described, since its fullest realization can only occur in an indeterminate future and within the individual body-soul, where "every man will have *Wagadu* in his heart and every woman a *Wagadu* in her womb." There is, however, another Wagadu tale in which the great city is described as a place of surpassing material and intellectual wealth:

> Its fields produced rich harvests, and traders came to that city from all directions to deal in cloth, gold and wares from distant lands. In Wagadu were great markets, and portions of the city were set aside for blacksmiths, goldsmiths, leatherworkers and craftsmen of all kinds. Many languages were heard in the streets—Manding, Fula, Hausa, Arabic and others. There were scholars, Muslim teachers of the Koran, and practitioners of the mystic sciences. The name Wagadu signified "infinitely deep," and it was in fact such a city, complex and profound in its variety and wonders. Whatever men sought after, they went to Wagadu to find.[1]

Already, by virtue of the past tense in which the story is couched, this city that possesses the infinite—unsoundable—depth of the (celestial, oceanic) cosmos, and as such becomes a magnetizing force toward which people are drawn to continually enrich it, is fated to fade into a time recoverable only by the storyteller's voice. In this story, the ideal city is indeed but a prelude to a quest that refuses to accept the finality of its apparent perfection. Fittingly, the revelation of Wagadu's ultimate displacement by the great Empire of Segu is carried out

not by a warrior but by a wise elder—doubtless kin to the old man Kiékorro who warned Gassire of the doom that would befall his city if he continued to pursue knowledge of the *Dausi* at the expense of his social position.

This sage, Segu Almami, is a prominent Koranic scholar with many students, whom one day he resolves to take on a journey outside Wagadu. "He said, 'Wagadu is great, yet the world in which it sits is greater still. Wagadu is infinitely deep, yet the world that surrounds it is infinitely wide.'"[2] No matter how many people are attracted to Wagadu, the city cannot encompass everything, although there are moments when it appears to. Underscoring this point, the wise man points out and explicates to his students various phenomena in the natural and animal kingdoms. Finally, the group comes to a large stone made of gold, yet another thing that Wagadu lacks, and Segu Almamy announces that a devil is guarding the stone. When a disciple protests that he cannot see any devil there, the philosopher answers, "The world is made up of two things, what the senses perceive and what they are incapable of perceiving. . . . What is told to me is that here there is a great unexplained force, and that here, some day, a powerful kingdom will rise out of the bush."[3]

The group continues its journey, but, overcome by greed, one of the pupils devises a pretext to return to the gold rock, breaks off a piece for himself, and is immediately killed by the devil he cannot see, whose "invisible spear [leaves] an invisible wound." Realizing that someone is missing, Segu Almamy sees in his mind's eye the body of the young man, hastens back to the golden stone, and finds everything as he had imagined it. The party buries the youth's body, using the golden boulder as his headstone, on which the wise man inscribes a message for future generations: "If a city is established here it will prosper and become great. It will live for many generations, and will be remembered by the djeli in their songs forever."[4] And as if to set the seal on this prophecy, Segu Almamy bestows his own name on that city of the future, which in centuries to come will be the capital of a powerful empire that will last for nearly 300 years and consign Wagadu to the misty realm of legend, where its wealth and achievements will nonetheless be magnified.

In an interesting counterpoint to the Biblical myth of Cain (founder of cities in mingled confirmation and expiation of blood guilt) and Sigmund Freud's myth of the primal horde (where civilization is built on the successful conspiracy of sons to kill their omnipotent father), the site of Segu is the result of an invisible action leading to a death first perceived in dreams and only later confirmed in reality. The diabolical, spear-wielding *genius loci*, felt by, or rather (as he himself puts it) *told* to Segu Almamy as a "great, unexplained force," sets the seal on the future city by claiming a life. Overweening greed is not the primary cause of the nameless victim's death. After all, he only breaks off a small

piece of the huge golden stone, and the lie he tells his companions as a pretext for leaving them is quite trivial, involving the "call of nature." Rather, what seals his doom is his refusal to heed his teacher's warning that invisible forces are always at work in the world.

Evidently, the citizens of Wagadu, too accustomed to thinking of their city as the center of the universe, are unprepared for the implications of Segu Almamy's observation that "the world in which it sits is greater still." Gold is traded in Wagadu's marketplace, but nobody there has ever seen a boulder made of gold, and it is precisely what lies beyond the purview of their experience that will form the basis for a new El Dorado-like city and empire whose power they cannot conceive because they cannot see it. Not only does the death of the young man herald their own and their city's demise, its monumentalization by Segu Almamy serves as both a *memento mori* to the transitory nature of human endeavor and a reminder of the primal violence out of which communities are built and against which these communities must always battle.

Segu Almamy names the future city after himself because he seeks to counterbalance the violence of its origins with a leavening wisdom. At the same time, he is well aware that, for all his knowledge, he is but a strand in a larger tale, which he literally writes into existence by inscribing a mingled temptation and prophecy on the golden foundational tombstone. For, in the griot's words, which alone keep Segu Almamy's name alive in memory, "those cities and people of the future, how can they be known to the mind of man? Only for the architect of the universe do they exist, and they will be seen by human eyes only after all the threads are drawn to make them visible."[5] That such a process of becoming visible is not wholly mystical can be seen in the emergence of Segu, centuries later, as a result of human actions and decisions. A group of hunters far from home reads the inscribed prophecy and, gambling on its veracity, resolves to settle there; they are joined by a group of homeless wanderers and then by a band of women fleeing an attack on their village. Each new set of arrivals makes a pact with the founding group of hunters, and over time, the city emerges and flourishes.

To move from the seventeenth-century CE founding of Segu to a poem written in the Cuba of the early 1930s may appear abrupt and arbitrary, but Nicolás Guillén's "Llegada" ("Arrival"[6]) provides a bridge between the builders of cities in Africa and their Cuban descendants who, newly emancipated from slavery, announce their readiness to "bring our mark / to the final profile of America." The opening poem in his groundbreaking 1931 collection *Sóngoro cosongo*, "Llegada" is steeped in Africanist imagery, but it is a measure of Guillén's adroit poetics that the Caribbean geography is ubiquitous, as if to show that the Africans find in the environment traces of their long-vanished home and shape

it not only to their immediate needs but to the call of memory. As well, the poem points to a positive transcendence of marronage; having forged a culture of resistance powerful enough to withstand all attacks, the collective protagonists of the poem are now proudly ready to take that culture into the island metropolis.

The historical backdrop to the poem, one with which Guillén's Cuban readers would have been familiar, involves a series of migrations from the Plantation into the urban areas, dating back to the earliest years of Havana's existence but most significantly occurring in the aftermath of the first (1868 to 1878) revolutionary war (initiated by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes's liberation of his slaves), the official emancipation of the slaves in 1886, and the *mambí* War of Independence of 1895 to 1898, all of which led to an increased Afro-Cuban urban presence—to which Esteban Montejo among others testifies, although he was far from enamored of Havana life. Guillén himself was writing as a pioneering exponent of the 1930s *negrismo* movement in Cuban arts and letters, itself reflective of the increasing influence on Cuban intellectuals of diasporic African cultures—particularly art, music, and dance—as major ingredients in what Fernando Ortiz called the *ajiaco* or "callaloo" of Cuban culture. While Guillén preferred to call himself *mulato* rather than *negro*, his use in this and other poems of the first-person plural in speaking of Afro-Cubans has an authoritative ring that clearly attracted and inspired his translator and friend Langston Hughes in his equally assured American English renderings.

The triumphant opening proclamation "Here we are!" is followed by an enumeration of the elements of the "mark" that the Afro-Cubans possess and bestow upon the city: first and foremost are words, "humid from the forests," followed by "our veins," where "the strong sun / rises" and transmits its strength to "our fists." With the following stanza, the lines broaden to encompass the black multitudes in their overland and riverine journeys: "deep in our eyes enormous palm trees sleep, / and our cry cuts the air like a drop of new gold. / Our feet, broad and hard, stroke the dust of the abandoned roads / too narrow for our numbers." Emancipated from the backbreaking slave labor in the fields and sugarmills, the Afro-Cubans rediscover and reshape the terrain of the "abandoned roads," transforming in the process their own relationship to their faculties and surroundings. The palm trees are now part of an inner vision instead of an indifferent backdrop to oppression, and it is their collective cry, no longer the machete, that "cuts the air like a drop of new gold," heralding the founding of a city where human worth is measured by other than monetary criteria. To this "rendezvous of conquest," as Aimé Césaire would call it, the Afro-Cubans bring their gifts, from morning smoke to nocturnal fire to the alligators of the swamps, and finally, in a sequence of metaphors that concludes on a direct and

ethical note, "bows that speed our dreams / the belt of the tropics / and a clean courage."

Again the arrivants proclaim their presence, this time by embracing within their call those whom they have come to join:

> Partners, here we are!
> The city awaits us with its palaces,
> frail as the hives of wild bees.
> Its streets are dry as rivers
> when there is no rain in the mountains,
> and the houses look at us
> with the frightened eyes of their windows.
>
> The elders of the town
> will give us milk and honey
> and crown us with green leaves.

The provocative comparison of the "palaces" with the beehives that provided maroon societies with a commodity exchangeable on the market indicates the newcomers' awareness of their own share in creating those palaces, confirmed by the "frightened eyes" of the house windows reflecting the fear of their (white, bourgeois) inhabitants. In addition, it alludes specifically to the turn-of-the-twentieth-century conversion of the former palaces of Old Havana into multifamily tenements that, in their density of population and incessant bustling activity, were (indeed, are today) quite comparable to beehives. Beyond this, by using imagery drawn from nature to describe the city, the Afro-Cubans introduce a way of conceptualizing urban life, new in this context but also solidly anchored in a tradition of African city-states: recall the description of Wagadu as not only a great center of learning and wealth but as a place whose fields gave rich harvests.

This ancestral memory is further alluded to in the solemn expectations of the gifts that the "elders of the town" will give them. At this point, it is difficult not to detect a certain irony in the poet's perspective, inasmuch as the same Afro-Cubans who had fought most fiercely in the various wars of liberation from the Spanish had been conspicuously deprived by the post-independence republican governments of their proper share of freedom. With the 1912 "*guerrita*" in which thousands of black Cubans were massacred, it became clear that José Martí's dream of a nation made "with all and for the good of all" was still quite remote. Yet, given the pervasive optimism of the poem, which concludes with the newcomers' "laughter [that] dawns / above the river and the birds," it is also possible to see the Afro-Cubans' occupation and even "conquest" (in

both the military and carnal senses of the word, which inflects the "damp faces of the conquered" reflected in the invaders' "sweaty skins" with an erotic *double entendre*) as the assertion of a claim that will eventually be redeemed in the form of "a nationality without racial conflict, of a great homeland where the flowing of the rivers of the world outlines the figure of a telluric saurian" (cf. the "alligators in the mud") "that represents the island."[7] The people of "Arrival" come as founders of a new city within the old, a multifaceted project whose complexity is well summed up in Virgilio Piñera's question, "to found a city, what is that? An act of love, a poetic act, a religious act?"[8]

Piñera posits two fundamental cities, the historical and the mythic:

> If history is made with deeds, places, people . . . with the flow of time, these deeds, people, and places, once supplanted by other deeds, people, and places, pass into storytelling. Then the city mythifies itself; vainly, the historian of the moment fights to demythify it, arguing that these were the people and places and those the deeds. . . . No way around it: the historical city has engendered the mythical city; not one, but two cities offer themselves to their inhabitants' the historical city cannot be explained without the mythical one and vice-versa.[9]

In light of Guillén's poem and the tale of the founding of Segu, the three foundational "acts" of which Piñera speaks can be considered as part of a single act of imagination/institution. The mythic or imaginary city—that city whose elders wait to bestow honors on Guillén's black multitudes—is no less "real" than its historical actuality, in that the city dwellers confront myth as a historical legacy and history, to some extent, as a mythic legacy. In the words of the Segu griot, "All things are tied, and they have been brought together in a fragment of time to make the city or the kingdom visible."[10] While Piñera's observations are inspired by *Primer libro de la ciudad* (1967), César López's long poem on Santiago de Cuba, they are no less applicable to Havana, which has inspired generations of imaginative myth-makers from the nineteenth century onward. In the literature and history of the Caribbean, Havana has been the prototype of the multiple city, the locus of both freedom and slavery, exuberance and brutality. As Antonio Benítez-Rojo points out, the establishment of the Plantation as the model of social organization during the colonial era was unevenly implemented in Havana: "at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the island of Cuba was more a colony of settlement than of exploitation . . . Havana was transformed into a city of plazas, esplanades, towers, walls, palaces, and theaters, all this before it was to turn out to be the capital of the Plantation. When the latter started to materialize, it had to adapt itself to th[is] model of settlement . . . "[11]

So while Havana, like all other cities of the Caribbean, was marked by the Plantation system, this system did not achieve hegemony in Cuba (and in the Hispanophone Caribbean in general) until much later than elsewhere in the

region: the full-fledged Plantation economy did not become determinant in the life of the colony of Cuba until the early nineteenth century, after the triumph of the Haitian Revolution deprived the European powers of the most lucrative of all the colonies.

Even the appropriately legendary foundational moment of the *cabildo* (parish) of San Cristóbal de La Habana in 1519 involves a ritual with quasi-African overtones—a proclamation issued under a *ceiba* tree. In the first few centuries of its existence, little was made of Havana's founding; as Emma Álvarez-Tabío Albo points out in her study *Invención de La Habana*, it was not until 1828, with a ceremony commemorating the city's founding, that an attempt was made to invent a usable, specifically Habanero past: "finally, the inhabitants of Havana became conscious of their civic identity and decided to consecrate the origins and urban condition of the territory they were occupying."[12] Already in 1762, when faced with an English invasion and occupation, the resistance of many of the city dwellers in the face of the capitulation of the colonial authorities testified to a definite break in the previous outer-directed consciousness of the inhabitants of Havana, by that time one of the most prosperous cities in the region.

Álvarez-Tabío Albo demonstrates that it was as much through literature as any other form of creative expression that an urban consciousness was created in which writing (of) Havana became cognate with writing the nascent Cuban nation. But acknowledging this also requires taking account of the intersections between the historical and mythical city, which, far from being easily distinguishable, often intertwine in mysterious, even hallucinatory ways. For a city to be at once outside and inside the Plantation and its "horrors of the moral world,"[13] in the words of the early nineteenth-century Cuban poet José María de Heredia, could not fail to engender among its writers a mingled sense of wonder and unease, of celebration and denunciation, of an unsettled feeling of "homelessness at home."

In his 1943 play *Electra Garrigó*, a mordant reworking of Greek tragedy in a Habanero context (complete with an onstage *conjunto* singing *décimas* in lieu of the Greek chorus), Virgilio Piñera features a sententious centaurine Pedagogue who, at the beginning of the play, tells his pupil Electra that "Evil is not to be found in this or that stray lobster. And every city always has a perpetual monster."[14] All of the characters in the play are trapped between the crushing oppression of the family and the familial dwelling and the fear that outside the house, still greater terrors await in the blinding yellow light of the city.

Later in the play, the Pedagogue lectures Orestes Garrigó—who in the end is the only one to flee the house, but only after having been ordered to do so by his sister Electra—about the "two great lice" on the head of the city: "the

matriarchy of the women and the machismo of the men. . . . In a city as vainglorious as this one, with deeds that were never accomplished, monuments that were never built, virtues nobody practices, sophistry is the weapon *par excellence*. . . . Don't forget that what we have here is a city where everyone wants to be deceived."[15] From mythic city to individual and collective mythomania is but a step—history becomes falsified and the myth, in turn, lends itself to historical manipulation. Here, Piñera makes a useful distinction between the "poet-mythifier" and the "citizen-mythifier":

> The citizen-mythifier does not interpret; he limits himself to storytelling; wherever legend is established . . . history ends. Conversely, the poet is very much aware that his mythification of the city will only be effective if it doesn't throw out history. More: such a mythification is carried out by making manifest "historical" history. . . . As there is no seismograph for the human time of the city, it happens that thousands of deeds and occurrences are not registered. . . . The radiations of the city, upon their dispersal, form a spectrum, which when seen by the poet with the aid of his microscope, brings to light the dark life, the underlying life of the city.[16]

In the Calvert Casey story, "In San Isidro," analyzed earlier, Piñera's dichotomy is dramatized as a tension between "the ectoplasm of legend, its white foam" and the poet's desperate attempt to descend to the marine depths—the black waters of Havana Bay—in search of the submerged mystery, the spectrum of which the spectral is but an emanation, that would do justice to Piñera's project to "bring to light the dark life, the underlying life of the city," intimately linked as it is to water.

In the very midst of urban dissonance and simultaneity, Piñera comes to the realization that the condition of being surrounded by water on all sides is a curse. Upon this revelation, whose force compels him, in a characteristically self-mocking and anti-rhetorical move, to "sit down at the café table," he builds the 1943 poem "La Isla en peso" (whose title can be translated either as "The Island Aloft" or "The Whole Island")[17]. In its hallucinatory pell-mell velocity, this poem resonates with Arthur Rimbaud's "The Drunken Boat" and in its movement from fierce denunciation to resolute affirmation, with Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (whose first version was published in Cuba in 1942 in a translation by Lydia Cabrera).

Temporarily subdued by urban chaos, the poet tries to square his disorientation with his "fixed idea: / in another time I lived Adamically. / What brought on the metamorphosis?" Against insularity—caricatured in the reiterated discourse of Cuban exceptionalism that at times, in both "revolutionary" and exilic nationalist orthodoxies, reaches near-autism in its refusal to engage the "outside" world—Piñera challenges and deflates the stereotypical images of Cuban poetry

("I dwell on certain traditional words: / cloudburst, siesta, cane-field, tobacco, / with a simple gesture, nothing if not onomatopoeically, / titanically I stroll behind its music, / and I say: water, midday, sugar, smoke"), attacks "the new solemnity of this island," and laments, "No one can leave, no one can leave!"

Moving through the phases of day and night, "the four moments in which the cancer opens" (which echo and parody, perhaps unconsciously, the Kongo "four moments of the sun"), the poem resolves itself into an affirmation of the "Antillean night." Far more encompassing than the "insular night" of José Lezama Lima's contemporaneous poem "Noche insular, jardines invisibles" (published in the 1941 collection *Enemigo rumor*), this darkness "invades with its smell and everybody wants to copulate. / The smell knows how to tear aside civilization's masks, / knows that man and woman will surely meet in the plantain grove. / Muse of paradise, protect these lovers!" Directly challenging the school of Catholic poets around Lezama Lima, Piñera proclaims that it is by going deeper down rather than lifting the etherealized poetic gaze upward that the physicality of island existence can at last achieve its long-sought-for definition, contrary to all metaphysics: "We want earthly presences, not celestial presences / . . . / happily we don't carry heaven in the mass of our blood."

Punning on the multiple and contrary definitions of the homonymic "peso" (weight) and "en peso" (aloft, whole), Piñera comes to embrace the disorder and incessant overlapping that initially terrified him: "Beneath the rain, beneath the smell, beneath everything that's a reality / a people makes and unmakes itself leaving behind testimonies: / a wake, a fête, a hand, a crime / mixed up, confused, melted within the perpetual current." Because he himself is a part of this current, for the poet to achieve any kind of transcendental synthesis is a vain and absurd task (although one in which he implicates himself at various stages in the poem). All he can do is attempt obsessively, with the aid of his poetic "microscope," to capture the radiation of the carnal testimonies as they rush toward the sea of oblivion and death. In so doing, he confers, at least provisionally, a "face" upon the people of the island.

Piñera's inveterate penchant for negation, for which he was criticized by some of his more pious colleagues like Cintio Vitier and Eliseo Diego (who countered Piñera by hymning "this little island surrounded by God on all sides"[18]), translates into a mockery of all cosmos and a search for the truth of the palpable, which, however, does not exclude a hope that a "definition," an "ordering," and a "relation" (in other words, a usable "mythification") might still be encountered in a country as "young" as Cuba. At the same time, Piñera's view of the city—of Havana—is not far removed from that of the Polonius-like Pedagogue in *Electra Garrigó*: a place haunted by its own monsters, which it tries to conjure away through sophistry and delusion.

Those who try to write the city of Havana have to write through these frustrations, availing themselves of belly-laughs or grimaces (or the Furies) when these are necessary to dissolve pretensions, even as they recognize that they are engaged in writing about what Abilio Estévez calls "a city that resists verbalizations, which doesn't want to be explained, which doesn't let itself be understood."[19] Another example of the blind men and the elephant-city—or a testimony to an urban existence comparable to what Piñera says in a poem dedicated to his sometime adversary and ultimate friend and companion-in-ostracism José Lezama Lima, "Okay, let's say we've lived / certainly not—though it'd be elegant—/ like the Greeks of the shining polis, / but more like chryselephantine statues, / with a trace of steatopygia."[20]

Estévez himself states that through "that surprising man named Virgilio Piñera," he learned many things about life, literature, and the city in which he lived. In a poem written not long before his death in 1979 and dedicated to his young protégé, Piñera says of him, "He walks the city once and again. / He wants to find the hidden treasure. / He speaks to people / as if they knew where it was buried."[21] Writing almost twenty years later, Estévez realizes that Piñera made him understand that Havana was "less a city than an obsession, an anguish, a spiritual condition, and above all, a nostalgia"—all characteristics poignantly present in the *flâneur* narrator of Piñera's "La isla en peso."

Estévez goes on to compare Havana to mythical literary lands like Macondo, Walden, and Yoknapatawpha County (he might well have added El Dorado to that list), "because what's true is that Havana has always been between 'reality and desire.' Because what's true is that Havana has never been what it is, but what we have longed for. Perhaps for that reason it has been at the center of the efforts of poets and writers."[22] Like the Wagadu of old, Havana has exerted an irresistible fascination on generations of writers; "whatever they searched for, they went there to find." As such, it becomes less a decorative backdrop where "local color" prevails than a protean protagonist, an active participant in shaping the narratives and poems ostensibly aimed at encapsulating it.

In his 1964 essay, "Problemática de la actual novela latinoamericana," Alejo Carpentier sets forth the challenge confronting those who would endeavor to depict the Latin American city in general and Havana in particular. He does so, however, in the name of a chimerical urban "essence" that is somehow awaiting its discovery and rendition: "perhaps our cities, because they haven't yet entered into literature, are more difficult to handle than jungles or mountains. . . . Upon seeing how infrequently Cuban novelists up until now have dealt with Havana's *essence*, I am convinced that the task of today's American novelists is to inscribe the physiognomy of their cities into universal literature, forgetting about local color and customs."[23]

What Carpentier ignores in his prescription is that often the "universal" may be accessed precisely through what is local, i.e., the specific qualities often occulted from the outside visitor or the casual reader that make a city the way it is and unlike any other, and that are not necessarily assimilable to exoticizing local color in the *costumbrista* sense. Estévez shows, for example, how natural phenomena can conspire to shape the apparitional presence/absence of the city, now one of Calvino's invisible cities, now a kaleidoscopic Caribbean Wagadu disintegrating even as it emerges: "It happens that, because it is so intense, the light invades, destroys, unmakes everything. . . . The light breaks reality down into illusions and particles. In contact with light, Havana explodes and fragments, it turns into fallacies and mystifications."[24] And further: "rain is one of the two ways in which Havana and Habaneros have found to disappear, to justify our unreality."[25] Perhaps, then, the only certain treasure to be found is what Piñera talks of in the conclusion to the poem for Estévez: "what the youth is looking for / is buried in his own body. / When he finds it / he will start describing it."[26] For Piñera, to be a Habanero would involve finding the city, if not in oneself, then in that "other self," the writing and written alter(ed) ego that obsessed him in his final years.

Whatever the case, the city exerts a diabolical hold such that "no one can leave, no one can leave." This fundamentally uncanny quality, described by Estévez in terms of a fatal destiny that one is condemned to live through as one is condemned to one's own body or family, is a leitmotiv for numerous literary depictions of Havana: from the chiaroscuro of Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* to the random violence and paranoia imbuing Lino Novás Calvo's story of the 1933 uprising in Havana "La noche oscura de Ramón Yendía." It emerges with greatest force, however, in a relatively under-analyzed novella by Alejo Carpentier, the 1956 *El acoso* (*The Chase)*.

In cities, the social uncanny emerges from the dissonances between the emancipatory thrust of the urban environment (its sociability, its potential for developing a rich variety of cultural expression) and its actual material and spiritual poverty. To each such dissonance belongs a particular "invisible city"; that is, an urban palimpsest, a site of contestation, the potential rendezvous of past, present, and future. And it is in the most immediate form of its manifestation—its architecture—that the city also, by the cunning of reason, reveals its specific historical content: "The city . . . does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls."[27]

At the end of his 1964 essay "La ciudad de las columnas" ("The City of the Columns"), Carpentier states: "The columns of Havana . . . make me think—treetrunks

of possible jungles, shafts of rostral columns, unimaginable fora—of Baudelaire's lines referring to the '*temple oú de vivants piliers / laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles*.'"[28] In light of *The Chase*'s subject matter, it is perhaps significant that he omits the quatrain's conclusion: "*L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles / Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers*."[29] Carpentier correctly assimilates Baudelaire's "nature" to the "second nature" created by cities, but because "The City of the Columns" is intended as celebratory, he does not undertake to explore the dual implications of Baudelaire's quatrain, which turns on the axial point (or liminal space) between alienation and recognition. It is the "forests" that are granted powers of observation, whereas man, their symbol-making creator, only passes through them, perhaps as unaware of their existence as he is of the precise meaning of the "*confuses paroles*" he hears (indeed, he may have repressed such knowledge). Such is the plight of the fugitive in *The Chase*. Yet the "*regards familiers*," while they may denote reification, also anticipate a latent possibility of harmony between man and his environment, where the uncanny can metamorphose into the marvelous. This disalienated aspect of the city is partially discussed in "The City of the Columns."

In its delirious architecture, whose distinguishing feature, according to Carpentier, is a "style without style," a seemingly random conglomeration of "bad" and "transplanted" architecture that somehow acquires its own logic and beauty, Havana becomes marked with a "peculiar Baroque quality that sometimes acts as a style, inscribing itself into the history of urban behaviors" (21). In concentrating on the columns—Baudelaire's "*piliers*"—Carpentier turns them into the emblems of an obsessively reiterative, anti-utilitarian aesthetic that unifies the entire city: "It should be remembered here that, in Havana, a pedestrian could leave the area around the fortresses of the port and proceed towards the outskirts of the city, crossing the entire center of the town . . . following a single and always renewed passageway, in which all the columnar styles are represented, joined together, or blended *ad infinitum*" (37–38).

Because they do not actually support anything, the columns transform themselves into hieroglyphs of urban society. Cut off from the centralizing demands of a planned urbanism (the ideological descendant of the Plantation), they become an architectural palimpsest "written" by and on history, a forest of signs proliferating in an endless whirl whose vortex displaces itself constantly. The architecture of Havana is an art of dialogic liminality, demarcated by "that polychrome frontier between what was shadow and what was sun, namely, the *midpoint*, a basic element of Cuban Baroque" (76). Carpentier contrasts the will to dominate of architects like Le Corbusier with the instinctive artfulness of the unknown Havana architects who were able to physicalize an entire philosophy of interplay between sun and shadow: "the Cuban *midpoint* has been

the Interpreter between Sun and Man—the Discourse of Method on a plane of reciprocal intelligibility" (82).

Yet here, a strangely contradictory note enters Carpentier's meditation; whereas earlier the "midpoint" had been a "basic element of Cuban Baroque," it has now taken on an overtly Cartesian simplicity, and the author's language becomes less obsessively cataloguist and broadens out into portentously capitalized concepts. Possibly the tone is ironic, but irony is also a mask . . . Beneath the manifest pride and wonder at the architectural extravagance of Old Havana lies a latent unease, which becomes more visible as the essay draws to a close. The key to this unease may be found in Benítez-Rojo's perceptive remarks about Carpentier"s baroque: "it is the textual representation of the labyrinth that surrounds and leads to the fugitive center of his own Caribbean Otherness."[30] Although he tries to make himself part of his city, it persists in escaping him; his compulsion to name is also a compulsion to appropriate what he fears he can only approximate. Inevitably, this leads him back to the columns and to the secret of their ubiquity:

> As for the thousands of columns that modulate—that is, determine modules and measures, a *modulor* . . . in the Havana ambience, one would have to seek out, in its uncanny proliferation, a singular expression of the American Baroque. (88–91)

The precise extent of that uncanniness is conveyed in a passage worth quoting in full for its conceptual juxtapositions and its gradual modulation into the atmosphere of menace that permeates the earlier *The Chase*:

> just as all *mestizaje*, through a process of symbiosis, addition, and blending, engenders a Baroque, the Cuban Baroque consisted in accumulating, collecting, multiplying columns and passageways in such an excess of Dorics and Corinthians, Ionics and composites, that the passerby ended up forgetting that he was living among passageways, that he was accompanied by columns, that he was spied on by columns that measured his torso and protected him from the sun and rain, and even that he was watched over by columns in his dream-filled nights. (91–94)

The startling equation of "Baroque" and "*mestizaje*" implies that racial and cultural admixtures tend to escape a strictly linear perspective, forming a center that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. Carpentier states that the "passerby's" surrender to the seductive ubiquity of the columns involves a loss of memory and awareness of the social uncanny, which he reanimates by endowing the columns with anthropomorphic powers. The verbs in the clauses following "was living" ("vivía" in the original Spanish) shift away from the active voice to the passive "was accompanied by" ("era acompañado") and "was spied upon" ("era vigilado"), until finally, the columns assume the role of active agents, by

turns benignly protective and menacing, sheltering the "passerby" from the elements in exchange for remote-controlling his unconscious, that playground of the uncanny.

Here, the necessary distinction between architecture and topography imposes itself. The "passerby," a fleeting presence in the city's *architectura longa, vita brevis*, unconsciously traces a topography under the occult influence of the columnar architecture, which retains reifying powers to the extent that it is not comprehended as a microcosm of a socio-cultural *mestizaje*. For reasons too complex to explore here, but that have been discussed by critics like Benítez-Rojo and Roberto González Echevarría, Carpentier was himself incapable of doing more than gesturing toward such a comprehension. His awareness of its necessity was perhaps what inspired him with the anxiety (termed by Benítez-Rojo "the tension of the *there*"[31]) reflected in his truncation of Baudelaire's sonnet at the end of his essay.

"The old city, formerly known as the *walled* city, is a city in shadow, made for the exploitation of shadows" (21). If "exploitation" is read in its economic as well as its strategic sense, the act of enclosure concretized by the "walled city" is also a metaphoric reference to another act of enslavement, the reduction of dark-skinned men and women to shadows on a wall, disturbing reminders of an unacknowledged and unredeemed past lying in wait to exact its revenge. The solitary "passerby" of "The City of the Columns" (a stand-in for Carpentier, who was literally *never at home* in Havana) is a few steps removed from *The Chase*'s fugitive. In both cases, the city behind the visible city, mapped by culture and history, pursues the traveler with its uncanny yet familiar/familial gaze.

The Chase has been deservedly hailed for its technical mastery and tightly knit structure. However, the skill with which the novella's architectonics have been constructed tends to reinforce the uncanny (if, as González Echeverría points out, not necessarily fantastic) elements. That quintessentially urban psychic malady, paranoia, permeates not only the point of view of the fugitive but the phantasmagoric meticulousness with which his environment and his trajectory through it are described. Guillermo Cabrera Infante's biting parody of Carpentier's style, "El ocaso," in *Tres tristes tigres* ("Lot's Steps" in the English *Three Trapped Tigers*), is an inflation *ad absurdum* of the author's obsessive reliance on terminology instead of vocabulary, reflective of a will toward absolute (and ultimately delusory) control of the literary space.

Yet here as elsewhere, the truth resides in the details, the signs. Having studied architecture, a career he had to abandon for journalism after his father (also an architect) walked out on his family, Carpentier triumphs over the specialized vocabulary of the trade by means of literature; instead of designing buildings, he writes them into existence. Additionally, he masters musical architecture and

introduces it into the armature of his novels and tales. *The Chase* derives its overdetermined, claustrophobic quality from the meticulous deployment of the threefold architecture of music, houses, and narrative form. The novella moves toward its dénouement with as much inexorability as any of Poe's tales, although the famed "single effect" is fragmented into an array of momentary yet telling shocks and premonitions, similar to those that occur in daily life.

Among these prophetic messages are the inscriptions fittingly carved onto the public buildings, particularly the University motto "*Hoc Erat in Votis*," whose finality is underscored by the epigraph to the second and middle part (of the three sections, only the "midpoint" bears such a heading), taken from the Book of Job: "*And these things hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this is with thee*."[32] Roberto González Echevarría has remarked that "each sign reminds (the fugitive) of his story. Signs attain meaning for him in this way, but it is a fleeting meaning."[33] He could well have added "because he is too alienated to decipher its deeper implications."

The fugitive constantly seeks to evade or displace the responsibility for the deeds that led him to his present plight. Nevertheless, he always fetches up against the unintended results of his free will. Having abandoned architecture, he still perceives his environment in architectural terms, but because he has cast aside all possibility of mastering this creative pursuit, it has become an incomplete fragment, a knowledge in ruins. From the vantage point of the Belvedere, he looks out into the street and contemplates at great length—and with the rational urbanist's loathing for baroque exuberance—the proliferation of hybrid columnar styles: "Nothing of all that had anything to do with what little the man who had been given shelter had learned at the University—that University which for him had been stored away in the trunk with the moldy hasps" (39).

Against this hybridity, the fugitive constantly counterposes a search for a redemptive plenitude, a center that will endow his life with a meaning and truth that have persistently eluded it. The immoderate, ostensibly oxymoronic but nonetheless functional "disorder of orders" (38) of old Havana can only disorient such a quest. Yet this mania for an artificially imposed rectilinear harmony, in an environment as spiraling as the staircase that leads to the Belvedere where he has taken refuge, is ultimately the cause of his multiple self-betrayals. The architecture he thought he had abandoned comes back to haunt him: while he examines the contents of the trunk he had taken with him to the city, he comes across "the notebook where as an adolescent he had pasted photographs of the temple at Paestum and Brunelleschi's dome, Wright's Falling Water House, and a view of Uxmal" (42–43). To fuse—creolize—these styles (Greco-Roman, Renaissance, American Modernist, and Pre-Columbian), it is implied, is the task of the Caribbean architect. In the trunk, however, this remains a potentiality that was

never acted upon. As far as the fugitive is concerned, though—since, as will be seen, his flight is fundamentally regressive, a return to a now-poisoned source—"he found in that trunk something like a symbol, one he could only decipher, of Paradise before the Fall" (43). For the fugitive, there can be no going forward other than to his own death, the only possible reflection of his absolutist yearning; every move he makes (*hoc erat in votis*) serves to propel him into the city he has always refused to understand.

In the course of his passage (both past and present) through the city, he sees it from the summit (in the Belvedere) and from the depths (when he tunnels through the cemetery with his student action group). Yet at no time does he create for himself a personal topography grounded in the sociability of the street, with the significant exception of the moment following his release from prison, when he receives a brief intimation of an unalienated response to the city. Here, the urban environment outside his cell of gangsters with its delusions of political efficacy is revealed in its diversity and harmony:

> He crossed the drawbridge and slowly walked down the hill from the fortress, excited after that passage through hell at the awakening streets. It was like the beginning of a convalescence, a return to the world of men. . . . And the cupolas of flesh-colored mosaics, the gilt crosses, and the coppery belfries of the Carmen, the San Francisco, and Las Mercedes were glittering in the morning air, in the awakening of the terraces edged with balusters where the washerwomen hung out their clothes. Behind them, the view of the sea was so overpowering that the fishing boats seemed to be sailing above the roofs. (97–98)

But the gap between this perception and the blind alley into which he has led himself is underscored shortly thereafter when he is ambushed on his way to see the "Exalted Personage" who has been sponsoring his group: "he found protection just in time behind a column and saved himself from a barrage of bullets fired from a black car whose license plates were covered by a tangle of streamers. After all, it was carnival time" (99). Carnival and the columns are reduced to simple props in a shootout. Indeed, the fugitive tends to view everything about the city in strictly utilitarian terms, much as when he first arrives there in search not of the intangible and the qualitative but of things that can be bought: a visit to a brothel, a mixed drink. During his participation in student terrorism, the city is reduced to strategic automotive routes. When he is finally forced out of the Belvedere, "nothing was so fearful to him as a stare now that he had thrown himself into the city" (64)—a paranoia-inspiring gaze that is multiplied to hallucinatory proportions as he sits in the concert hall. His movements on foot through the city are limited to a few well-trodden paths, to the prostitute Estrella's house and finally to the House of the Arrangement, which he finds in

ruins, "reduced to pillars standing on a marble floor covered with rocks, beams, and chunks of stucco chipped off the ceilings" (92).

What is specifically uncanny about this image is not only the unexpectedness of the destruction and the deadpan casualness with which its condition is related, but the fact that the columns are still remaining upright. Alone among the mélange of styles and bric-à-brac scattered throughout a now-open space, the columns mock him with their untarnished purity, as does "the sign painted in thick brush-strokes on a broken barrel: FREE RUBBLE" (92). The impersonal third-person-plural verb form of the original Spanish, "SE REGALAN ESCOMBROS," carries overtones of unknown forces whose only "gift" to the fugitive is that which he can literally make no sense of: rubble or ruins, the hieroglyphs of a modernizing capitalist society. The house may well have been blown up by a rival gang. But it is also possible that the owner of the house, on whose behalf the fugitive has carried out terrorist acts, has had it demolished prior to moving to a more opulent dwelling in a more luxurious neighborhood at some distance from "the obscure street with the sad café" (92). In that case, the fugitive is stymied by his failure to read the social topography of power.

Power is fundamentally vertical, and it is above all the sheer verticality of the columns that fascinates and attracts him. This identification with phallic rigidity occasions his complete breakdown and confession when he is imprisoned and threatened with castration by the police: "they were going to . . . dry him out, depriving him of the axis where his body had its coat of arms" (96). Throughout his final journey, the fugitive is constantly reduced to abject, horizontal prostration by the cumulative weight of congealed hierarchical power—a condition he masochistically embraces as the truth of his aspirations. When, after two days of fasting in the Belvedere, he believes he has attained the highest point of understanding—"[h]is person had integrated itself for an instant with the Truth" (46)—he throws himself down on the ground and weeps. Gnawed by hunger pangs, he drinks a large amount of tap water and collapses in spasms of vomiting: "Exhausted, he threw himself down at the foot of the wall, his body shaken by whiplash convulsions" (48). Recalling his active role in the execution of one of his comrades, he virtually re-enacts the moment of the man's murder: "He was nauseated, sick to his stomach over all he'd lived since then . . . He threw himself facedown on the roots of the poplar—so hard that his teeth, after clamping on something, brought the taste of his blood to his mouth" (90, 91).

When he enters the church in the hope of obtaining sanctuary, he is overcome by the Gothic verticality of the architecture: "[he] stopped, dazzled, at the foot of a pillar whose stone was redolent of incense" (101). But although he is still capable of apprehending the church's grandeur (significantly, through

the second-hand memory of a "book on the Gothic"), he enters only with the intention of humiliating himself on the stone floor: "fall down on their paving stones in the peace of the naves, and groan and free myself of all that I have hidden in my heart!" (100). Expelled from the church, he will get his wish in the modern temple, the concert hall, where he pathetically regresses to a virtual pre-natal state and huddles on the carpet, vainly consoling himself with the incongruous yet still somehow ominous phrase "After that a new era will begin" (119). His murder is the culmination of his lifelong abjection: he has become indistinguishable from the (blood-)red carpet of the concert hall and by extension, the city. "Two spectators . . . leaned over the rail of a darkened box, and fired into the carpet" (122).

The socio-historical ramifications of this abjection disguised as will to power are summed up by José Lezama Lima's characteristically gnomic observation, frequently cited since its initial appearance in 1949: "A country frustrated in what's politically essential is able to attain virtues and expressions through other preserves of greater royalty."[34] Lingering on the first half of Lezama's statement—as many have done—fosters the most pessimistic of interpretations: that Cuba is condemned, by geographic destiny or its own intrinsic political limitations, to the eternal frustration of whatever civic ideals emerge. However, Lezama was not much given to pessimism in his writings, and emphasis should accordingly be placed on the aphorism's predicate. Since politics in postcolonial Cuba had been a realm of disappointment and (as *The Chase* exposes) venality masquerading under idealistic rhetoric, the ideals advocated and practiced by civic-minded poets like José Martí were best honored within the field of cultural creation—in Cuba at least, a "preserve of greater royalty" to whose discovery and exploration Lezama's circle of poets ostensibly dedicated themselves. To insist on what is fundamentally ("essentially") frustrated—an underdeveloped politics—is to obstruct the profounder transformations that artistic creation both imitates (in the Aristotelian sense) and instantiates. It is to enforce a "sleep of reason" that engenders monsters like *The Chase*'s hapless fugitive.

The transition in Carpentier from "the time of the Tribunal" (the anti-Machado student movement of the late 1920s and early 1930s) to "the time of lootíng" (the internecine warfare between action groups during the early 1940s) is therefore merely a matter of degree. Anachronistically imported and half-baked Jacobinism is invariably penetrated and manipulated by the ruling powers, because for all their rhetoric, the student terrorists are fundamentally playing according to the dominant rules. A politics where the polis plays no part is nothing but gangsterism, and, in the eyes of their powerful patrons, the functionaries of "the bureaucracy of horror" (95) are as interchangeable as their hapless victims.

But perhaps the crux of the fugitive's predicament is to be found in his relations with the Afro-Cuban world—that unacknowledged fecundating center not only of the urban life of Havana but of Cuban culture as a whole. While González Echevarría affirms that "[f]rom *The Lost Steps* on, Afro-Americans cease to occupy a central position in Carpentier's work,"[35] it is nonetheless the case that in *The Chase*, the figures of the fugitive's old black wet-nurse and Estrella are not as peripheral to the narrative as González Echeverría would have them be.

As discussed earlier, cities in Cuba were places of refuge for runaway slaves, locations of underground secret societies such as the Abakuá, and in general the sites of what Fernando Ortíz called "transculturation" and other scholars "creolization." The presence of Afro-Cuban and slavery-related symbols in *The Chase* is only alluded to, although these allusions are important; for instance, the "official notice decorated with cut sugarcane" (121) that counterpoints the ticket-taker's study of Beethoven and reveals the extent of his submission to external dictates. A superficial reading might conclude that such symbols are put there to create a conventionally "uncanny" (because mysterious and exotic) effect. But what is really involved here is another way of seeing—more integrated in the case of the old woman, tragically incomplete in Estrella's case—and as such far less uncanny than the world hallucinated by the alternately rationalist and fanatically religious fugitive and that cheapjack vitalist, the Scholarship Student.

The fugitive experiences what is for him a transformative epiphany when, from his hiding place in the Belvedere, he sees the old woman light a ritual cigar:

> The portentous news was God. God, who had been revealed to him by the sight of the old lady's cigar the night before she fell ill. Suddenly, her taking the coal from the brazier and raising it to her face—a gesture he'd seen repeated in the kitchens of his childhood—became magnified in his mind and took on overwhelming implications. (52)

On the basis of this vision, he meticulously constructs a Great Chain of Being that leads back to the origin of fire and the presence of a Prime Mover, and he will carry this presumed revelation with him throughout his tormented journey. But this consoling theological edifice is based on an utter incomprehension of the old woman's gesture; since she has given the fugitive shelter, she is lighting the cigar to ask her *santo* about the fate of the man whom as a boy she had once nursed, and possibly receives a message similar to the following:

> [Sango] is the idea that just as lightning illuminates the night by allowing one to see in a flash, an easily distinguishable landscape, Sango has the ability to show one the truth just as quickly . . . In this sense, Sango punishes those persons not

> doing their job, while at the same time, reminding other people to live . . . It is said that Sango only speaks once, which means that once he illuminates the truth, one should realize what is meant with no further questions.[36]

Because the fugitive has the old woman's milk in him, he is able partially to acknowledge the revelation and apply it to himself; however, he cannot perceive its relevance to his own self-betrayal. Alone among the personages in the novella, the old woman has a sense of history—she tells the fugitive of the repressive policies of the Spanish Captain-General Valeriano Weyler, who during the third War of Independence rounded up rebellious peasants by the thousands and forcibly deported them to the cities, where "they swelled up from drinking so much water" (49). (Typically, he remembers this tale only in terms of his immediate self-interest, which backfires on him as he vomits up the lukewarm water he immediately drinks to assuage his hunger.) And when she dies (or rather, is starved to death by the very man she once nourished, who steals the food from her sickbed and gorges himself on it), her family members come from various districts of Havana to pray at her wake. The fugitive, on the other hand, makes off with her prayer book to ensure his spiritual salvation, which will earn him expulsion from the sanctuary of the Gothic church when the priest recognizes it as an item sold in Afro-Cuban botánicas.

In short, the old woman incarnates Cuban civility (a preserve of Lezama's "greater royalty"); she is a guardian of collective memory and healing. But to the fugitive, she is only the primal recollection of a breast he has sought to recapture "in young torsos of her same race" (59)—a body without a mind. The annihilating power of this reductive gaze is internalized by the prostitute Estrella, who can only maintain a self-image by remaining fixed in one place, a still point or guiding star (*estrella*) for the "men of unknown domicile, who seemed to materialize when they turned the corner of her street and then just dissolved back into the city until the next time" (69). She and her surroundings are her only reality as far as she is concerned, and her customers are mere phantoms who only assume materiality on her threshold. Similarly, her self-imposed division between her objectified body ("[s]he referred to It, separating it from herself . . . as she might speak of a very valuable object, kept in another room in the house") and her head, "[which] had little to reproach her for" (70), though inspired by a "sermon she had only half listened to," has its real source in the Yoruba conception of the head as the source of power. Indeed, Estrella loses this power when she is forced to betray the fugitive to the police in order to preserve her ordered life: "This time she had sinned with her head, and these were the evils unleashed by her sin: the Word was shouted to her by voices from Hell . . ." (71). She is brought face to face with the commodification of her entire being, not just a part of it; for all her efforts to remain fixed, she is

in circulation, like a coin, defined by the spectral bodies that enter and leave through her door.

The single moment of uncommodified sexuality in the tale occurs when the drunken Scholarship Student and the fugitive wander down to the public baths and witness a couple making love: "A lightning flash made it seem that both were black. . . . [A]nother lightning flash illuminated, just for a second, a body in metamorphosis, the beast with two backs moved by hushed moans that seemed more like the accompaniment to a cruel rite than a delightful embrace" (109–10). Here, Sango is speaking to the fugitive with as much eloquence as when he appeared in the old woman's glowing coal; the lovers are transforming the deserted bathhouse into a ritual site and affirming the metamorphic power of bodies to alter social space (in contrast to the alienated agglomeration of bodies in the concert hall, viewed by the equally alienated fugitive as potential protectors). For his part, the Scholarship Student assimilates the act to his incoherent vitalism ("'They are our strength!' exclaimed the Scholarship Student. 'They are our strength!'" [110]) and is duly beaten up by the man. Equally, the "uncanniness" of the sexual rite derives from a specific mode of conceptualizing the social uncanny: because the fugitive cannot conceive of an act that is not alienated or commodified (particularly the sexual act, which he always pays for), he can only invest such acts with an uncanny aura, the more so when the participants are black and outside the circuit of utility (wet-nursing, prostitution) defined for them by the rules of the alienated game.

The true sign of the social uncanny is to be found in the large-denomination bill that moves the drama along like one of Alfred Hitchcock's MacGuffins. Karl Marx knew well that there is nothing quite as phantasmagoric as the notion of a universal social equivalent that reduces all realms of human endeavor to a single arbitrary standard. In a sense, all money is counterfeit; what determines its authenticity is its ability to circulate and be recognized, and to act as a medium of communication between people who cannot themselves communicate. For example, it is the mechanism that manipulates and conditions the "so-close-and-yet-so-far" relationship between the ticket-taker and the fugitive, potential "doubles" in an unwritten fantastic tale whose topographies intersect constantly but who only encounter each other through the mediation of the bill.

The revelation that these particular bills are false is imparted by a taxicab driver to Estrella, obviously as a stratagem to go to bed with her without paying. Yet because she herself, as a self-valorizing commodity, has the (limited) ability to enforce the price of her labor power, she in turn can define what constitutes proper payment. Ironically, although she prides herself on her fixity, the results of her rejection of the bill ripple through the entire micro-society of *The Chase*. At the end, when the police officer confirms the bill's authenticity (duly pocketing it

in order to send it on another journey), he serves to underscore Power's position as the ultimate guarantor of the common coin. Appearances are always deceptive; "the General with the sleepy eyes" continues to exercise surveillance over economic and social affairs.

The ironic implication of the fugitive's absurdly hopeful final statement, "After that [*más allá*] a new era will begin" (119), is that any such new beginning will simply repeat on another level the crimes and delusions of the former era. As elsewhere in Carpentier's work, history becomes an endlessly repeating series of cycles, or concentric circles, similar to the structure of Dante's Inferno, whose motto "Per me si va ne la cittá dolente" was invisibly emblazoned by Cabrera Infante on the parodically elaborate Carpentierian door through which Leon Trotsky, another "man on the run," solemnly passed. The "*más allá*" or beyond, that undiscovered country of the fantastic, remains an unseen geography, a half-heard message, exerting controlling power over the movements of the city's inhabitants.

Yet the signs of a rupture with repetition are also present in the oscillation between "the Cuban street . . . talkative, indiscreet, prying [and] the Cuban house, [which] multiplied the ways to isolate oneself and to defend, to the extent possible, the intimate life of its dwellers" (*La Ciudad de las columnas*, 44). The passage between private and public space is not the "infernal passageway" (44) of the fugitive's emergence into political activity, but the baroque turbulence of the curve. Only through the reciprocal inscription of the "here" in the "there," the deciphering of the forest of signs not just in the Baudelairean city but in Wifredo Lam's *Jungle*, will a social topography be charted that is adequate to the multitude of invisible cities germinating and flourishing behind the architectural and columnar façades. In the context of such a project, the notion of the "marvelous real" can only be viewed as an unsatisfactory compromise between an oppressive reality and the marvelous that, in the guise of the uncanny, mocks and threatens it.

While the transformative potentiality of social (and sociable) space is heralded by Carpentier himself in his description of Old Havana—"the (streets of Havana) that remain, however poorly designed they might be, provide us with an impression of peace and coolness that would be difficult to encounter where conscious urbanists exercised their knowledge" (*La Ciudad de las Columnaqs*, 18)—there is also validity to Emma Álvarez-Tabio Albo's observation that "Carpentier's Havana is a stage-set city that rarely surrenders its interiors."[37] Carpentier, she argues, admirably succeeds in imposing a monumentalized "catalogue for the myth" of the city, at the cost of losing sight, amidst the proliferation of urban iconographies and "easily reproducible models," of the quotidian practices that constitute the ritual substrate of the urban mythos.

To be sure, Álvarez-Tabio Albo acknowledges the glamour and power of Carpentier's Havana as "a city within the reach of discoveries and the memory of all its inhabitants."[38] At the same time, the "peace and coolness" he perceives as attributes of certain areas of Old Havana seem absent from Abilio Estévez's descriptions, written nearly 35 years after *La Ciudad de las columnas*: "It's always hot, morning, noon, and night; winter, spring, summer, autumn. The streets of Havana are mirrors multiplying rays of sunlight to the point of exasperation. Walls and roofs also give off the irritating steam. There is no way to escape the heat." And in regard to "peace": "It is impossible to conceive of this city being silent, among other things because this city is terrified of silence."[39]

In *Before Night Falls*, Reinaldo Arenas tells a humorous anecdote involving Carpentier. Arenas has just scavenged a board to make an illegal *barbacoa* or loft in his living space, and as he walks the street with the board under his arm, he notices Carpentier giving an open-air lecture. Loudly remarking on Carpentier's heavy French accent, Arenas bangs the end of his board against the lectern as he passes by. Arenas does not say anything about the substance of the lecture, but it is known that in the late 1970s Carpentier often gave such outdoor talks, whether under the auspices of UNESCO or the Cuban Writers and Artists Union. In any case, the episode dramatizes the discrepancy between Carpentier's preoccupation with the external lineaments of Havana and the conditions faced by those like Arenas who have to struggle with the lack of interior living space and are therefore compelled to break the law (and cause structural damage to the buildings) in order to gain such space.

The collision of Arenas's board with Carpentier's lectern symbolizes the irruption, into the city of the columns, of the *lived* Havana, the overcrowded city of the *barbacoa*/lofts concealed behind—or repressed by?—the façades whose detail-work Carpentier was so expert at reading. Writing from the vantage point of 1990s Havana, during one of the worst economic crises in the city's (and island's) history, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez bears witness to the paroxysmic results of this invasive process—not long after Old Havana was officially listed by UNESCO as part of the "Patrimony of Humanity": "With the bulbs stolen, the elevator trashed, and more and more illegal loft rooms built for more and more people, any minute now, the building will collapse. I've had it up to here with this destitution."[40]

As Álvarez-Tabio Albo notes, Carpentier's vision of Havana focused on the center of the city, downplaying the peripheral neighborhoods. Although he was too sharp an observer not to have taken into account the existence of smaller cities within the larger one, he was "more interested in presenting a uniform and legible profile of the city, [and thus] did not insist too much on these derivations which appeared essentially as ghettos that did not call into question the centralized

structure of the city."[41] Proletarian neighborhoods like El Cerro—whose turbulent street culture is brilliantly depicted in Eugenio Hernández Espinosa's 1964 play *María Antonia*—Jesús María, Jesús del Monte, and Colón do not figure in Carpentier's work, no more than the vernacular expressive cultures that were shaped in these districts. While music is vital to the structure of *The Chase*, it is a real-time performance of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony that frames the action and underscores the various flashbacks that torment the fugitive as he seeks refuge in the concert hall. Carpentier's monumentalization of Havana, while perfectly suited in its meticulous detail to the uncanny effect he conveys in *The Chase*, bypasses in its high seriousness the kind of *choteo* (goofing, kidding around), improvisation, and ludic modernity so much in evidence in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's novel *Three Trapped Tigers*, which captures Havana during a crucial period: the late 1950s, precisely around the time Carpentier was writing *The Chase*, which depicts events that occurred ten to fifteen years earlier—the same historical remove from which the exiled Cabrera Infante contemplates the city of music that was his lost Havana.

Toward the end of "Jazz and the West Indian Novel" (1967–68), a critical essay on the past and possibilities of Anglophone Caribbean literature in light of the improvisatory aesthetic of jazz, with its grounding in popular communal forms of creative expression and its emphasis on meeting the challenges of moment-to-moment invention, Kamau Brathwaite anticipates the flowering of a future "West Indian jazz novel" on the basis of the following: "Dealing with a specific, clearly-defined, folk-type community, [the jazz novel] will try to express the essence of the community through its form. It will absorb its rhythms from the people of this community, and its concern will be with the community as a whole, its characters taking their place in that community, of which they are felt and seen to be an integral part."[42]

Yet *Tres tristes tigres*, published in Spain three years before Brathwaite's essay appeared in the Barbadian literary journal *Bim*, is a paradigmatic example of just such a Caribbean "jazz novel," reflecting and indeed surpassing Brathwaite's criteria. A linguistic *tour de force* and a carnival of wordplays of all varieties and qualities, whether in the original Cuban Spanish or in the 1971 English version, *Three Trapped Tigers* has achieved the rank of a classic—one, however, that is rarely analyzed. For beyond the undeniable virtuosity of Cabrera Infante's literary performance, where protean words change shape and meaning as they fly past with the speed of sixteenth and thirty-second notes in a bebop solo, the novel as a whole admirably carries out what Brathwaite termed the "West Indian writer['s entry into] his own cultural New Orleans [where he expresses] in his work of words that joy, that protest, that paradox of community and aloneness,

that controlled mixture of chaos and order, hope and disillusionment, based in his New World experience, which is the heart of jazz."[43]

By situating *Three Trapped Tigers* in the Havana of the 1950s, which, besides being the period that witnessed the development of the revolutionary movement that would come to power in 1959, was also (in what can be clearly perceived as a related phenomenon) a culmination of a process of creative efflorescence in all branches of the arts, popular music in particular—Cabrera Infante depicts a transitional historical moment in which, amidst the glitter and shadow (Cuban *son* and city lights) of the final years of the brutal Batista dictatorship that had seized power in 1952, all of the social and human paradoxes cited by Brathwaite as integral to the jazz sensibility came into play.

While written from the vantage point of a self-exile disillusioned with the authoritarian course taken by the Cuban Revolution after the emancipatory promise of its earlier years, *Three Trapped Tigers* does not take refuge in facile, rheumy-eyed nostalgia. It is too seriously, challengingly playful—and hence radical—for such complacency. The complexity of the musical references, along with the use of established Afro-Cuban practices of musicking as structuring principles of the text, not only indicate the central importance of music to the characters and their specific nocturnal milieu, but turn the city of Havana itself into a mobile center of musical and linguistic improvisation, where everything, at some point or another, can become music. Writing more than thirty years later, within an urban environment that had greatly deteriorated from the time of *Three Trapped Tigers*, Abilio Estévez remarks, "Music is like the light; it floods everything. Music is the most effective, aggressive answer we have found to try to avoid the destruction provoked by time, rain, and light."[44]

Implicitly parodying Walter Pater, Cabrera Infante shows that *life itself*, more than art, aspires to the condition of music. In the process of telling an unknown listener about a decisive argument with her mother, the character Magalena says: "just as Im bluein my cool I can hear the music all rite comin up the street with its varoom boom, varoom broom, boom boom varoom, with its onetwo-three time percussion and its shake rattle and roll rhythm and as Im beginning to rock it up so much I barely can stop I gotta give it to her one more time."[45] The street sounds of a carnival *comparsa* bring this young woman out of the confines of her parental home and into the wider world with all its dangers and opportunities, and in her vehement farewell (patterned on a Hollywood gesture she remembers as that of "Beddy Davis in Now Voyeur"), she expresses one of the primary themes of the novel: "when I die the carnival is gonna stop meanin its gonna die with me and the music will die and all the happiness will die too and so will life die" (26).

As the great reed player and composer Eric Dolphy once remarked (appropriately, at the conclusion of his live-performance LP *Last Date*), "When music's over, it's gone in the air. You can never capture it again." Charlie ("Bird") Parker was fond of quoting Omar Khayyam-via-Edward Fitzgerald's lyrical lines, "The Bird of Time has but a little way to fly, and the Bird is on the wing." These affirmations of a necessary evanescence are brilliant summations of the improvisatory musical impulse that shapes lived experience into a decisive yet transitory aesthetic statement. But what is called "literature," bound as it is to print and page, does not, cannot work in the same way. And this is a source of distress for Cabrera Infante's character Arsenio Cué, who spins an elaborate theory of an "aleatory literature" which "wouldn't have a score, just a dictionary. . . . Or rather a list of words that wouldn't have any order at all"(357). As a shining example of literary minimalism, Cué cites Chano Pozo's 1946 *guaracha*, "Blen blen blen," which is then typographically spread out to fill the following page, an onomatopoeic refrain turned into a concrete poem or "*Score*" consisting only of "Blen blen blen."

The incessant punning, verbal acrobatics, and erudite literary/philosophical allusions to which all the principal characters have recourse—and which, as Cabrera Infante shows, tend to obstruct transparent communication among themselves and with others—originate in what can be seen as a will to make verbal music, to bend words as jazz musicians bend notes. Their friend, inspiration, and punster supreme, the mad genius Bustrófedon, "who could make out of a couple of words and four letters a hymn and a joke and a song" (230), dies suddenly of a cerebral aneurism which, it turns out, has been the source of his manic verbal inventiveness, preserved for posterity only in the form of a tape of an oral performance (transcribed by one of his friends for literature's sake) that captures a parodic sequence of changes played on the styles of various famous Cuban writers. The novel's somber, downbeat epilogue reproduces an obsessive monologue of a deranged woman sitting in a park and staring out to sea (as she has, it seems, for more or less the previous ten years), that concludes with the words "cant go no further" (487), although, as the character Silvestre has remarked earlier, "when she got to a certain point, like the roll on a pianola, she repeated the whole thing over again" (324). Even here, a musical analogy is found to describe this compulsive, endless-loop repetition.

Faced with the insufficiency of verbal as compared to musical pyrotechnics, Cabrera Infante prefaces the novel with a quote from Lewis Carroll that serves as a provocative corollary to Dolphy and Bird's above-cited statements: "And she tried to fancy what the flame of a candle looks like after the candle is blown out." Acknowledging the transience of everything moving through time and space must also involve a conscious attempt at keeping its flame somehow alive

"after the candle has been blown out," transforming it, through reconstructive imagination, into an element of a tradition in constant motion. Meditating on memory and time, Silvestre (the eventual author or rather composer/arranger of the book that is *Three Trapped Tigers*) declares, "I like remembering things better than living them or living things knowing they can never be lost because I can always evoke them again. . . . I can live them over again by remembering them" (321). In a baroque city like Havana, a labyrinth whose center is always displaced with the movement of night life from one location to another, in this case the Vedado and La Rampa area west of Old Havana ("I wonder when it will stop, this walking center which moves, and strangely enough, like the city and the sun, from east to west" [326]), this entails developing a consciousness that words and music are not necessarily polarities of expressive culture, but rather enter into and shape each other's development. Already Fernando Ortiz, in attempting to theorize the complex evolution of Cuban culture, had made use of the musical term "counterpoint" to characterize the influences of tobacco and sugar on that development, and turned to popular cultural forms for specific examples of the kind of relation he was talking about:

> This type of dialogued composition which carries the dramatic dialectic of life into the realm of art has always been a favorite of the ingenuous folk muses in poetry, music, dance, song, and drama. The outstanding examples of this in Cuba are the antiphonal prayers of the liturgies of both whites and blacks, the erotic controversy in dance measures of the rumba, and in the versified counterpoint of the unlettered *guajiros* and the Afro-Cuban *curros*.[46]

While driving around Havana in a journey to the end of the night (in ironic echo of the arrestingly melancholy opening of José Martí's poem "Dos patrias": "Two homelands have I, Cuba and the night / Or are the two one? . . ."[47]), Silvestre and Arsenio Cué listen to classical music on the radio, and the typically expansive Cué, believing it is Bach being played, exclaims: "What do you think of the Old Man? I'll be doggone if that isn't a Montuno melody he's playing. . . . Listen to this sudden *ripieno*, Silvestre *viejo*, doesn't it become Cuban when you hear it on the Malecón and it's still Bach but not exactly Bach?" (319). In the end, it turns out to be a Vivaldi piece ("The speaker just transformed his contrapuntal rumination into musica falsa" [322]), but the true moment of contrapuntal creolization is always already present in the title of the section, "Bachata," which turns Bach's name into a genre of Caribbean popular music. Just as Ortiz found counterpoint in the rumba, so also does Cabrera Infante transmute the fugue into the *son montuno*, and beyond that into the interplay of solo and ensemble voices in the immense Cuban jazz orchestra that emerges from the novel. The extended dialogues between Cué and Silvestre, for example, have much in common with the instrumental cutting contest, with each

trying to verbally outwit, outargue, outjoke, and in general outdo the other in verve, style, and erudition.

Following a "Prologue" in which a garrulous master of ceremonies at the Tropicana Club announces both the imminent spectacle and the literary "performance" that is the novel itself, the section "Beginners" offers an example of Cabrera Infante's canny use of a range of nation languages in the context of seven quasi-instrumental solos, each in the (written or spoken) voice of a particular male or female character, each stating themes that will be variously taken up in the course of the novel, often in unexpected contexts. Appropriately, each monologue/solo refers to a crucial event in the past that shaped the individual character's journey from poverty into the swirl of the Havana *farándula*, as the nightlife-world of "cabarets, nightclubs, strip joints, bars, *barras*, *boîtes*, dives, saloons, *cantinas*, *cuevas*, *caves*, or caves" (55) is called.

In this regard, while Cabrera Infante refuses to downplay the exploitation of women, racial discrimination, and cheap commercialism that oil the machinery of the *farándula*—which he reveals in subtle, telling details instead of broad brushstrokes—neither does he purvey the myth to which so many variously intentioned defenders of the Castro regime subscribe: that the Havana of the 1950s was no more than a giant Mafia-administered brothel. The famous sex club featuring the prodigious Superman appears, but is clearly shown to be a tourist trap for North Americans, satirized in the persons of Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, the respectively pompous and condescending weekend trippers from Florida. Like an earlier Caribbean writer excoriated by his peers for his frank portrayals of urban nightlife, Claude McKay in the 1928 novel *Home to Harlem*, Cabrera Infante is uninterested in making easy denunciations, and more concerned with showing the totality of the community or *micro-city* to which his characters belong.

After all, to criticize turn-of-the-century New Orleans for its racism while ignoring the richness of the culture that emerged from the brothels and segregated districts would be tendentious and incomplete regardless of its empirical accuracy. And while United States economic and cultural interests certainly took precedence in the Cuban society of the 1950s (as they had done for the more than fifty years preceding, with generally deleterious results), it would be simplistic to speak of some kind of U.S. "hegemony" without also understanding that Cuban popular culture had for many years interacted with *and influenced* that of the United States (not to mention Latin America) as much as the other way around. Given that much of what was distinctive in U. S. culture resulted from African-American contributions, the shared African elements in the United States and Cuba, once they were interculturated, produced immensely exciting and indeed revolutionary results.

Against either the Francophilia or the Stalinism of older members of the Cuban intelligentsia, Cabrera Infante's rebellious generation of intellectuals—many of whom, like Cabrera Infante himself, grew up in poverty and were largely autodidacts—extolled the pleasures of the movies, jazz, the writings of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, and popular culture in general. Notably, Cabrera Infante was arrested and imprisoned in 1952, shortly after Batista's *coup*, for writing a story that contained "English profanities" (spewed from the mouth of a drunken American tourist).

As Cabrera Infante, Leonardo Acosta, and others have shown, Cubans were very much present in New Orleans, the legendary "birthplace of jazz," at the turn of the twentieth century. When Jelly Roll Morton spoke of the "Spanish tinge," it was undoubtedly the Cuban touch he had in mind. In the nineteenth century, the virtuoso New Orleans pianist and composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk had performed his adaptations of African rhythms on a highly successful concert tour of Cuba. The coming of radio to Cuba in 1922 helped diffuse a range of sounds throughout the island; Acosta notes that by 1933, Cuba had no less than 62 radio stations, and that the first live broadcast of a Cuban jazz group took place in 1927. In the late 1920s, groups like the Trio Matamoros and the Sexteto Nacional had already made recordings in North America, documenting the *son oriental*, one of the oldest documented Cuban song forms (dating, as legend has it, from the seventeenth century and the "Son de la Ma Teodora"). Particularly following its belated entry into 1920s Havana, the *son* was the foundation for much of the subsequent development of Cuban popular music. Cabrera Infante makes numerous references to *sones* in *Three Trapped Tigers*, particularly those by Ignacio Piñeiro, Havana-born founder of the Septeto Nacional, whose lyrics for the *rumba-son* "Sobre una tumba, una rumba" play a crucial role in one of the episodes.

By the 1950s, so-called "Latin jazz" had thoroughly established itself in U.S. musical centers, and at the same time, a popular Cuban song-form, the *bolero*, had spread across all of Latin America and taken on many of the trappings of North American hit songs, notably elaborate, lush arrangements for big bands (cf. the contemporaneous work of singers like Nat King Cole, who made best-selling Spanish-language recordings in Cuba, and Dinah Washington, whose hit record, "What a Difference a Day Makes" is an English version of a *bolero* by Mexican songwriter María Grever). This jazz-inflected hybrid genre became known as *feeling* (or *fílin*), one of whose major exponents, vocalist Elena Burke, appears in the novel on the same bill as a jazz quintet playing such (for the time) avant-garde compositions as Charles Mingus's "Tonight at Noon" and Thelonious Monk's "Straight No Chaser."

The atmosphere of the *bolero*, whose lyrics speak either of joyous expectation of imminent amorous fulfillment or sad and solitary recollection of a vanished moment of pleasure and/or love affair, permeates *Three Trapped Tigers*; the tale of the vocally and physically outsized singer La Estrella, entitled "I Heard Her Sing" in the English version, bears the heading "*Ella cantaba boleros*" (she sang boleros) in the original Cuban Spanish. One of the characters to appear in "Beginnings," Gloria Pérez, whose movement up the show-business career ladder is chronicled in a letter to her mother by her scandalized guardian, develops into a famous nightclub *chanteuse* under the name of Cuba Venegas. She becomes an ever-elusive, recurring incarnation of the bolero for two of the characters who have loved and lost her, the *farándula* photographer Códac and the percussionist Eribó, as well as the object of parody by La Estrella, who performs one of Cuba's greatest hits in an after-hours session to the laughter of the intimate audience—including Códac himself.

Following the precedent set by Cirilo Villaverde in *Cecilia Valdés*, Cabrera Infante introduces real-life personages into *Three Trapped Tigers*. In addition to drama critic Rine Leal (the only one in the novel's primary circle of friends whom Cabrera Infante presents under his real name), Cuba Venegas, for example, performs songs by *feeling* pianist Frank Domínguez and Piloto and Vera, a noted team of *boleristas*. Photographer Jesse Fernández (responsible for the photograph of an Afro-Cuban *conjunto* that adorns the cover of the original Spanish and American editions of the novel), drummer Guillermo Barreto, singers Rolando Laserie and Elena Burke, pianist Frank Emilio Flynn (called "Franemilio" in the novel), and trumpeter Félix Chappottín—notable talents all—put in appearances.

But the most significant cameo is of the great singer Beny Moré ("to talk about him is to talk about music" [88]), whose protean talent spanned all genres of Cuban popular music, and whose untimely death in 1963 clearly inspired Cabrera Infante's tribute. There is no better description of Beny's art than the following passage, Eribó's salute from one musician to another (all one needs to do is put on any of Beny Moré's records to hear precisely what Eribó means):

> [Guillermo] Barreto told me you had to break the mandatory two-two/four-four beat of Cuban rhythms, and I told him about Beny who, in his songs, made fun of that four-to-the-bar prison for squares, making the melody glide over the rhythm, forcing the band to follow him in his flight and making it supple as a saxophone, as a legato trumpet, as if he were conducting a rubber band. . . . It was one hell of a job playing behind Beny, turning his back to the band, singing and making faces at the audience, sending the melody soaring over the heads of our earthbound instruments and their dragging feet and then all of a sudden to see him turn and ask you to throw a bomb at precisely the metronomic moment, right on the spot. *Ese Beny!* (88–89)

Cabrera Infante's literary aesthetic project has much in common with Beny Moré's "making fun of that four-to-the-bar prison for squares" and with what Eribó describes as Felix Chappottín's improvisatory impulse that creates "a circle of happy music . . . out of the rigid square of Cuban rhythms" (88). Doubtless as a reaction to playing constantly in highly structured and thoroughly arranged nightclub venues as backup musicians to a vocalist, instrumentalists in Cuba during the 1950s frequently engaged in after-hours jam sessions, described by the photographer Codác as a *chowcito*:

> (The *chowcito* was the group of people who got together to get lost in the bar and hang around the jukebox after the last show was out to do their own *descarga*, this Afro-Cuban jam session which they so completely and utterly lost themselves in that once they went down they simply never knew it was daylight somewhere up there and that the rest of the world's already working or going to work right now, all the world except the world of people who plunged into the night and swam into any rock pool large enough to sustain night life, no matter if it's artificial, in the underwater of the frogmen of the night.) (58)

For Codác/Cabrera Infante, this moment of losing oneself in the music in order to find oneself in a more authentic, more *nocturnal* way, is the most transcendent achievement, the very reason for being, of the city of music. The language here speaks of descent, of submergence, recalling the Kongo cosmology of the light-world above and the aquatic world of the dead below, *kalunga*, "referring, literally, to the world of the dead as complete (*lunga*) within itself and to the wholeness that comes to a person who understands the ways and powers of both worlds."[48] The *chowcito* moves into a choreographic realm when a rumba dancer performs solo to a jukebox accompaniment, and her sensual movements, far beyond anything the meticulously choreographed *corps* of the Tropicana and other large nightclubs can achieve precisely because they are *freely improvised* and uncommodified, inspire Códac to praise her for "inventing for the first time movement, the dance, the rumba at that moment in front of my eyes" (62). And then, one of the pivotal characters of the novel, the singer known as La Estrella brusquely intervenes and, by means of her voice, takes the *chowcito* to quasi-spiritual heights.

La Estrella is patterned on the vocally and physically immense singer Freddy (*née* Fredesvinda García), who like La Estrella worked as a cook in a house in Havana's upper-middle-class Vedado district before her discovery and immediate rise to fame as a headliner (also like La Estrella) in the Capri, Bar Celeste, and Las Vegas nightclubs (though it is unclear whether Freddy, like Estrella, was contractually swindled into performing with a band). Cristóbal Díaz Ayala notes that for the record producer Jesús Goris, convincing Freddy to record with a band was "an almost impossible task,"[49] which mirrors La Estrella's

vehement refusal to work with backup instruments because, as Frank Emilio tells her during a party, "here it's you who brings the music" (122). In her own words, "La Estrella always sings alone, she has more than enough music herself" (64). Freddy's only recorded legacy is a session approximately half an hour in length, which displays a magnificent, almost impossibly huge instrument clearly constrained by the limitations of the recording technology and the rather conventional and uninspired backup arrangements, and while perhaps not entirely justifying Códac's vitriolic assessment of La Estrella's single disc, "the dead voice of that godawful record has nothing to do with her own live voice" (308), Freddy's album clearly gives only a hint of what she really sounded like live and up close.

However, Freddy did not achieve her fame at the same time as Cabrera Infante's fictional La Estrella; she caused her sensation in 1959, the year of the triumph of the Revolution, recorded her album in 1960, and died not in Mexico like La Estrella but in Puerto Rico in 1961 (at 26, though the fictional Estrella appears ageless). That Cabrera Infante should move Freddy's fictional counterpart slightly back in time indicates a strategy to turn La Estrella into more than a character in a novel, rather a trope for something transitory gained, lost, and subsequently revived and made more powerful through an act of memory, a spark of Lewis Carroll's remembered extinguished flame that Códac explicitly characterizes as "her voice revolution in Cuban music and . . . her style which is a thing that lasts longer than a person and a voice and a revolution." Initially portrayed by the characters in almost racist terms as an outlandish monster, a leviathan-like freak of nature, a comic absurdity like a black character from the tradition of *teatro bufo*, La Estrella becomes, over the course of the novel, a tragic figure whose comet-like rise to fame and untimely death at the height of her career are seen as a kind of betrayal of her earlier art as she had wanted to perform and live it.

So while La Estrella's nightclub appearance is termed her "apotheosis" by Códac, it is clear that this is meant only in a commercial sense, given his less than enthusiastic opinion of the concert itself, in which she "recover[s] from time to time her sound of yesteryear . . . But a minute can only last a minute. If I stayed on until she had finished it was only out of solidarity and pity . . . " (307). When Códac encounters her for the first time at the *chowcito*, he is able to discern the heights and depths of her genius, yet even with his good intentions of exposing her voice to a wider and more influential audience and thus bringing her the fame for which she longs, he becomes complicit with the racist commercial machinery of stardom that, while it benefits a beautiful *mulata* like Cuba Venegas with more looks than voice, eventually undermines La Estrella's talent: "I told myself that the gold of her voice had to be separated from the

muck in which Nature or Providence or whatever it was had enveloped her, that this diamond had to be extracted from the mountain of shit it had been buried in . . . " (118).

But Códac, a man whose profession as press photographer compels him to concentrate on appearances, has already, under the spell of La Estrella's performance, shown himself capable of seeing beyond this separation of voice and singer, content and form. Even before she opens her mouth to sing, he watches her move and scat-sing to the music, "and the total effect was of a beauty so different, so horrible, so new, so unique and terrifying" (59). When she pulls the plug on the jukebox and begins to sing the famous Mexican *bolero* "Noche de Ronda," Códac mentally addresses the composer, Agustín Lara, "you've never composed anything, but now this woman is inventing your song" (59), recognizing La Estrella's impulse to transform trivial or well-worn basic material—her *bolero* repertory—into a new statement in which sentiments become emotions, clichés wisdom, and ugliness a more profound beauty.

The Afro-Cuban mythological figure of Lucero, the morning star, often appears on Kongo-influenced altars in the form of a round cowrie-eyed figure, cognate with the Yoruba Elegguá, guardian of the crossroads, and described by Robert Farris Thompson as "a *mbwétete*, a star of the spirit—a soul. This star rises, then fades before the sun, indicating the *nkisi* [spiritually charged amulet]'s passage between the worlds of night and of morning."[50] La Estrella is such a figure, bringing her audience in the *chowcito* through the night and into the day, her performance less a concert than a deep ritual of communion and transition from the undersea world of *kalunga* to the diurnal realm, *ntoto*. So although Códac's first reaction upon hearing of her death is bitterness at the prospect of her being forgotten by the world—"because the one thing I feel a mortal hatred for is oblivion"—he also knows that "you can't give a stop bath to life, so life must go on" (310).

In the club where La Estrella had given that transcendent performance, he encounters an *a cappella* duo of two attractive young black women in whose voices he hears La Estrella as a presence-absence, "a homage that doesn't dare disclose its name" (310), and when he and a friend drive them home, they hear a mysterious knocking near the house, whose true meaning only Códac knows: "I didn't say anything not because it was uncanny but because it was unnecessary" (311). According to Kongo belief, however, "the especially righteous Kongo person will never be destroyed but will come back in the name or body of progeny."[51] The duo Las Capellas are also an incarnation of the Yoruba *ibeji* or divine twins, and as such receive the blessings of their community, personified by a penniless young guitarist, recently arrived in Havana, who sits in with them at another bar, unaware that they are headliners, and elicits their best

performance ever. Reflecting the words of the famous song by Ignacio Piñeiro, *sobre una tumba, una rumba*—over a grave, a rumba—the music describes and voices the movement of the eternal circle of life and death, and in the moment of its sounding announces the triumph of memory over oblivion.

In addition, the circular Kongo cosmogram of the worlds of life and death, day and night, is gendered according to a schema in which "the summit . . . symbolizes not only noon but also maleness, north, and the peak of a person's strength on earth. Correspondingly, the bottom equals midnight, femaleness, south, the highest point of a person's otherworldly strength."[52] To women also belongs *seseribó* or Sese Eribó, the silent drum of the Abakuá secret society, whose foundational myth Cabrera Infante rewrites to emphasize the separation between the male *ekué* drum "that speaks now in the rites for initiates and is magic" and is consecrated to the sacred fish whose secret was indiscreetly betrayed by the overly curious princess Sikán, and the "beautifully adorned" *seseribó*, which "nobody touches . . . and is unable to talk by itself" (86).

However, in Abakuá ideographic signs, both Sikán and Ekué are always shown together, since sound and silence are statements of complementarity. Cabrera Infante, as a friend and admirer of Lydia Cabrera, would surely have known this. Given that the tale is an epigraph to the percussionist Ribot's bitter reminiscence of female deception and betrayal, it can be assumed that Ribot is the one who is giving the misogynist spin to the legend—especially as Bustrófedon has nicknamed him "Eribó," i.e., the second component of the sacred silent drum. In a reflective passage when he compares playing the drums to a solo flight in a quantum universe—"cutting across [the band] without letting on that I'm off beat, making believe I'm cutting across them, returning to the time, moving in line, straightening up the machine and finally touching down . . . and of course so far away from my solitude and from company and from the world: in music" (109)—the music appears both as a way for Eribó to escape his loneliness and, in a certain sense, to accentuate it. Drummers, after all, play with silence and sound in equal measure.

The two characters who die in the course of the novel, Bustrófedon, that magnificently and manically inventive verbal improviser who uses the dictionary as a source of chord-changes, and La Estrella, that outsize singer who through performance invents songs that others thought they had composed, are permanently linked as complementary examples of the jazz sensibility. Their loss is acutely felt by all the characters, whether they admit it or not, because with their creative flames, these two defiant artists of the ephemeral give meaning to the lives of those around them. Compare "Thinking about Bustrófedon is like thinking of the goose that laid golden eggs, of a riddle with no answer, a spiral without end" (213) and "what is true is that she's dead and that soon

nobody will remember her and that she was very much alive when I knew her and that now nothing remains of that fabulous freak, that enormous vitality, that unique human being but a skeleton . . ." (308). By the end of the novel, both have become almost cosmic figures: in the mysterious knocking, Códac hears her spirit soaring above her skeletal worm-eaten remains, and Silvestre, contemplating the stars from his apartment window, "wonder[s] if Bustrófedon's sentity was expanding multiversally, the non-signs of his specter now on the rosy shift, moving like a Doppelgänger in my memory" (480).

Brathwaite's observation about "improvisation, in the jazz sense, where tone, rhythm and image come together to create a certain kind of effect"[53] could well apply to both characters. Just as, next to La Estrella, the gorgeous and successful Cuba Venegas's voice is compared to a "missing molar" (299), Arsenio Cué's superbly erudite and hilarious paean, bristling with multilingual literary allusions, to a woman he is trying to pick up, falls flat. Unlike Bustrófedon, who punned as he did because he literally could do nothing else, Cué is fundamentally contemptuous of his audience (as he is of most people and things around him). As a result, his solo becomes more a way of showing off to his friend Silvestre than a genuinely seductive move; the same could be said of both men's subsequent prolonged and unsuccessful attempts to make the women laugh. Magalena, one of the listeners, passes conclusive judgment: "it was just too weird. I swear to God I didn't understand a word of it" (411). It could be said that, with reference to the Kongo paradigm of day and night, the two men have too much *day*—superego—in them to communicate with these women of the night.

Reflecting the link between women and night, a woman's dream narrated by Cué provides the most prophetic moment in the novel, and the identity of the dreamer becomes an important element in uncovering certain silences and secrets between Silvestre and Cué. In it, Havana is burning, perhaps in the aftermath of an atomic explosion. (Cabrera Infante, along with his compatriots, had lived through the tense days of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, when for a short time nuclear holocaust seemed inevitable—a moment that also marked certain works of Calvert Casey and Virgilio Piñera). A naked Marilyn Monroe (who was to die in that same year of 1962) rides on horseback over to the intact balcony where the dreamer stands watching the scene of devastation. Silvestre then reminds Cué of a visit they paid to Lydia Cabrera several years earlier, during which she told them of a similarly apocalyptic dream that turned out to foreshadow Batista's 1952 coup. What is clear from all this imagery of disaster is that the life they are leading, the milieu in which they lead it, and the historical moment that encompasses all of this, are rushing headlong to an end.

And yet, gazing at Havana in the twilight, Silvestre has a vision of the kind that Walter Benjamin once described as flashing up at a moment of danger: "The city . . . seemed to be illuminated by a light that wasn't artificial and didn't come from the sun, but which seemed to belong to itself, to emanate from it, as though Havana was a source of light, a radiating mirage, almost a promise against the night that was threatening to surround us" (382). In an unexpected access of puritanism, Cué, preoccupied with thoughts of leaving the city to join Castro's guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra, sees the skyline as "whitewashed sepulchers . . . It's not the New Jerusalem, kiddo, it's Somorrah. Or if you prefer, Godom" (383).

Earlier in the novel, Silvestre, thoroughly drunk, sings a parody of a *guaracha* by Ñico Saquito, "María Cristina": "*Mister Mystery wants to rule over us / And I just keep on doing what he says / Because I don't want to hear people say / That Mister Mystery wants to rule over us*" (107). Arsenio Cué's joking retort indicates that the year is 1958, so the allusion to Fidel Castro, the leader in whom at the time nearly all of Cuban society saw what he or she wanted to see, is evident. One of the many paradoxes of the novel is that Cué, a failed writer who resents his job as an actor even though he spends his entire life cultivating poses and refusing to talk seriously about anything, and who repeatedly indulges in "sound tracts against the tropics, the country, the people, the music, the Negroes, women and underdevelopment" (96), is precisely the one who nurtures ambitions of joining Fidel Castro's guerrillas. However, as Carlos Franqui, one of the major participants in the anti-Batista movement and the early years of the post-revolutionary government, points out, "The Cuban Revolution was not the Chinese Revolution. It was people from the city going to the mountains. Look at the origins of the *comandantes* and you'll see. The guerrillas were the vanguard, an important one. But the Movement was the city, and the people the protagonists."[54]

While the "Movement" as an organized political force is more of a presence-absence in *Three Trapped Tigers*—Cué and Silvestre agree that Batista's regime has no future, though without pursuing the discussion beyond allusions, interestingly, to the dictatorship's schemes for urban renewal—it is worth expanding Franqui's notions of "Movement" and "protagonists" in light of the novel. What unites the major characters is discontent and unhappiness, which their boisterous humor and pleasure-seeking do little to conceal. All of them in some way, within the twin constraints of the culture industry that employs them (Cué as a radio announcer and soap-opera actor, Silvestre as a ghostwriter and journalist) and the dictatorship's repression, are restlessly experimenting with—improvising—different ways of living and new perspectives on the Havana of night-lights that is also the city of their dreams. As Silvestre says of his and Cué's automotive *dérive* through the city: "the thing was to make it look like we didn't

have to work because in Havana, Cuba, this is the only way to be *gente bien* or high society, which is what Cué and I wanted, would have wanted, tried to be-and we always had time to talk about time" (321). This "time" is not the time of teleological History, that construct manipulated by the post-revolutionary regime for its own self-absolving purposes, but the subversive time of creativity, crystallized in the endless *descarga* of the Havana nightwalkers.

In fact, the first major cultural crisis within the Cuban Revolution was touched off in 1961 by *P.M.*, a short documentary experimental film, directed by Orlando Jiménez Leal and Cabrera Infante's brother Sabá in *cinéma-vérité* style, that depicted mostly Afro-Cuban denizens of nightlife dancing, drinking, and musicking. Banned and confiscated by the authorities as "counter-revolutionary" for its allegedly "obscene" portrayals of working people "making it look like [they] didn't have to work" (to paraphrase Silvestre), *P.M.* furnished the pretext for the closure of *Lunes de Revolución*, the cultural supplement edited by Cabrera Infante—a decision that would ultimately lead to his marginalization and subsequent self-exile.

But *Three Trapped Tigers* testifies to a deeper quest that transcends mere circumstance; like Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man listening to Louis Armstrong in his underground sanctuary, Silvestre, Cué, and their friends try to slip into the (linguistic, musical, social) breaks and look around. What counts is the impulse to keep moving, to ride the momentum of the moment, to see and hear further—a process culminating in Silvestre's silent epiphany (clearly patterned after the conclusion of James Joyce's story "The Dead") of a pre-dawn "dead Havana," viewed from the terrace of his high-rise apartment, beyond which the heavens open "toward where there becomes here and all directions are the same and there is no place or a place which is no place with no up or down or east or west, ever-ever land" (480). In this solo, Silvestre leaps into the music of the spheres—or rather, the drums, as this moment of gnosis echoes Eribó's waking dream of quantum flight while playing: "to fly low and see the houses and people or to fly high and see the clouds and to move between the sky and the earth, suspended, without dimension, but in all the dimensions" (108).

This evanescence of the city parallels music's transitory nature and its corresponding capacity to haunt; frequently, a half- or wholly remembered tune carries associations with the place in which it was first heard, even if that place has long since disappeared or become unrecognizable, and the "ever-ever land" where Silvestre is transported is the topography of a cosmos/city that has been lost, except to memory as expressed and embellished in and through the imagination. As reflected in the Spanish title of his memoir in the form of a novel (or vice versa), *La Habana para un Infante Difunto*, Cabrera Infante's artistic project involves an act of self-resurrection—of the remembered splendor he once

encountered in Havana and which, by his own account, he tried to recapture in other cities around the world—and of resurrecting the city from its actual ruined condition. "Havanity of Havanities, all is Havanity," he once quipped, and as always with Cabrera Infante, a highly serious point was being made beneath the wordplay. For it was the revolutionary leadership's moralistic perception of Havana in terms of "vanity" or "decadence" (which, as the controversy over *P.M.* shows, was not at all confined to the Mafia control of casino gambling and high-class brothels) that led not only to Cabrera Infante's departure from Cuba but also to very specific negative consequences for the city itself. As if in a parody of "Gassire's Lute," the punishment for such "Havanity" would be, if not the city's outright disappearance, then its neglect and corresponding desuetude.

Álvarez-Tabio Albo notes that although Havana was a crucial and dangerously risky center of underground resistance to the Batista dictatorship, whose long-awaited end created a memorably festive atmosphere within the city, "the revolution of January 1959 turned its back on the capital, opportunely identified with the corruption of Republican governments and the vices of the 'American way of life.'"[55] Although Fidel Castro's march on Havana from Santiago initiated an immense exodus from the countryside into the city, the arrivants in this case were not the Afro-Cubans of Guillén's poem, but overwhelmingly *guajiros* or peasants. One of them, Reinaldo Arenas, recalled his emotions at the time: "the city fascinated me. . . . A city where people did not know each other, where one could disappear, where to a certain extent no one cared who you were. . . . [It] was my initial contact with another world, a world of many faces, immense, fascinating."[56] These sentiments in themselves proved incompatible with official policy, which was more interested in using these peasant newcomers, allegedly less contaminated by so-called "bourgeois" mores, to purify the city of its sins. Arenas speaks of a later episode in which he and his aunt saw young scholarship students from the countryside, lodged by the government in a mansion in the exclusive Miramar district, "dismantling all the windows of the mansion and using the wooden frames to build a huge fire in the yard so they could boil and whiten their clothes."[57] The social leveling that appears to be at work in this incident is actually far from salutary, because nothing is being done to integrate these students into the urban texture. One would imagine this demonstrably laissez-faire attitude to be incompatible with a government allegedly concerned with the improvement of civic life.

With this and similar incidents in mind, Álvarez-Tabio Albo does not hesitate to speak of "an antiurban revolution [where] the 'new man' was converted into a version of the 'noble savage.' Ignoring the traditional models of civic coexistence, the city was utilized as if it were a provisional encampment, with all

the consequences for the city's conservation that this implied."[58] Likewise, she points to the inability of Cuban writers to conceptualize the Revolutionary City as a sign of this city's real absence; far from saving the city from corruption, the revolution actually "destroyed the *locus* of a utopia which has not been realized, albeit not superseded either."[59]

However, Álvarez-Tabio only partially hints at the numerous writings that have emerged around the theme of the Ruined City. Along with their alternately scathing and elegiac denunciations of the wreckage of Havana, these texts end up reaffirming the city's continued hold on the imagination. They thus portend a possible rebirth or regeneration even in the face of disaster, as prophesied by Virgilio Piñera in his 1971 poem for José Lezama Lima, written during the grim period of official ostracism and censorship, which lasted until their deaths: "Now, silenced for a while / we listen to cities crumbling into dust, / distinguished manuscripts burning to ashes / and the slow, daily dripping of hatred. / But it's only a pause in our becoming / Soon we will start to converse."[60]

As the son of the poet Eliseo Diego, who began his illustrious literary career with a sequence of poems hymning the dignified poverty and intimate glory of a Havana Street, *En la Calzada de Jesús del Monte* ("Up Jesús del Monte Road, up this vein of stones I climbed, blind with beloved reality, until the demoniacal whirlwind of fictions caught me and the city imagined the incessant ghosts that conceal me"[61]), Eliseo Alberto grew up as a full participant in post-revolutionary Cuban society, performing military service and voluntary field labor, writing journalistic articles and screenplays, enjoying the benefits of being part of the Cuban cultural elite. In 1996, however, he wrote a memoir, *Informe contra mi mismo* (*Report Against Myself*), which in the process of calling for peaceful dialogue among Cubans on and off the island, without interference from any constituted power, made some harsh criticisms of, *inter alia*, the conditions into which his beloved Havana had been allowed to sink, contrasting the dilapidation of the present day with the services and amenities that had been provided well into the 1980s, but that after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Cuba's superpower patron) and the subsequent euphemistically termed "special period," had vanished: "The Havana that tourists now photograph is a broken city, crushed by inefficiency, mistreated by administrative incompetence, abandoned, screwed, besieged from without and within, bitten by the rats of apathy; an old city stripped bare, nothing but bones, badly dressed, a living fossil that bears its boredom and complaints as best it can. A landscape after a battle. Everything's collapsing. Everything. Nothing's arising. Nothing. Not even the rubble."[62]

Explicitly invoking his father's words, he obsessively names all the major streets of Havana, apostrophizing them as "veins of my body, dirty, cast off,

dark, swollen by the cholesterol of forgetting, my veins, my streets: don't let me lie."[63] Then he conducts a poll of many of his friends, asking them to list the seven, eight, or nine wonders of Havana (and if they wish, a few of the horrors, all of which turn out to be official, newly constructed buildings). As well, poetry's power to construct an imaginary city without more than a glancing relationship to the real one is made evident by a friend of Alberto's who, in a letter included in the *Informe*, exposes the Calzada de Jesús del Monte immortalized by Diego as "a horrible avenue, filled with garbage, invaded by stray dogs, with a few shops that don't sell anything and some obsolete bakeries that don't bake bread. A filthy street, surrounded by ruined houses, that smells of a cystitic old lady's piss."[64]

Perhaps the most wrenching moment of the book involves his childhood memory of the day his family, for reasons he does not give (because they are "too sad to tell"), was forced to leave their ancestral home in the little suburb of Arroyo Naranjo, one of whose access points was an extension of the Calzada de Jesús del Monte. "We left the house to its fate. We closed the doors. We turned our backs. We betrayed it. Since that afternoon, the last one of our childhood, we have borne this enormous guilt. . . . It's true, the Arroyo Naranjo that my brothers and sister knew as children no longer exists. Back then it had everything necessary to the happiness of its inhabitants . . . "[65] When he returns to visit, everything is in ruins. The domestic utopia ("halfway between the city and the countryside"[66]) of family tradition, intellectual exchange (Eliseo Diego was an important member of the *Orígenes* group), gardens, childhood, Sunday gatherings of friends and relatives ("without those Sundays in Villa Berta, history would definitely be different—and probably worse"[67])—in short, Eliseo Diego's realized dream of a "place that feels so right" ("if anyone asks, tell him / nothing's happening here, it's only life"[68])—has not been extended and deepened as a result of the Revolution, let alone taken as a model for the harmonious blending of city and countryside, but abandoned to disrepair.[69] That the son should feel guilty for something he could not possibly have influenced (Alberto was an adolescent in 1968) speaks to a greater defeat of his "revolutionary" generation: the awareness that, for all the Revolution's social achievements, he and his contemporaries have been fed a steady diet of slogans and tasks that distract from (when they do not prohibit) addressing the real civic problems that beset them.

At such moments of painful self-awareness, Eliseo Diego's transfigured visions of a street where the "too-bright light forms other walls with the dust,"[70] far from being an impossible idealization as Alberto's brutally pragmatic correspondent would have it, becomes a way of keeping alive a memory of a space of conviviality that can impel future acts of reconstruction. If, no matter how

briefly, a shabby or dilapidated street corner can be bathed in an aureole of light, and if that moment can be prolonged through its transmutation into written form, then perhaps a similar sensibility can be brought to bear on the actual transformation of the environment that inspired that textual rendering.

Alternatively—given the tendency of a film like Wim Wenders's highly successful music documentary *Buena Vista Social Club* to aestheticize the ruins of Havana for the benefit of European and North American audiences thirsty for instant nostalgia—Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's determinedly unadorned "dirty-realist" approach to writing Havana has the merit of conveying the particular challenges of everyday life in the city. In Gutiérrez's *Dirty Havana Trilogy*, the squalor and anomie of the "special period" in 1994, the year of the first anti-government riot in Havana since the Revolution, followed by the massive exodus, tacitly encouraged by the government, of the *balseros* or raft people, are vividly portrayed, along with the racial divisions and disparities in access to education and medical care. The anti-heroic first-person protagonist of the first two installments of the trilogy, a former journalist fired for outspokenness, deals with permanent unemployment by joining his fellow Habaneros in the endlessly renewed daily quest to "*resolver*" or make do, by any means necessary. In his urban picaresque, Pedro Juan moves from building to building, awash in a sea of rum of wildly varying quality, selling whatever he can on the informal market, begging when he has no other option, and having (or attempting to have) a fair amount of sex along the way.

Given this improvised approach to life, his philosophy changes drastically from day to day—he can call himself a slave one day and a master another. As he puts it, "I have no interest in any kind of straight and narrow life, no interest in anything that moves smoothly from one point to the next . . . There's no use trying to be sound and practical or to live along a precisely plotted path. Life is a game of chance."[71] Contrary to his *flâneur* predecessors in *Three Trapped Tigers*, who tried hard to make it look as if they didn't need to work, Pedro Juan has no need of pretense or performance, as he knows that more than ever before, he is on his own. At one point, when he is forced to lie low in the countryside, he calls himself a runaway slave, fleeing what he calls "all the poverty, all the hunger, all the people around me. Everybody's always trying to fuck you over, squeeze a few pesos out of you. Because that's what poverty is. Shit attracts shit" (131). Yet before too long, he is back in his accustomed haunts, unable to stay away from Havana and his love-hate relationship with its people.

The underlying irony of his and other Habaneros' predicament is that for decades, the "revolutionary" regime had spoken endlessly of creating a utopian society whose cornerstone was a "new man" with unstinting devotion to an austere communal ethos. Eliseo Alberto recalls one particularly paroxysmic

example of the *dystopic* lengths to which such an ideology could go: a group of honors students from Havana were once taken to live in an "ideal village" in Pinar del Río on the western tip of the island where money had been abolished. Its salient feature was a roll of barbed wire—an invention, incidentally, used in Cuba by the Spanish government during the third War of Independence as an indispensable element in building the first modern concentration camp. This was strung around the settlement not to prevent people from escaping the pure communist city, but to keep the hopelessly corrupt and contaminating outside world at bay, or so said the military officer in charge. In *Dirty Havana Trilogy*, the remnants of such ideological delirium still appear in the media, but for Pedro Juan, they all refer to a fantasy world. Right after affirming "You've got to struggle to survive. The only sure thing in life is death," he hears a radio announcer broadcasting inflated, optimistic slogans and admits, "I didn't know what he was talking about. He kept repeating the same things" (288).

However, for all his detailed depictions of squalor, misery, and hair-raising violence, Gutiérrez is not completely nihilistic, in that he is able to recognize, praise, and at times practice provisional solidarity and compassion, so long as it does not involve dropping his guard and thus courting injury or death: "The poor man, or slave, it makes no difference what you call him, can't afford to have a complex ethical code or demand much from his pride, since he's always in danger of starving to death" (162). Writing of an old woman who has lived in the same building in Central Havana for years and has watched it become a densely populated tenement since the Revolution, Gutiérrez launches into a paean to her neighbors:

> In the middle of the debacle, they laughed, lived their lives, tried to enjoy themselves as best they could. Their senses were sharpened. They were like the weakest and smallest of animals, learning to conserve their strength and develop lots of different skills because they knew they'd never be big or strong, never be predators. Born in the ruins, they just kept trying not to give up or let themselves be beaten so severely that at last they were forced to surrender. Anything was possible, anything allowed, except defeat. (324)

In a dialectical twist, the language Gutiérrez uses to describe the resilience of the slum dwellers of Central Havana echoes the combative official rhetoric he studiously ignores as irrelevant. Here, however, it emerges from what he witnesses and lives rather than from a bureaucrat's office, and the fight is not against an external enemy but for survival against the odds.

At the same time, this passage reflects the kind of neighborhood parochialism often found in urban areas. By his own admission, Gutiérrez is "not interested in the whole city. Havana's very different. Also, people from the Vedado think differently from the people of Central Havana," which he describes as

"a very tough neighborhood, very violent and aggressive,"[72] the result of the displacement over the years of the middle class from Old Havana to Central Havana and subsequently to the Vedado and Miramar districts, leaving behind old buildings to be subdivided by speculators and occupied by the poor (mostly black) denizens of Havana and emigrants from the countryside, who ever since the start of the "special period" have been crowding into twelve-foot-square rooms by the dozens. One of the buildings he lives in is a 1936 high-rise on the Malecón whose "façade is still in good shape, and tourists are always amazed by it and take pictures. . . . But inside it's falling to pieces, and it's an incredible labyrinth of stairs without banisters, darkness, bad smells, cockroaches, and fresh shit" (82). This building becomes a metaphor for Havana's current status as a destination for tourists, latter-day Mr. and Mrs. Campbells, to marvel over and take snapshots, all the while ignoring the real life that goes on behind the stage set.

But even in a situation where anything is liable to happen that could alter or erase whatever may have been accomplished the day before, memory still enters into the textures of Havana. Pedro Juan, for all his cynicism, admits early on that he has found it impossible to divest himself entirely of nostalgia. "Maybe, if we're lucky, nostalgia can be transformed from something sad and depressing into a little spark that sends us on to something new, into the arms of a new lover, a new city, a new era, which, no matter whether it's better or worse, will be different" (54). Although this remark comes in a context where he is reflecting on lost loves, Pedro Juan is also pursuing the path of writers like Cabrera Infante and Abilio Estévez, who have understood that Havana is a city not to be seen for what it is, but as something they have longed for, and thus eternally made new in memory.

Later, as he takes a walk through the neighborhood on his way to gamble, he goes to the Las Vegas bar for a drink—the same bar in which Freddy/La Estrella once sang as a headliner more than thirty-five years before. Parodying the concluding lines of Cabrera Infante's novel-in-vignettes of Cuban history *Vista del amanecer en los trópicos* (*View of Dawn in the Tropics*) and alluding as well to the centerpiece section of *Tres Tristes Tigres*, Pedro Juan says "Las Vegas is immortal. It will always be there, the place where she sang boleros, the piano in the dark, the bottles of rum, the ice. All of it just as it always has been. It's good to know some things don't change. . . . It was very quiet and very cold and very dark. . . . It's really a tomb, where time has stopped forever" (141). The narrator's ambivalence is clear; on the one hand, this bar is a *lieu de mémoire* for a vanished Havana, on the other hand, it is cold and dark, and most likely deserted, whereas the real life of Havana, its heat and noise, are out in the streets

and no longer to be found where Cabrera Infante encountered them many years before.

Nostalgia, then, cannot congeal into souvenirs or vestiges of bygone eras; it must, as Pedro Juan realizes, become a "spark" that can incite the individual to define himself or herself in a more active relation to the urban environment. After all, in their various ways, this is what the denizens of the "dirty Havana" are trying to do, as witness the various defiant Habanero catchphrases: "The main thing is not to die," "Nobody can take away what I've danced," "Here I am, fucked but happy." In Estévez's words: "Proudly correcting Descartes, Habaneros seem to be saying: I listen, dance, and enjoy myself, therefore I exist."[73] The city is made and unmade, written and erased, in the space of a moment, a day, to the point of breaking into thousands of ruins, shards, fragments, whether in the glare of the light ("another way Havana and Havaneros have found . . . to justify our unreality"[74]) or in the rubble of collapsed buildings. From the rubble of the Ruined City, the vision of an ideal city tempts, taunts, and persists as what Emma Álvarez-Tabio Albo has called the "permanently unfulfilled promise at the center of the project of Cuban modernity."[75]

CHAPTER 5

City of Dis or City of Renewal?

Looking back on his nearly ten-year sojourn in Ghana during the decade of that nation's movement toward and into independence, Kamau Brathwaite describes it as a crucial life- and work-changing moment in which "was I able . . . to begin to glimpse/to understand, something of where we had come from—as I moved slowly towards, let us call it, Kumasi, City of Gold, at the start & centre—in a sense, at the *interior* of my journey."[1] Kumasi, the former capital of the Ashanti Empire, takes on a double incarnation: as both concrete and imaginary topos, ceremonial center and locus of poetic revelation and self-knowledge. As a City of Gold and God, its splendor appears to portend an El Dorado of a different nature than that dreamed of by the conquistadores; Brathwaite's phrase "let us call it" indicates that the actual city of Kumasi is a reflection of the archetypal "Kumasi" toward which the poet is journeying, and which is poetically rendered in "Masks," the centerpiece of the trilogy *The Arrivants*:

> city of gold,
> paved with silver,
> ivory altars,
> tables of horn,
>
> the morn-
> ing sun of
> seven hills
> greets you best,
>
> knows you blessed.
> . . .[2]

The first of these quatrains (which technically begins with the title of the poem "Kumasi") establishes two dualities: gold and silver are precious metals that signify sun and moon and by extension the male and female principles, and the "ivory" and "horn" resonate with the twin gates (notably appearing in both Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's foundational epic of empire *The Aeneid*) through which, respectively, delusory and prophetic dreams leave the realm of the dead to haunt the minds of the living. Following this schema, the "ivory altars" could prophesy the ultimate fall of Ashanti despite its belief (shared with other empires) in its own eternity and divine sanction, whereas the "tables of horn" might represent the truth of the poetic law-giving word passed down through time and rekindled by the poet. At the same time, ivory and horn are perishable, even as gold and silver are eternal: "the ivory altars, / tables of horn, // will crack / with the day."[3] Since Kumasi is an everlasting "city of gold," it follows that the "morning sun," incarnated in Asante by "the king or *hene* [a]s the divine representative of (*O*)nyame-Light,"[4] would "greet it best, know it blessed."

The resemblance to the European dream of El Dorado is, in the case of Kumasi, no mere comparative exercise, in that the ritual of kingship said to have been practiced in the mobile Andean/Caribbean invisible city, wherein the "golden man" coated himself with gold dust as part of an annual ceremony, was in fact practiced by the Ashanti ruler: "All the king's ornaments, eating utensils, and ceremonial instruments were of gold, the metal of the sun. On New Year's day in the evening he appeared as the risen sun on the horizon, his hair and his naked body powdered with gold dust adhering to grease, wearing a cloth woven of hammered gold thread and his whole person covered with gold ornaments."[5]

The dreamed conquistadorial myth of a golden city, then, can be seen as a prophecy materialized not in the newfound America but in that very Africa whose bodies were providing the fuel for the insatiable Plantation-city that sprang up as compensation for the invisibility of El Dorado and its immediately accessible wealth. And given that the Ashanti Empire, with Kumasi as its capital, reached its pinnacle in the eighteenth century, at the height of the slave trade, there emerges a striking Doradian relationship between fable and historical actuality. For as Gordon Rohlehr observes, precisely in relation to Brathwaite's "Kumasi":

> Kumasi's wealth during its period of greatness, was substantially due to the slave trade. Its power was due to war and the subjugation of its equally bellicose neighbours, and its tendencies were, like its neighbours', bellicose and expansionist. Most of the wars concerned the control of the traffic in gold and slaves. Kumasi was, in short, a city-state on the brink of being absorbed into and corrupted by the same nascent and vigorously expanding capitalist economy that created the

> Caribbean, and through slavery led to Jamaica becoming the home of so many Akans of the diaspora.[6]

Thus, Kumasi's splendor is not entirely its own, but derived in no small part from the Plantation machine, and Brathwaite's paean seems inspired by the dream of that splendor apparently uncorrupted by the workings of history, in which it remains a fixed, magnetizing point. Writing about that moment of discovery in *Barabajan Poems*, as well as his poetic rendering, Brathwaite realizes, "But that, bountiful and hierarchic as it is, as it must seem—is the Africa of dreams, really, though it was here, for me, very real."[7] However, despite this disclaimer, Brathwaite's Kumasi is no less a part of history, as shown in the lines: "To the west / Denkyira dreams, / south the Akyems // seek their rest,"[8] an allusion to, respectively, the former state of Denkyira, which once ruled over the Ashanti until their defeat and ensuing subjugation at the hands of the Ashanti chief Osei Tutu and now "dreams" either of its lost power or of a future reconquest, and to the Akyem tribe, vanquished by the Ashanti in the process of creating a centralized state and empire. The "morn- / ing sun of / seven hills" carries an echo of that other grand empire city built on seven hills, Rome, whose destruction, Brathwaite notes elsewhere, launches the vast historical process leading to "our slavery."

Upon arrival in Kumasi, Brathwaite and his Jamaican traveling companion, *omowales* come home to Africa, seek an audience with the Asantehene, the hereditary ruler of the Ashanti Confederation. They confront, on a personal level, the "re/warped nightmare of history" as the *okyeame* or royal counselor/orator informs them in no uncertain terms that such a meeting "was just not 'on,' was in fact a ceremonial insult (anathema) since . . . it was the West India Regiment, hurriedly summoned from its Caribbean stations in 1895 or thereabouts . . . that had brought about the defeat of the nation and th(e) banishment of Prempeh to the Seychelles in 1896."[9] Ever since then, so-called "cane-suckers" were barred from the Asantehene's presence. Having unexpectedly come face to face with this harsh lesson from a history they had never been taught, the travelers are compelled to "begin the real what I have called *interior journey* into the history & culture of our *selves* . . . the discovery of our ancient & ancestral buried birthchord & the further deeper nearer more distant confrontations with // time- / place-self."[10]

The necessary and longed-for search for the magic city, "hidden almost from view on its pyramidic plateau,"[11] has indeed brought revelations, but of a double-edged sort: at the same time that the travelers find connectedness with their ancestral land, they also collide with the past of slavery and colonialism that has shaped that land, and their own ancestral complicity with the ruin such scourges have brought. The resultant unhappy consciousness, however,

provides a point of entry into a realm deeper than simple affirmative celebration, a city where "time- / place-self" form an ideogram of interiority in which splendor, while inextricable from its past loss or present imperilment, nonetheless endures as something recoverable, something to be imagined and moved into other contexts. Likewise, Wagadu, in the tale of Gassire's Lute, vanishes through human weakness and reappears fortified with new gifts and qualities that are the paradoxical legacy of those failings. For example, the confluence in Brathwaite's poem of Kumasi, Rome, and El Dorado that forms an image of the City of God and Gold, not only reconfigures the geometrical form through which the slave trade is usually viewed—a triangle linking Europe, Africa, and the Americas—into urban centers, "real" and "imaginary," but also outlines a different, polycentric way of reading or "interstanding" the burdens and possibilities of history in the present, one which encompasses "deeper nearer more distant" correspondences, overlappings, echoes, analogies as active constituents of that gnosis. Each of these cities variously contains and is contained by the other, at the "start and centre" of a world system in its birth pangs, ascension, and decline—and of its ever-possible yet always imperiled negation and transcendence.

In comparing Kumasi and Kingston (Jamaica), Rohlehr declares: "the metaphors [of gold and silver] have lost all their heraldic associations, and were beginning to lose them . . . even in the Kumasi of Osei Tutu. Kumasi, at the green beginning of historical process, and Kingston at the dead end, both manifest an intestinal corruption endemic in the system which has engulfed them both."[12] The carnivorous flowering of this corruption in dead-end Kingston is blisteringly portrayed in Brathwaite's *Trench Town Rock*, a blend of documentary sources and impassioned outcry, based on a personal ordeal with a predawn break-in and robbery in his own apartment, at the horrendous gun violence sweeping Kingston in the early 1990s (which shows no immediate sign of decreasing in the "new millennium," though by now all too many seem to have accepted it as an unavoidable curse) and the coarsening of social relations that this pathology reflects. After recounting how an (unnamed) poet and supposed friend of his forwarded a newspaper clipping about a murder that occurred in Brathwaite's Kingston housing complex (and whose fatal shots open the poem), without even mentioning that Brathwaite lived there and was therefore in possible danger, he moves back from this single instance of unthinking callousness to a panoramic consideration of its deeper significance:

So that these crimes we *all* embrace
the victim and the violate
the duppy & the gunman
so close on these plantations still

so intimate
the dead/undead[13]

Here, Brathwaite extends into the realm of tragedy Martin Carter's affirmation that "all are involved." The specter of the Plantation city/machine, with its zombifying power to forge ties of oppressive complicity, maintains its hold over the minds of those who have failed to resolve and thus transcend its bitter legacies.

This failure in turn accumulates to such an extremity as to engender the emergence of a dread city, the City of Dis, ruled by the anti-principles of "Distress, Dispair & Disrespect. Distrust Disrupt Distruction" (73), from the lingering social death—endless Middle Passages toward nowhere—imposed by slavery and colonialism. In this city of daily horrors and random brutality, of mass detentions, lockdowns, robberies, rapes, and murders, the notion of any kind of post-independence "progress" vanishes into a spiral of near-apocalyptic decline: "Orlando Patto's Dungle of the 60s Sisyphus become the Riverton City (Kingston) Dump of 1992: an image of a city smouldering in garbage, & men and women plundering that monstrous HELL of stench and detritus and death" (68). The vulturous mentality that develops from a permanent need to scavenge is reflected in such grisly acts as looting the belongings of car-crash victims on site. Denizens of a society ravaged by centuries of plunder perpetuate what Brathwaite in another bitter context terms "*too much a reaction—if not a reactionary—plantation culture. We are not prepared to foresee to foresay to forestall to help in that real way. . . . [E]vvabody busy busy busy busy wid dem own busyness . . . and that I call . . . our scavenge John Crow culture*."[14] And such institutionalized and internalized parasitism is not confined to Jamaica; as Brathwaite says of the horrific happenings recounted in *Trench Town Rock*: "Events that I have chronicle personwise or foolish cd have been recorded in various degrees—some less intense, some as you know far far more so—for other Caribbean countries & beyond" (67). One could, for example, cite in this context Martin Carter's disillusioned outcry from 1964, two years before his native Guyana's independence:

Rude citizen! think you I do not know
that love is stammered, hate is shouted out
in every human city in this world?
Men murder men, as men must murder men,
to build their shining governments of the damned.[15]

In such a dystopic city and world, love can only be expressed through "stammering" amidst the din of a hatred "shouted out" and expressing itself through a foundational, fratricidal murder similar to the primal killings that have undergirded

all mythic creations of cities. The results of this predatory act, repeated over and over again, are "shining governments of the damned," at once Brathwaite's cities of Dis and infernal El Dorado, which dwarf and crush their oblivious architects.

In *Trench Town Rock*, Brathwaite reworks an earlier poem of sorrow and disillusion, "Kingston in the Kingdom of This World," and places it immediately before his own account of the break-in and armed robbery that left "*my life like torn from its moorings*" (59). In this version, what was once "Kingdom" is now "Kingdoom," and Alejo Carpentier's moving passage from the concluding section of his novel *The Kingdom of This World*—"bowed down by suffering and duties, beautiful in the midst of his misery, capable of loving in the face of afflictions and trials, man finds his greatness, his fullest measure, only in the Kingdom of This World"[16]—becomes in this context an elegiac statement of unfulfilled and ever-receding redemption amidst pervasive social and human reduction.

The Christ-like voice of the poet-narrator, whose Biblical imagery of the lilies of the field, fishermen, and little children whom he "suffers" to enter his presence, suffuses a pastoral *locus amenus* with its beginning in the Word. Brathwaite abruptly counterposes it to the world of the "sudden lock-up" wherein those who have in the past performed or inherited heroic deeds are "reduced // to a bundle of rags / a broken / stick" (47), a blighting reduction that "wilts the flower / weakens the water / coarsens the lips" (48) and tears the word "suffer" away from its associations with "willingly permit" and into its meaning as "painfully endure." There then transpires a similarly inflected confrontation between the poetic "I" and the unnamed imprisoning "you" around the meaning of "authority." The poet roots his authority in "sunlight . . . / . . . windmills, choirs singing of the / flowers of rivers," in dance and earth, whereas the interpellated "you" draws his from "these chains that strangle my wrists / . . . the red whip that circles my head / . . . the white eye of interrogator's / terror . . ." (48)—in short, the whole arsenal of oppressive practices that have persisted unchanged (allowing for technological improvements) from slavery onwards.

In the crush of this carceral mechanism, the poet is forcibly diminished from a body to a hideous mask, a brutalized orifice, turned to virtual stone by Power's implacable Don Gorgon stare, "to this hole of my head / . . . / to these black eyes / this beaten face / these bleach- / ing lips blear- / ing obscenities" (49). Yet endurance of this *sufferation* still produces a thread or intimation of hopeful expectation, somewhere present in the apparent dead-end waiting of "kingdoom" imprisonment. The prisoner has strength left to prophesy what might be awaiting him, suspended in a Not-Yet-Present at the other end of the cell bars: "the water of sun/light / . . . / the lilies to spring up out of the iron / . . . / your

eyes o my little children" (49). The conjunction of lilies and iron betokens a possible synthesis of rural and urban, but also the placating and tempering of the wrathful Ogun, who wanders unchecked in present-day Kingston, slaughtering with cutlass and gun. And Brathwaite's concept of "nam" should also be recalled here, precisely because it is the result of compression, downpression as the Rastafarians would call it, overpowering reduction to the barest essence and slightest breath—but which nonetheless provides a basis, albeit precarious, for an effort, a project, of reconstruction where lilies could be birthed from iron.

In keeping with this possibility, Brathwaite concludes his poetic sequence on a slightly more hopeful note, retelling a section of an Ananse story included in Jamaican writer (and fellow Caribbean expatriate in Ghana) Neville Dawes's novel *The Last Enchantment*, and "brought . . . first alive to us one afternoon in Ghana" by Jamaican storyteller/cultural activist Yvonne Sobers. The fleeting vision of unity between written and oral, between diasporic Jamaica and ancestral homeland Ghana, between memory as leaven for the present and a cycle of stories constantly reworked, renewed, and reinvented by parents in Africa and its diaspora for their children, is a glimmer of "the water of sun/light" flashing up at this moment of danger.

Parallel to the degeneration of sociability in the Caribbean city looms the prospect of a re-emergent Plantation city encroaching upon, indeed expropriating the territories in the form of hotels, golf courses, highways, and other tourist-oriented amenities, an El Dorado for those with sufficient gold in their pockets and bank balances to reap the organized all-inclusive pleasures and privileges of controlled leisure. As if it were not enough that the Caribbean region should be the location of tax havens, offshore bank accounts, and similar virtual cities of finance where, in a grotesque parody of tidalectics, billions of dollars flow in and out leaving no visible trace on the ravaged environments that play involuntary host to such machinations. In *Barabajan Poems* and elsewhere, Brathwaite has waged a spirited—though alas, so far quixotic—campaign against the gradual disappearance from public access, even public view, and eventually public memory, of whole sections of Barbados under the relentless, often government-spurred march of the so-called hospitality industry.

Faced with such gloomy prospects, which threaten to banish Wagadu permanently from hearts and wombs—from "my father's city and my mother's heart"—and to strip El Dorado of its remaining aura of utopian fantasy, some redemptive possibilities may yet be gathered from the Caribbean literary legacy. After all, Aimé Césaire began his pathbreaking *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* with a scathing denunciation of Fort-de-France as "this town sprawled flat toppled from its good sense, inert, . . . incapable of growing with the juice of this earth, embarrassed, torn, reduced, ruptured from fauna and flora" whose

inhabitants were in turn reduced to a "squalling crowd . . . detoured from its cry of hunger, of poverty, of revolt, of hatred, this crowd so strangely chattering and mute."[17] Only by accepting this condition and his own complicity with it could the poet voice his prayer "that I hear neither the laughter nor the screams, my eyes fixed on this town which I prophesy, beautiful"[18] and move decisively toward the cosmic insurrection leading to a rendezvous of victory and a final leap into the heavens. That this is a struggle that must always be renewed emerges from Césaire's "there still remains one sea to cross / oh still one sea to cross / that I may invent my lungs,"[19] and, it could be added, new ways of conceiving and writing the Caribbean magic city.

Wilson Harris, for one, speaks to the role of the imaginative creator in confronting and elevating human consciousness beyond the "diminution" to which Brathwaite bears witness: "we have to move that diminished creature through our work in a manner that is disturbing, so disturbing that vitality and power are realized as a very strong possibility."[20] Harris explicitly conceives this mobility in architectural terms: rhythms of living that can be expressed and sounded in the transformation of the human environment from the current inadequacies of "the classical architecture of the world."[21] Such structures are based on principles that are not arbitrarily "innovative" in the sense of abandoning tradition, but that involve "a profound rediscovery of that deep organism that presently moves away from and eludes our grasp—that objective process that reveals the true state of the classical world, however horrible, as a prerequisite of change."[22] In this light, it is worth briefly examining some attempts by Caribbean intellectuals to reconceive their cities in terms of a resonance with a specific "classical" paradigm: the city-state.

C. L. R. James, a resolutely optimistic dreamer until the end of his life, observed in a 1985 conversation that "the moment you jam a lot of people together in the city, some form of democracy and social organization has to take place."[23] Given that the paramount principle of his theoretical and practical activity was a serene confidence in people's ability to devise an everyday way of living that would prefigure a future direct-democratic order, urban existence by definition was the form of social life most propitious for the realization of this project. In his 1956 essay "Every Cook Can Govern," published in the United States workers' journal *Correspondence*, James recovers Athenian democracy as an institution whose participants did not delegate their power to representatives and then retreat to the isolation of private life (as is done in modern bureaucratic parliamentary democracy), but were actively involved, through public deliberative assemblies, in all aspects of urban life: justice, foreign policy, cultural affairs, etc. It was this participatory dimension, grounded in the presumption of equality and competence of all citizens, James argues, that made

Athens, at the height of its democratic epoch, the touchstone of civilized life for future generations, and led to the prodigious flowering of creativity in so many fields of human endeavor. Citing the speeches of Pericles, James affirms that the "perfect balance, intuitive and unconscious, between the individual and the city-state . . . gave [the Greek democrat] the enormous force and the enormous freedom of his personality."[24]

It is, of course, reasonable to chide James for painting a rather rosy picture of Greek democracy, for emphasizing its undeniable merits and achievements over its defects (which, as he indicates, tend to be brought up more often in any case). But to his credit, James does devote a good deal of his argument to Athenian democracy as a historical creation born of protracted struggle whose zenith lasted slightly over a century. The immediate political purpose of putting forward the Athenian city-state as a foreshadowing of a more thoroughgoing—because global—direct democracy was clear: "the position we take here is based on . . . our own belief in the creative power of freedom and the ordinary man to govern."[25] "Athens" as a historical construct—and as part of the "Western" imaginary, albeit not in the radical way in which James figured it—becomes for James a trope for the good life that he saw emerging from the possibilities of the present, not least in the Caribbean, as shown in *Modern Politics*, his 1960 collection of lectures given to a Trinidadian audience.

Trinidad's independence from Great Britain in 1962 was owed in no small part to the so-called "University of Woodford Square," in which Eric E. Williams, a one-time student of James and future Prime Minister, transformed the square into an *agora* and gave speeches on history, politics, and current affairs that galvanized the crowds who came to hear him into debate and discussion with each other. (Well after Williams had discredited himself with his stubborn, quasi-dictatorial hold on power and his subservience to U.S. interests, Black Power activists in the 1970s renamed Woodford Square the "People's Parliament," preserving its existence as a topos of open and unlimited exchange of views.) To a definite degree, then, James's audience at the Trinidad Public Library had experienced a taste of the kind of civic participation that he deemed necessary to the continued vitality of democratic life. So when he brings up the Athenian polis in his lectures, he allusively links it to the island and region of his birth:

> The average Greek must have lived on what I expect would be today about fifteen or twenty-five cents a day. The territory of Greece was very unproductive—chiefly dried fish, olives and olive oil, dried fruits. The houses were notoriously commonplace—four or five rooms, somewhere in the back for servants. But when you walked out in the streets of Athens, you could see Plato, Aristotle, Pericles,

> Socrates, Phidias, Aeschylus, Sophocles and many more of that stamp, all at the same time; and they were active in the daily life of the city.
>
> The question, therefore, of what is the good life is not to be judged by quantity of goods. . . . [26]

Having established that the cornerstone of "Western civilization"—at least in how that civilization represents itself to itself—was founded on relative material scarcity, James is making the easily discernible point that the quality of lived experience can trump capitalist affluence, and accordingly, what is most important for his audience and their fellow Caribbeans is to develop a sense of their own continuous participation in a dynamic movement with freedom as its ground:

> Without [contradiction] there is no movement, there is only stagnation and decay. That was why the Greek City-States moved so far and so fast, and that is my hope for the development of the West Indies too. Those states were so small that everybody had a grasp of what was going on. Nobody was backward; nobody was remote; nobody was far in the country; and people in the West Indies are even closer because we have methods of transport that bring us very rapidly together.[27]

Considering that by this time James had already entered into open conflict with his erstwhile protégé Williams, and that the published versions of these lectures would be impounded by the government for many years and their author briefly placed under house arrest, the implications of James's insistence on the motive power of contradiction are clear. But beyond that, James is deploying the rhetoric of colonialism and neo-colonialism against itself not only to praise the Greek achievement but to show that potentially the Caribbean can go even further. Words like "backward," "remote," "far in the country" were doubtless all too familiar to James's audience, who had heard it applied to them by colonial officials; some, perhaps, had even disdainfully applied it to their fellow citizens. But they would also have known the power inherent in "having a grasp of what was going on," and through the judicious application of modern technology, James argues, this "grasp" could become something more transcendent in the social life of the region. It is possible that behind his reference in "Every Cook Can Govern" to "the festival of Dionysus, the climax of which was the performance of plays for four days, from sunrise to evening"[28] there may well lurk an allusion to the bacchanal of the Trinidad Carnival.

However, James was by his own admission a "black European"[29] who lived most of his life away from the Caribbean and was thus more concerned with panoramic, world-system perspectives than with the specific textures of the local (although his early and only novel *Minty Alley* shows a definite ability to convey life in the "yard" communities of Port of Spain even as it testifies in the

end to his protagonist's class-bound estrangement from that world, which to his credit James does not understate or avoid). Thus, for all their power to inspire, his meditations on the city-state in the Caribbean context take on an undeniably lofty and generalizing, even somewhat detached quality. It falls to another Caribbean explorer of Aegean/Hellenic archipelagic echoes, Derek Walcott—in his 1992 Nobel Prize address—to ground and extend James's observations within the plenitude of the poetic everyday.

Against the dismissive perspectives of those Walcott identifies as the (usually touristic) epigones of an ossified classicism and enervated "seriousness," latter-day followers of nineteenth-century traveler James Anthony Froude who profess to find in the Caribbean "no people . . . in the true sense of the word," Walcott affirms that it is precisely in their impulse to make a common life out of disparately fragmented cultures and languages that the peoples of the Caribbean find their clearest definition. In order to grasp the specificity of Caribbean existence—what Walcott terms "the light and salt of Antillean mountains . . . the demotic vigor and variety of their inhabitants"[30]—it suffices to look at the cities in which this existence unfolds. If "a culture, we all know, is made by its cities" (29) and if "ours are not cities in the accepted sense" (30), then this will undoubtedly have cultural and, in particular, poetic consequences not easily assimilable by those who seek only the unanimity of a single unilaterally transmitted Tradition, where everything is affirmed and accepted and nothing is transculturated.

Walcott finds that just as the territories of the Caribbean have cast spells on those who would render these spaces in written form, so also have these writers, by essentially *recreating* these spaces, conveying and magnifying their auras, become cognate with them: "[Our cities] dictate their own proportions, their own definitions in particular places and in a prose equal to that of their detractors" (29). It is the cities and islands that write themselves through these creators. To this legacy, Walcott adds his own sketch of Port of Spain, which he characterizes as a "writer's heaven" for its "downtown babel of shop signs and streets, mongrelized, polyglot, a ferment without a history . . . " (28). Walcott uses "history" here in an ironic sense, referring to how the Froudes of the world would define it and thereby lay claim to it, as the sum of "achievements" and the presence of ennobled ruins. For Walcott, the proliferation within the Caribbean's "raucous, demotic streets" (31) of cultural shards from all over the world and all historical periods refutes the notion of a single reductive history.

Continuing his polemic against the condescension of the imaginary traveler, Walcott finds patience and thought where this metropolitan Other would see sloth and deprivation, and rather than assume that "magnified market towns" are all the Caribbean has, abruptly poses the question "what are the proportions

of the ideal Caribbean city?" (29). His answer is worth quoting in detail for its cunning skill at drawing a utopian picture, dominated by the future conditional tense, that turns out, with the calculatedly triumphant entrance of the present tense, to be an everyday reality:

> A surrounding, accessible countryside with leafy suburbs, and if the city is lucky, behind it, spacious plains. Behind it, fine mountains; before it, an indigo sea. Spires would pin its center and around them would be leafy, shadowy parks. Pigeons would cross its sky in alphabetical patterns, carrying with them memories of a belief in augury, and at the heart of the city there would be horses. . . . Its docks would not be obscured by smoke or deafened by too much machinery, and above all, it would be so racially various that the cultures of the world . . . would be represented in it, its humane variety more exciting than Joyce's Dublin. Its citizens would intermarry as they chose, from instinct, not tradition, until their children find it increasingly futile to trace their genealogy. It would not have too many avenues difficult or dangerous for pedestrians, its mercantile area would be a cacophony of accents, fragments of the old language that would be silenced immediately at 5 o'clock, its docks resolutely vacant on Sundays.
>
> This is Port of Spain to me, a city ideal in its commercial and human proportions, where a citizen is a walker and not a pedestrian, and this is how Athens may have been before it became a cultural echo. (29–30)

On the one hand, Walcott's vision of Port of Spain is somewhat idealized, particularly when read against such clear-eyed, unadorned novels as Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* and the ongoing political fragmentation between clientelist constituencies organized along the very racial lines that Walcott deems futile in the light of intermarriage. On the other, perhaps such pragmatic cavils are beside the point. After all, he does declare that "this is Port of Spain to me," a rendering that, though no less stylized in its way than those "tinted engravings of Antillean forests" (30) from the nineteenth century, at least has the indisputable merit of seeing the city in the proper light and through the perspective of one who feels an intimate kinship to the place: a "native" in Césaire's sense. And earlier in the speech he points out the architectural "excrescences [of] a city trying to soar, trying to be brutal, like an American city in silhouette" (28), in the context of an inauthentic will to imitate imposed metropolitan models.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that in his paean to Port of Spain, Walcott does not dwell on the architecture, which he cites as having a disorienting effect on his first mornings back in the city. So perhaps it is the human potential—the ambience of sociability, the cultural variety, the proximity to the rural, all qualities that at one point or another enter into literary renditions of the Caribbean city—that make Port of Spain a potential exemplar of an urban environment akin to Athens in its small scale and human-centered proportions. As Walcott says,

moving from the particular to the general, "the Caribbean city may conclude just at that point where it is satisfied with its own scale" (30). The "Athens" Walcott cites is, as with James, neither a "cultural echo" nor an imported artifact, but a paradigm of urban life formed in another constellation of islands at an earlier historical dawning, upon which the Caribbean is uniquely placed to build, precisely by virtue of its temporal location in "the early morning of a culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defining dawn" (31) against the invasion of "the guano of white-winged hotels, the arc and descent of progress" (32). In other words, the island city-state constitutes a fragile space of possibility and beauty, now menaced by the new Plantations of colonizing leisure and their "music of Happy Hour and their rictus of a smile" (32).

More than forty years earlier, José Lezama Lima had anticipated such a conflict of values between the forces of pseudo-modernist gigantism and established urban communal mores, when for a short period in 1949 to 1950 he wrote a series of daily columns on Havana for the newspaper *El Diario de la Marina*. Without compromising in any way his audaciously radical writing style for the paper's historically conservative readership, Lezama continued to explore, uncover, and poeticize the intricate byways and echoes of the streets of Havana, just as he did in his poems, fictions, and essays. Having lived all his life in Havana, he dedicated himself to preserving the *secret* Caribbean city known only to those whose every waking hour is spent within its precincts. If in their own ways James and Walcott personify the historical type that has been fashionably labeled "rootless cosmopolitan," Lezama incarnates the paradox of the rooted, insular cosmopolitan. Whereas James and Walcott seek to locate Athens in the Caribbean, Lezama, in a breathtaking reversal of perspective, transforms world civilization into a moment of Havana. As his friend and editor of his columns Gastón Baquero observed, "The faculty with which heaven endowed him, to travel without moving, to be in the center of the world without leaving his reading chair, is reflected above all in his spiritual and blood ties to Havana."[31] In all of Lezama's work, Havana assumes an almost mythical quality; it is capable of transforming itself into an oneiric city, a labyrinth of sorts, an extension of the interior space of the house (a structure associated with the individual body) into the exterior realm.

In his October 13, 1949 column—written, as the date indicates, to commemorate the Columbian enterprise—Lezama declares that Havana still retains "*a rhythm* of alive, vivacious growth, of sudden dazzle, of a breathing city that hasn't arisen in a week of plans and equations. It has a destiny and a rhythm. . . . A slow-paced rhythm, of stoic indifference to the hours, of a dream with a marine rhythm, of an elegant, tragic acceptance of its decomposition as a port because it knows its tragic perdurability."[32] This urban rhythm develops musically

from a *scherzo* passage extolling the vivacity of the city to a melancholic *andante* where Havana becomes conscious of its own decline. Given that the piece starts off in a solemn tone, it is possible to read it according to the structure of a Baroque overture, in keeping with Lezama's dedication to revealing the contours of the American Baroque and with Baquero's observation that "for him, Havana was like a symphony."[33] At the same time, the nostalgia that emerges is, as Emma Álvarez Tabio-Albo indicates, linked to Lezama's own dream of the nineteenth century in Havana, which for him marked the apogee of the proud *criollismo* that inspired his own public persona (and also the period in which his family had not become reduced to the poverty that beset him all his life).

In a sense, then, Lezama not only identified with Havana as a home, but founded a private Havana of his own, to the point where at times he became the very image of the city he was trying to project in his work. The foreshadowing of Walcott in the final paragraph of the column—"This rhythm . . . is born of proportions and measures. Havana still preserves the measure of man"—is followed by a slightly uncanny passage, almost Pascalian in its desolation, in which the individual "walks around its environs, finds its center; it has its zones of infinity and loneliness where the Terrible reaches him."[34] However, this city is not Carpentier's monumentalized force hounding *The Chase*'s fugitive to his doom, but a "classical and clear measure" wherein the enduring presence of tragic solitude "leads the individual to abominate nocturnal life," doubtless because the "terrible" quality of the city becomes accentuated at that moment, deprived of the matutinal and crepuscular play of lights that, for Lezama, mark Havana's individuality, rather than the lunar chill.

Given that by 1949, Havana's fame as a nocturnal city had become legendary, Lezama's insistence on the anonymous Havana "man's" disdain for nightlife, compounded by the image of the city that "after twelve o'clock at night, closes its flower and its curiosities,"[35] would appear quaint if not downright bizarre. More so, because his famous house at 162 Calle Trocadero (where he lived with his mother until her death) is located in Central Havana, near, on one side, the Paseo del Prado (an avenue that was one of the first colonial public-works projects, dating from the early nineteenth century, and where incidentally the Presidential Palace was located), and the Barrio Colón, Havana's red-light district for many years, on the other. It is as if the *flâneur*—Lezama himself, clearly—"abominates" the Havana night because it is another world whose exotic flora might be inimical to the *criollo* domesticity that he prized, and thus threaten the stability of the (maternal) house. In terms of his own creative work, however, it should be added that his novel *Paradiso*, first published in 1966 though written over a period of around twenty years, concludes with its protagonist's audacious venture into the depths of the Havana night, which bifurcates into "the starry

night that descended with the dew" and "the subterranean night, which grew upwards like a tree, which supported the mystery of going into the city that was marshaling its troops in the center of the bridge."[36] For Lezama, the urban night is associated with a quest and all its attendant perils, and thus not to be entered idly, inasmuch as it is part of another city, not necessarily the Havana whose truth emerges only in light. (Walcott's view of the ideal Caribbean city, to be sure, is also clearly diurnal.)

A month after writing this column, Lezama developed his thoughts on the human scale of Havana, this time in a more overtly polemical context. Citing English anarchist art critic Herbert Read's observation that the postwar period marked the moment of a necessary return to the city-state as a mode of social organization, Lezama proclaims the incapacity of modern States, "devoured as they are by their own approaches," to concoct the "yeast" capable of producing "metaphysical questions and the answers of form and expression." This salutary cultural process can only unfold in the framework of a small city, because "the artist feels the city, but he feels the state to be an equation" (note the similarly pejorative use of the algebraic metaphor in the earlier column). As examples of the kind of artist who "feels" the city, Lezama cites Goethe, "the last European in the grand style to extract his strengths from the city"[37] and Pico della Mirandola, "a typical Florentine [who] knew that his wisdom descended from that city and that only there could his knowledge attain the maximum tension of its bowstring."[38] (If Lezama refrains from mentioning Athens other than in passing, it is probably because the honorific of the "Athens of Cuba" had long since been claimed by the town of Matanzas.)

Thus, Lezama places Havana as the direct heir to Goethe's Frankfurt and Pico's Florence, capable of resisting a globally modernizing trend "where everything is hypertrophic, made to the measure of the Pleistocene buffalo or the mammoth."[39] Here, Lezama's *criollo* disdain for the North Americanization of the city, with its modernist architecture on the Malecón and its expansion beyond the traditional center of Havana, is clearly evident. For him, such projects, along with the consumerist mentality that accompanied them, represent a clear retrogression to an almost prehistoric brutality and clumsiness. Yet in the statement that concludes the column, which praises "the beautiful measure, the response to the caresses of the hand that still reaches Havana," there is a sense of inevitable loss in the "still." Indeed, after this brief foray into the public forum offered by *Diario de la Marina*, Lezama would retreat into his house: "to have a house is to have a style to combat time. Combating time only succeeds if one unites an essential sense of tradition with a creation that still maintains its spiral, which has not stopped passing."[40] There, he would begin to chronicle the loss of the past and the birth of the poet in *Paradiso*, a *Bildungsroman* which in

many respects is a Caribbean variation on Proust but which also testifies to the continued power and enchantment of the magic city of memory, encountered once more in the Baroque spiral.

The passage from the remembered city to the seashell of creation, which speaks of oceans to those who place it to their ear, marks a return to the starting point of this study: the tidalectic of city and sea that enveloped Calvert Casey as he stood on the dockside praying for a redemptive immolation in the murky waters of Havana Bay. Having traversed some of the various literary representations of cities, and considered them as moments of that larger Caribbean which Antonio Benítez-Rojo has called "a cultural sea without boundaries . . . a paradoxical fractal form extending infinitely through a finite world,"[41] it remains only to descend into that actual sea and view the Caribbean city not through a glass darkly, or even *sub specie aeternitatis*, but through the prism of a "space that can only be intuited through the poetic, since it always puts forth an area of chaos."[42] And since the city is an attempt—chimerical, perhaps, but nonetheless enduring—to make an order, a rhythm as Lezama perceived, out of chaos, then the tone of a voice emerging from the chaotic (chthonic) space of the ocean, far away yet so close to the dream of the city, can only be elegiac.

Such is the poem by Gastón Baquero, "Testamento del pez" ("The Fish's Testament"),[43] at once a last will and witness and a Biblical offering, expressed through an embodied icon of Christianity; recall that Jesus, in seeking out his disciples, summoned them to become "fishers of men," to metaphorically transform the fish of their livelihood into men and vice versa. Baquero was a member of the *Orígenes* group that coalesced around Lezama Lima and whose orientation was strongly Catholic, and this 1942 poem marks one of his earliest published ventures. It is a declaration of love for an unnamed, clearly Caribbean city, which many Cuban commentators have hastened to identify as Havana, although the poem lacks any explicit markers of place. Besides, a city seen from the depths of the waters cannot have any specific name; it is at once a particular city and all cities. The Afro-Cuban Baquero was most likely aware of the land of waters as the land of the dead—and even as well of the importance to the Abakuá of the fish Tanze, whose involuntary capture by the princess Sikán lay at the origins of that secret society. Thus, the fish whose poem it is becomes an ancestor, but also a potential descendant, an unborn child. After all, every human embryo passes through a fish-like stage of development as it moves toward human form. The poem, then, is a memory—and an anticipation of that nonviolent order toward which, according to Benítez-Rojo, the Peoples of the Sea strive in their cultural expressions.

The refrain of the poem is its first line, "City, I love you," repeated at the beginning and end of the first two stanzas, then at the beginning of the third,

fourth, fifth, and seventh, and vanishing entirely in the sixth and eighth, as if its initial invocational properties were no longer needed. This love is endowed with content by means of various connectives: "although," "when," and "because." In keeping with its marine setting, the poem undergoes various metamorphoses. The first stanza is a lamentation: the city, whose "distant noise" is all the fish can hear, has forgotten the fish's existence and turned it into an "invisible island," But when "the rain is born suddenly on your head / threatening to dissolve your myriad face," the fish, "in the silent crystal where I dwell," feels the rain as if it were a kind of hope scattered by stars, and senses that "my skin is burning in your memory, / when you remember, deny, revive, perish."

If the sea is history, then the fish is the guardian of that history, and in its ancestral wisdom, gathered from all those who have died in its waves and, a Eucharist of souls, have been transmogrified into the fish, it understands that the city's drive to live and perpetuate itself involves a certain forgetting. But the city dies and is reborn every day, with the rising and falling of the sun. And the city's apparent distance from death helps inspire the fish's love and transforms the city into a fish itself, swimming in death's waters while affecting indifference toward it and moving toward a liberated vision: "because death passes and you watch it / with your eyes of a fish, with your shining / face of a fish with premonitions of freedom." The city triumphs over the death it disdains by incorporating it into its fabric, "dressing it as a church, a square or cemetery, / making it stay motionless beneath the river, / making it feel itself a millenarian bridge, / returning it to stone, returning it to night."

Yet death is always ready to rend the veils and disguises with which the city has sought to cloak it—"you hear it . . . / how quickly it robs you of a child / robs you of a flower, destroys your garden / and strikes your eyes and you watch it / stealing your indifferent smile"—because in the end, "you, city, color of the world / you're the one who makes death exist; / death is prisoner in your hands, / in your houses of stone, in your streets, your heaven." Although cities are intended as centers of conviviality, affirmations of the diverse possibilities of a life in common, they are also founded on acts of sacrifice, and this is even more the case in the Caribbean, where such sacrifice (of massacred indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and indentured Asians) reached monstrous proportions. Death may be held prisoner in the city, but it has stealthily, inexorably worked its way into its textures.

The fish repeatedly laments the city's "forgetting" of its existence, because it realizes that it too is an "echo of death" which, like the city, it takes into itself. But just as the fish's premonition of its own mortality threatens to invade its very soul, amidst the city's slumbering indifference, the poem moves into a more triumphant register that turns on the fish's defiant "I don't want to die,

city, I am your shadow." From here, the fish remembers what it has given and continues, out of its unselfish love, to give the city: "I'm the one who watches over the trace of your dream, / who leads the light to your doorways." For the fish is a living reincarnation, a totem of the Peoples of the Sea whose city this is, and in everything that flashes through the streets, traces of the fish and its sea are ever-present: "I am a fish, an angel I've been, / heaven, paradise, stairway, din, / psalter, flute, guitar, / flesh, skeleton, hope, / drum and tomb."

The fish reaffirms its love one last time, because through all its activities, the city restlessly creates life in its own image, in the face of death's incessant efforts to destroy whatever it builds: "if a child dies, you make it eternal, / if a nightingale dies, you sound forth." Through such creativity, the city is always "inventing for yourself sea, skies, sounds, / opposing death with your structure / of impalpable fabric and hope." A miraculous city of prophecies fulfilled, of eternal returns and departures, where in the words of Dylan Thomas (a favorite poet of Baquero's), death shall have no dominion—and at the same time, a city where what is happening every day (as C. L. R. James would put it) shapes all this into a never-ending story woven from "impalpable fabric and hope."

Now the fish proclaims its final, impossible though not hopeless desire to abandon the sea and live once again in the city. For there, it can be "morning among your streets / any shadow, an object, a star," yearning to be cradled in the city's hands in its ideal form as an "eternal fish, eternal eyes," before resurrecting itself into a "cloud and tear." From this celestial vantage point, it can watch the city laboring through the seasons, in shadows, lights, and "the sonorous country of fruits"—all with the aim of conquering death. And because it persists in this task in defiance of the inevitable, the city achieves an arduous victory, "becoming reborn . . . in every moment / in your golden fishes, your children, your stars."

Here, after centuries of misguided quests and depredations, El Dorado, at last redeemed, rises into view in fullest splendor. For in a city powerful enough to live, like ancient Wagadu in its final incarnation, in the hearts, minds, souls, and wombs of its people as they daily create new possibilities, the "golden fishes" of imagination and renewal are potentially reincarnated in the children of these men and women, heirs to a "reality of light, of work, of survival . . . the visible poetry of the Antilles."[44] From such lived poetry, with its origins in shared predicaments and hopes, there may yet emerge powerful memories of a different future, unfinished geneses of modern maroon societies without a need for treaties, renewed forms of sociability in a region reconstructed in tune with the revolutionary democratic principles and possibilities Kamau Brathwaite gleaned from the words of the Guyanese historian and activist Walter Rodney:

that when men gather govern other manner
they should be honest in a world of hornets

that bleed into their heads like lice
corruption that cockroaches like a dirty kitchen sink

that politics should be like understanding of the floor.
boards of your house

swept clean each morning, built by hands that know
the wind & tide & language[45]

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Notes

Preface

1. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Vintage, 1963), 85–86.
2. Aimé Césaire, "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land," in *The Collected Poetry*, trans. and ed. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1983), 81, 83.

Chapter 1

1. Calvert Casey, quoted in Ilan Stavans's "Introduction," in *The Collected Stories*, trans. John H. R. Polt (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), xiii.
2. Wilson Harris, *Jonestown* (Boston & London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 8.
3. Casey, 13–16; all future references to this story incorporated within the main text.
4. Calvert Casey, untitled excerpts from private correspondence with Fernando Palenzuela, March 31 and June 17, 1962, "Calvert Casey: In Memoriam," *Alacrán Azul* I:1 (1970), 25, 26; my translation.
5. Ibid., 25.
6. V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 28–29.
7. "Relation . . . does not act upon prime elements that are separable or reducible. . . . It does not precede itself in its action and presupposes no a priori. It is the boundless effort of the world: to become realized in its totality, that is, to evade rest." Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 172.
8. [Edward] Kamau Brathwaite, "Salt," in *X/Self* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5.
9. Casey, quoted in Ilan Stavans's "Introduction," in *The Collected Stories*, xiii–xiv.
10. Wilson Harris, "Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins,"in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*, ed. Andrew Bundy (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 61.
11. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 47.
12. In the early years of the Cuban Republic, Alberto Yarini, the young scion of a wealthy Havana family, achieved quasi-heroic stature for his activities as a pimp, gang leader, and politician (with a power base among the people of San Isidro) before being slain—at 22 years of age—in a knife-fight with a rival pimp. His funeral was a major public event, with thousands in attendance. Carlos Felipe's

1960 play *Requiem por Yarini* transforms him into a tragic character of mythic dimensions, an incarnation of the warrior orisha Changó.

13. Glissant, *La case du commandeur* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 67.
14. Cristóbal Colón, *Los cuatro viajes; Testamento*, ed. Consuelo Varela (Madrid: Alianza, 1996), 82; my translation.
15. Sandor Ferenczi, *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality* (New York: Norton, 1968), 52.
16. Ibid., 56.
17. Ibid., 107
18. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (2nd ed.), trans. James E, Maraniss (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996), 167.
19. "tidalectics . . . is dialectics with my difference. . . . I am now more interested in the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic, I suppose, motion, rather than linear." Nathaniel Mackey, "Interview with Kamau Brathwaite," in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. Stewart Brown (Mid Glamorgan: Seren, 1995), 14.
20. G. Cabrera Infante, *Three Trapped Tigers*, trans. Donald Gardner and Suzanne Jill Levine in collaboration with the author (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 407–8.
21. Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui, *Los orishas en Cuba*, 2nd ed. (Havana: PM Ediciones, 1994), 135–36, 172; my translation.
22. Ibid., 173.
23. Derek Walcott, "The Sea is History," in *Collected Poems 1948–1984* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1986), 364.
24. According to Guillermo Cabrera Infante's biographical reminiscence ("¿Quién mató a Calvert Casey?," *Vidas para leerlas* [Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998], 59–96), Casey's apartment was on the Muelle de Luz, which is mentioned in the story.
25. Italo Calvino, "Las piedras de La Habana," trans. from the Italian by Esther Benítez, *Quimera* 26 (December 1982), 55; my English translation.
26. Ibid., 54.
27. Virgilio Piñera, "La Isla en peso," in *Poesia y critica*, ed. Antón Arrufat (Mexico City: Conaculta, 1994), 45; my translation.
28. Harris, "New Preface to *Palace of the Peacock*," in *Selected Essays*, 54.
29. John Donne, "Elegie: Going to Bed," in *The Complete Poetry*, ed. and intro. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1967), 58.
30. Casey, "Piazza Margana," in *Collected Stories*, 193.
31. Calvino, Las Piedras.
32. Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 165.
33. Ibid.
34. Benítez-Rojo, 25.
35. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onis (New York: Knopf, 1947), 3.
36. Christopher Columbus *et al.*, *The Four Voyages of Columbus*, ed. and trans. Cecil Jane (New York: Dover, 1988), 4.

37. Angel Rama, *The Lettered City*, ed. and trans. John Charles Chastain (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 6.
38. Alejo Carpentier, *Concierto barocco* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1974), 47; my translation.
39. Oliver Cromwell Cox, "Economic Underpinning of Venice," in *Race, Class, and the World System: The Sociology of Oliver C. Cox*, ed. Herbert M. Hunter and Sameer Y. Abraham (New York: Monthly Review, 1987), 251.
40. José Lezama Lima, *La expresión americana*, ed. Irlemar Chiampi (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 71; my translation.
41. Calvino, 61.
42. Lezama Lima, 49.
43. Benítez-Rojo, 108.
44. Lezama Lima, 56.
45. Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London & Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1984), 49.
46. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 71.
47. Casey, "In San Isidro," 14.
48. Rama, 22.
49. C. L. R. James, "The West Indian Middle Classes," in *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980), 134.
50. James, "Discovering Literature in Trinidad: The 1930s," in *Spheres of Existence*, 239.
51. Rama, 21.
52. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 105.
53. Rama, 41.
54. William Luis, *Literary Bondage: Slavery in Cuban Narrative* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 16.
55. Ortiz, 52.
56. Ibid., 81.
57. Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba*, trans. Cedric Belfrage (New York/London: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 73.
58. James, "The Making of the Caribbean People," *Spheres of Resistance*, 177.
59. Benítez-Rojo, 211.
60. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 68.
61. Ibid., 71.
62. Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon, 1958), 138.
63. James, "The Making of the Caribbean People," in *Spheres of Existence*, 177.
64. Ibid., 176.
65. Nicolás Quintana, "Cuba en su arquitectura y urbanismo," *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* 18 (Fall 2000), 16; my translation.
66. Harris, "The Amerindian Legacy," *Selected Essays*, 173.
67. Ibid.
68. Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona: Savacou Publications [Monograph No. 4], 1977), 64.

69. Ferenczi, 101.
70. Mackey, "Interview with Kamau Brathwaite," 21.
71. Ibid., 26.
72. Jacques Roumain, "Guinea," trans. Langston Hughes, in *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry*, ed. Dudley Fitts (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1942), 293.
73. Lezama Lima, "Confluencias," in *Las eras imaginarias*, 177; my translation.
74. Benítez-Rojo, 4.
75. Walcott, "The Schooner Flight," in *Collected Poems 1948–1984*, 361.
76. Harris, *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* (London/Boston: Faber & Faber, 1993), 107.
77. Lezama Lima, "Confluencias," 183; my translation.
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79. James, "The Making of the Caribbean People," 180.
80. Harris, "Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins," in *Selected Essays*, 59.
81. See Lezama Lima, "Un puente, un gran puente," in *Muerte de Narciso: Antología poética*, ed. David Huerta (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1988), 55–58.
82. Harris, "Creoleness," in *Selected Essays*, 239.
83. José Triana, "In Memoriam Calvert Casey," trans. John Polt, reprinted in Ilan Stavans, "Introduction" to Casey, *Collected Stories*, xx.
84. Brathwaite, "Caribbean Man in Space and Time," *Savacou 11–12* (September 1975), 1.

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2. Wilson Harris, *The Age of the Rainmakers* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 9.
3. Harris, *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* (London/Boston: Faber & Faber, 1993), 82.
4. José Lezama Lima, "Prólogo," in *Antología de la poesía cubana*, Vol. I (La Habana: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, 1965), 7; my translation.
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6. Ibid., 60–61.
7. Lezama Lima, "La imagen histórica," in *Las eras imaginarias* (Madrid: Fundamentos, 1971), 61; my translation.
8. Lezama Lima, "Prólogo," 61.
9. Lezama Lima, "Resistencia," in *Los Poetas de Orígenes*, ed. Jorge Luis Arcos (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002), 79.
10. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1989), 90.
11. Lezama Lima, "La imagen histórica," 65.
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13. Ibid., 9.
14. Ibid., 10.

15. Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 84.
16. Stephen Belcher, *Epic Traditions of Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 88.
17. Ibid., 87.
18. Lezama Lima, "Mitos y cansancio clásico," in *La expresión americana*, ed. Irlemar Chiampi (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 58; my translation.
19. Leo Frobenius and Douglas C. Fox, "Gassire's Lute," in *African Genesis* (Berkeley: Turtle Island Foundation, 1983), 110.
20. Nathaniel Mackey, "From Gassire's Lute: Robert Duncan's Vietnam War Poems," in *Reading Race in American Poetry: "An Area of Act*," ed. Aldon Lynn Nielsen (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 209.
21. Frobenius and Fox, "Gassire's Lute," 110 *et seq*.
22. Ibid., 109, 110.
23. Carter, *Selected Poems*, 78.
24. Philip Curtin, "Africa North of the Forest in the Early Islamic Age," in Curtin, Steven Feierman, Leonard Thompson, Jan Vansina, *African History from Earliest Times to Independence*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1996), 86.
25. Frobenius and Fox, *African Genesis*, 29.
26. Stephen Belcher, *Epic Traditions of Africa*, 77.
27. Curtin, "Africa North." The myth dealing with the origin of the famine is included in *African Genesis* under the title "The Fight with the Bida Dragon," and concerns a curse placed on the people of Wagadu by a sacred serpent that, accustomed to an annual tribute of maidens in exchange for giving the people rain three times a year, is decapitated by the would-be lover of the most beautiful girl in the city. Like "Gassire's Lute," this tale involves the sacrifice of a collective well-being founded in "predatory coherence" to the power of individual desire, the latter being articulated in anti-animist (and by implication, Muslim) beliefs, which confer the aura of "historical necessity" on the act as well as the tragic dimensions of individual consciousness.
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29. Frobenius and Fox, "Gassire's Lute," 115.
30. Nathaniel Mackey, "From Gassire's Lute," 211.
31. Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 210.
32. Ibid., 211.
33. Wilson Harris, "Continuity and Discontinuity," in *Selected Essays*, 178.
34. Mackey, "From Gassire's Lute," 222.
35. Robert Duncan, "Passages 24," in *Bending the Bow* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 77.
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37. Harris, "History, Fable, and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," in *Selected Essays*, 165.
38. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 19.
39. Harris, "History, Fable, and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," in *Selected Essays*, 162.
40. Ibid., 164.
41. David Dabydeen, "El Dorado," in *Turner: New and Selected Poems* (London: Cape, 1994), 42.
42. Dabydeen, "El Dorado."
43. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed., trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 186–7.
44. Harris, "New Preface to *Palace of the Peacock*," *Selected Essays*, 55.
45. Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 35.
46. V. S. Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 20.
47. John Hemming, *The Search for El Dorado* (New York: Dutton, 1979), 107.
48. Neil L. Whitehead, "Introduction" to Sir Walter Ralegh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 71.
49. Sir Walter Ralegh to Sir Robert Cecil, quoted in Charles Nicholl, *The Creature in the Map: A Journey to El Dorado* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 268.
50. Pedro de Aguado, *Historia de Venezuela*, Vol. 1, 249; quoted in Hemming, 154.
51. Benítez-Rojo, 187.
52. Ralegh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*, ed. and intro. Neil L. Whitehead (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 188.
53. Nicholl, *The Creature in the Map*, 219.
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55. Harris, "Living Landscapes," in *Selected Essays*, 40.
56. Ibid., 45.
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58. Ralegh, "The passionate mans Pilgrimage," in *The Poems of Sir Walter Ralegh*, ed. Agnes Latham (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 49–51.
59. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, 136.
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62. Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age*, 177.
63. Harris, "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," in *Selected Essays*, 144.
64. Mark McWatt, "The Two Faces of Eldorado: Contrasting Attitudes towards History and Identity in West Indian Literature," in *West Indian Literature and Its Social Context*, ed. McWatt (Barbados: University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, 1985), 38.

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67. Brathwaite, in Nathaniel Mackey, "An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite," in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. Stewart Brown (Glamorgan, Wales: Seren, 1995), 22.
68. Harris, "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," in *Selected Essays*, 144.
69. Brathwaite, in Mackey, "An Interview."
70. St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 1986), 597.
71. Ibid., 595.
72. Ibid., 596.
73. Ibid., 139.
74. Ibid., 599.
75. Harris, *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*, 189.
76. Brathwaite, "Gods of the Middle Passage: A Tennament," *Caribbean Review* II:4 (Fall 1982), 18.
77. Miguel Barnet, "The Religious System of Santería," in *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, ed. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, trans. Lisabeth Paravisini-Gebert (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 92.
78. Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui, *Los Orishas en Cuba*, 2nd ed. (Havana: Ediciones PM, 1994), 191; my translation.
79. Brathwaite, "Gods of the Middle Passage," 44.
80. Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (Munich: Prestel, 1993), 48.
81. Brathwaite, "Gods of the Middle Passage," 19.
82. Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1995), 30.
83. Richard W. Hull, *African Cities and Towns Before the European Conquest* (New York/London: Norton, 1976), 45.
84. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 106.
85. Robert S. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 3rd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 13.
86. E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (New York: Wazobia, 1994), 15.
87. Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte; Igbo-Finda; Ewe Orisha; Vititi Nfinda: Notas sobre las religiones, la magia, las supersticiones y el folklore de los negros criollos y el pueblo de Cuba* (Miami: Ediciones del Chicherekú, 1986), 68; my translation.
88. Ibid., 68–69.
89. Ibid., 69.
90. Ibid., 13.
91. David Brown, "The Afro-Cuban Festival 'Day of the Kings': An Annotated Glossary," in *Cuban Festivals: A Century of Afro-Cuban Culture*, ed. Judith Bettelheim (Kingston: Ian Randle / Princeton: Markus Wiener; 2001), 56.
92. Cabrera, *El Monte*, 135.

93. Eugenio Matibag, "Ifá and Interpretation: An Afro-Caribbean Literary Practice," in *Sacred Possessions*, 154.
94. Kimbwandende Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *African Cosmology of the Bântu-Kôngo: Principles of Life and Living* (New York: Athalia Henrietta, 2001), 103.
95. Idowu, *Olodumare*, 204.
96. Too often, words like "creolization" tend to refer to transcultural processes linking the dominant (white, European) cultures to the subaltern (African, later Asian as well) cultures, and scarcely at all to the interesting ways in which subaltern cultures interchange and develop among themselves.
97. Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo*, trans. Robert B. Cross (New York: Pocket, 1971), 39.
98. Ibid., 22.
99. Ibid.
100. Joan Dayan, "Vodoun, or the Voice of the Gods," in *Sacred Possessions*, 18.
101. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 109.
102. Ibid.
103. Dayan, "Vodoun, or the Voice of the Gods," 17.
104. Dany Laferrière, *Down Among the Dead Men*, trans. David Homel (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), 109.
105. Thompson, *Face of the Gods*, 62.
106. Cabrera, *El Monte*, 462.
107. Harris, *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*, 78–79.
108. ("Wasn't Jesus born in the *monte* on a pile of herbs?" asked C. "And when he went to heaven to become God, didn't he die on a *monte*, Mount Calvary? He was always going around in the *montes*. He was an herb-doctor!") Cabrera, 17.
109. Laferrière, *Down Among the Dead Men*, 79.
110. Ibid., 153–54.
111. René Depestre, "Cousin Zaka," *A Rainbow for the Christian West*, trans. and intro. Joan Dayan (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), 143.
112. Laferrière, *Down Among the Dead Men*, 77.
113. Ibid.
114. Brathwaite, *The Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* (London/Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1981), 31.
115. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 74.
116. Thompson, *Face of the Gods*, 60.
117. Ibid., 68.
118. Cabrera, *El Monte*, 196.
119. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 241.
120. Ibid., 237.
121. Ibid., 250.
122. Cabrera, *El Monte*, 286.
123. Ibid., 201.
124. Ibid., 212.
125. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 241.

Chapter 3

1. Francisco Pérez de la Riva, "Cuban *Palenques*," in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard Price (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 54.
2. Richard Price, "Introduction," *Maroon Societies*, 24.
3. Price, "Introduction," *Maroon Societies*, 24.
4. Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the New World* (New York: Vintage, 1981), 53–54.
5. Ibid., 82.
6. [Edward] Kamau Brathwaite, *Wars of Respect: Nanny and Sam Sharpe* (Kingston: API, 1977), 16.
7. Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 5.
8. Price, *First-Time*, 12.
9. Brathwaite, *Wars of Respect*, 9.
10. Price, "Introduction," *Maroon Societies*, 5.
11. Brathwaite, *Wars*, 12.
12. Price, "Introduction," 12.
13. Ibid., 13.
14. Jean Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death*, trans. A. Faulkner Watts (New York: Blyden, 1981), 272.
15. Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, *Los cimarrones urbanos* (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1983), 5–6; my translation.
16. Ibid., 54.
17. Price, "Introduction," *Maroon Societies*, 30.
18. See Richard Price's acerbic critique of *créolité's* dismissive approach to maroons and its complicity with a sanitized, touristically acceptable narrative of Francophone Caribbean culture; in *The Convict and the Colonel* (Boston: Beacon, 1998), 174–79.
19. Brathwaite, *Wars of Respect*, 6.
20. Aimé Césaire, "Le verbe marronner / à René Depestre, poète haïtien" (1955 version), cited *in extenso* in Maryse Condé, "Fous-t-en Depestre; laisse dire Aragon," http://www.columbia.edu/cu/french/maison/aragonpapers/conde.html, 5–7; my translation.
21. Césaire, "The Verb 'Marronner'/for René Depestre, Haitian Poet," *Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1983), 368–71.
22. Césaire, "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land," in *Collected Poetry*, 47.
23. In Eshleman and Smith's translation, the phrase "j'accuse" appears as "I indict," which is a misreading in the context of the poem. Césaire's intent here is not to indict but to acknowledge "bad" (i.e., anti-bourgeois and anti-bureaucratic) manners, something he does elsewhere in his work, notably in the *Cahier*.
24. Nicolás Guillén, "The Grandfather," in *Cuba Libre*, trans. Langston Hughes and Ben Frederic Carruthers (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1948), 83.
25. I have slightly modified Eshleman and Smith's translation here.

26. Miguel Barnet, *Biography of a Runaway Slave*, trans. W. Nick Hill (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone, 1994), 44; all subsequent page references included in parentheses within the main body of the text.
27. The Moudang are a people from southern Chad.
28. Césaire, "And the dogs were silent," in *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry 1946–1982*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Charlottesville, VA/London: University of Virginia Press, 1990), 44.
29. Price, "Introduction," *Maroon Societies*, 3.
30. Martin Carter, "Sensibility and the Search," in *A Martin Carter Prose Sampler*, ed. Nigel Westmaas, *Kyk-over-al* 44 (May 1993), 79.
31. Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls*, trans. Dolores M. Koch (New York: Viking, 1993), 5–6; all.
32. Wole Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage (Through the Mysteries of Ogun to Origins of Yoruba Tragedy," in *The Morality of Art*, ed. D. W. Jefferson (London: Routledge, 1969), 126.
33. John Mason, "Ògún: Builder of the Lùkùmí's House," in *Africa's Ogun*, 2nd ed., Sandra T. Barnes (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 353.
34. Ibid., 359.
35. Karen McCarthy Brown, "Systematic Remembering, Systematic Forgetting: Ogou in Haiti," in *Africa's Ogun*, 65.
36. Ibid., 84.
37. Adeboye Babalola, "A Portrait of Ògún as Reflected in Ìjálá Chants," in *Africa's Ogun*, 168.
38. Barnet, *Biography of a Runaway Slave*, 18.
39. Ráájí Ògúndìran Àlàó, quoted in Babalola, 162.
40. Quoted in John Pemberton, "The Dreadful God and the Divine King," in *Africa's Ogun*, 106.
41. César Leante, *Capitán de cimarrones* (Barcelona: Argos Vergara, 1982), 194; my translation; all subsequent page references included in parentheses within the main body of the text.
42. McCarthy Brown, 81.
43. Bade Ajuwon, "Ogun's Iremoje: A Philosophy of Living and Dying," in *Africa's Ogun*, 179.
44. Namba Roy, *Black Albino* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1986), 138; all subsequent page references included in parentheses within the main body of the text.
45. Sandra T. Barnes, "The Many Faces of Ogun," in *Africa's Ogun*, 17.
46. Mason, *Africa's Ogun*, 364.
47. Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui and Valentina Porres Potts, *Orisha Ayé: Unidad mítica del Caribe al Brasil* (Guadalajara, Mexico: Ediciones Pontón, 1996); my translation.
48. Brathwaite, "Veridian," *Middle Passages* (New York: New Directions, 1993), 37.
49. Ibid., 40.
50. C. L. R. James, "On Wilson Harris," *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1980), 170–71.
51. Wilson Harris, *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), 334–35.
52. Carter, "Sensibility and the Search," 81.

53. Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona: Savacou, 1974), 64.
54. Harris, *The Guyana Quartet*, 359; all subsequent references included in parentheses within the main body of the text.
55. Carter, *Selected Poems* (Georgetown: Red Thread Women's Press, 1997), 61.
56. James, "On Wilson Harris," 162.
57. Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 184.
58. Ibid., 186.
59. Lázaro Vidal, quoted in Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui, *Los Orishas en Cuba*, 2nd ed. (Havana: PM Ediciones, 1994), 192; my translation; all subsequent references included in parentheses within the main body of the text.
60. Harris, "Continuity and Discontinuity," in *Selected Essays*, ed. Andrew Bundy (London/New York: Routledge, 1999), 179.
61. Brathwaite, "Veridian," 37.

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1. Harold Courlander and Ousmane Sako, *The Heart of the Ngoni* (New York: Crown, 1982), 13.
2. Courlander and Sako, *The Heart*.
3. Ibid., 14.
4. Courlander and Sako, *The Heart*.
5. Ibid., 12.
6. Nicolás Guillén, "Arrival," in *Cuba Libre*, trans. Langston Hughes and Ben Frederic Carruthers (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1948), 61–62.
7. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Post-Modern Perspective*, 2nd ed., trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 1996), 125.
8. Virgilio Piñera, "Mitificación de Santiago de Cuba," in *Poesía y crítica*, ed. Antón Arrufat (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 296; my translation.
9. Ibid., 297.
10. Courlander and Seko, *The Heart*, 13.
11. Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 62–63.
12. Emma Álvarez-Tabío Albo, *Invención de La Habana* (Barcelona: Casiopea, 2000), 27; my translation.
13. "Fair Cuba! in your breast may be seen / to the highest and deepest degree, / the delight of the world's outer semblance, / the moral world's horrors within." José María Heredia, "Himno del Desterrado" (September 1825), in *Poesías Completas* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1985), 51; my translation.
14. Piñera, "Electra Garrigó," in *Teatro Completo* (Havana: Ediciones R, 1960), 37; my translation.
15. Ibid., 67–68.
16. Piñera, "Mitificación," 297–98.
17. Piñera, "La Isla en peso," in *Poesía y crítica*, 45–57; my translation.

18. Eliseo Diego, "El primer discurso," in *Entre la dicha y la tiniebla: Antología poética 1949–1985*, ed. Diego García Elío (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986), 15; my translation.
19. Abilio Estévez, "La Habana, esa alucinación," in *La Habana Elegante* (Winter 2000), http://www.habanaelegante.com/Winter2000.Ronda.htm; my translation.
20. Piñera, "Bueno, digamos," in *Poesía y crítica*, 104; my translation.
21. Piñera, "El tesoro," in *Poesía y crítica*, 130; my translation.
22. Estévez, "La Habana, esa alucinación."
23. Alejo Carpentier, "Problemática de la actual novela latinoamericana," in *Ensayos* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1984), 11; my translation.
24. Estévez, "La Habana, esa alucinación."
25. Ibid.
26. Piñera, "El tesoro."
27. Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 11.
28. Alejo Carpentier, *La ciudad de las columnas* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1985), 95; my translation; all subsequent page references incorporated parenthetically into the body of the text.
29. Charles Baudelaire, "Correspondances," *Les fleurs du mal*, trans. Richard Howard (Boston: David R. Godine, 1983), 193.
30. Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 183.
31. Ibid.
32. Alejo Carpentier, *The Chase*, trans. Alfred Mac Adam (New York: Noonday, 1989), 31; all subsequent page references incorporated parenthetically into the body of the text.
33. Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 206.
34. José Lezama Lima, "Señales: La otra desintegración," in *Orígenes* 21 (1949): 60; my translation.
35. González Echevarría, 190.
36. John Mason and Gary Edwards, *Black Gods—Orisa Studies in the New World* (Brooklyn: Yoruba Theological Archministry, 1985), 42.
37. Álvarez-Tabio Albo, *Invención de La Habana*, 189.
38. Ibid.
39. Estévez, "La Habana, esa alucinación."
40. Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, *Dirty Havana Trilogy*, trans. Natasha Wimmer (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001), 222.
41. Álvarez-Tabio Albo, *Invención de La Habana*, 319.
42. Kamau Brathwaite, "Jazz and the West Indian Novel," in *Roots* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 107.
43. Ibid., 63.
44. Estévez, "La Habana, esa alucinación."
45. G. Cabrera Infante, *Three Trapped Tigers*, trans. Donald Gardner and Suzanne Jill Levine in collaboration with the author (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 25; all subsequent page references incorporated parenthetically into the body of the text.

46. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onis (New York: Knopf, 1947), 3–4.
47. José Martí, "Dos patrias," in *Obra poética* (Miami: La Moderna Poesía, 1983), 175; my translation.
48. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*: *African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 109.
49. Cristóbal Díaz Ayala, *Música Cubana, Del Areyto a la Nueva Trova*, 2nd ed. (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Cubánacan, 1981), 249; my translation.
50. Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (New York/Munich: Museum of African Art/Prestel, 1993), 63.
51. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 109.
52. Ibid.
53. Brathwaite, "Jazz and the West Indian Novel," in *Roots*, 80.
54. Carlos Franqui, *Retrato de familia con Fidel* (Barcelona: Seix-Barral, 1981), 66; my translation; paragraphing altered from original.
55. Álvarez-Tabio Albo, *Invención de La Habana*, 371.
56. Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls*, trans. Dolores M. Koch (New York: Viking, 1993), 52.
57. Ibid., 150.
58. Álvarez-Tabio Albo, *Invención de La Habana*, 376.
59. Ibid., 377.
60. Piñera, "Bueno, digamos," in *Poesía y crítica*, 104.
61. Eliseo Diego, "El primer discurso," 16.
62. Eliseo Alberto, *Informe sobre mi mismo* (Mexico City: Alfaguara, 1997), 130–31; my translation.
63. Ibid., 132.
64. Ibid., 89.
65. Ibid., 147.
66. Ibid., 145.
67. Ibid., 146.
68. Diego, "El sitio en que tan bien se está," in *Entre la dicha y la tiniebla*, 46; my translation.
69. For the effects of this destructive move on Eliseo Diego's own poetry, "La Casa Abandonada" and "Arqueología," in *Entre la dicha y la tiniebla*, 125 and 126, are particularly moving testaments to the sorrow and spectral presences evoked by the ruins of a cherished former home.
70. Diego, "El primer discurso," in *Entre la dicha y la tiniebla*, 15.
71. Gutiérrez, 47; all subsequent page references incorporated parenthetically into the text.
72. "Entrevista: Pedro Juan Gutiérrez o la literatura como conflicto," in *Encuentro en la red* II: 356 (May 2, 2002), http://www.cubaencuentro.com.
73. Estévez, "La Habana, esa alucinación."
74. Ibid.
75. Álvarez-Tabio Albo, *Invención de La Habana*, 379.

Chapter 5

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2. Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 138.
3. Ibid., 139.
4. Maureen Warner-Lewis, *E. Kamau Brathwaite's Masks: Essays and Annotations*, 2nd ed. (Mona: Institute of Caribbean Studies/University of the West Indies, 1992), 48.
5. Eva Meyerowitz, *Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), 89.
6. Gordon Rohlehr, "Songs of the Skeleton," in *My Strangled City and Other Essays* (Port of Spain: Longman Trinidad, 1992), 291.
7. Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, 76.
8. Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, 76.
9. Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, 76–77.
10. Ibid., 77.
11. Ibid., 76.
12. Rohlehr, "Songs of the Skeleton," 292.
13. Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock* (Providence: Lost Roads, 1994), 22; all subsequent page references incorporated parenthetically into the main text.
14. Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, 364.
15. Martin Carter, "After One Year," in *Selected Poems* (Georgetown: Red Thread Women's Press, 1997), 119.
16. Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Noonday, 1994), 185.
17. Aimé Césaire, "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land," in *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1983), 35; translation slightly modified.
18. Ibid., 69.
19. Ibid., 81, 83.
20. Wilson Harris, "The Question of Form and Realism in the West Indian Artist," in *Tradition, the Writer, and Society: Critical Essays* (London/Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1967), 15.
21. Harris, "Art and Criticism," in *Tradition, the Writer, and Society*, 8.
22. Ibid.
23. C. L. R. James, *Every Cook Can Govern & What is Happening Every Day: 1985 Conversations*, ed. Jan Hillegas (Jackson, MS: New Mississippi, 1986), 46.
24. Ibid., 11.
25. Ibid., 13.
26. C. L. R. James, *Modern Politics* (Detroit: Bewick/ed., 1970), 97.
27. Ibid., 99.
28. James, *Every Cook Can Govern*, 5.
29. Cf. C. L. R. James, quoted in John Bracey, "Nello": "I am a Black European, that is my training and my outlook." Paul Buhle, ed., *C. L. R. James: His Life and Work* (Chicago: *Urgent Tasks* #12, Summer 1981), 125.

30. Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory," in *The New Republic*, December 28, 1992, 30; all subsequent references incorporated parenthetically into main text.
31. Gastón Baquero, "Palabreo para dejar abierto este libro," in José Lezama Lima, *La Habana*, ed. José Prats Sariol (Madrid: Verbum, 1991), 15; my translation.
32. Lezama Lima, "El Día del descubrimiento o la ciudad con su ritmo y destino," in *La Habana*, 61; my translation.
33. Baquero, *La Habana*, 15.
34. Lezama Lima, *La Habana*, 62.
35. Ibid.
36. Lezama Lima, *Paradiso*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1974), 458.
37. Lezama Lima, "La pequeña ciudad o la medida del hombre," in *La Habana*, 87; my translation.
38. Ibid., 87–88.
39. Ibid., 88.
40. Lezama Lima, "Una casa o un estilo," in *La Habana*, 221; my translation.
41. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed., trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 314.
42. Ibid., 17.
43. Baquero, "Testamento del pez," in *La Habana 1952–1961: El final de un mundo, el principio de una ilusión*, ed. Jacobo Machover (Madrid: Alianza, 1995), 29–32; my translation.
44. Walcott, "The Antilles," 30.
45. Brathwaite, "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa," in *Middle Passages* (New York: New Directions, 1993), 54.

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