
Writers Playin' Mas':

Carnival and The Grotesque in the Contemporary Caribbean Novel

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The rewriting of history has been a constant endeavor of twentieth-century Caribbean writers. Emerging from a common experience of colonialism and slavery, Caribbean authors have found a history written by the Other, reflecting the Eurocentric perspective of the colonial powers who ruled the islands for centuries. These "flawed" accounts of Caribbean historical development pointed to the need to recast the region's history into narratives that could serve as the basis for a reinterpretation of the roles played by Caribbean peoples in their own history, and by extension, for a reformulation of the prevailing concepts of Caribbean national and individual identities. The Caribbean has produced rich and varied interpretations of the historical process, many of which await critical analysis. Edward Brathwaite, Frantz Fanon, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Edouard Glissant, José Luis González, Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, Derek Walcott, and others, have focused on the replacement of the Eurocentric and logocentric approaches to history that have dominated Caribbean historiography with autochthonous approaches that reflect essential aspects of the struggles of Caribbean peoples to assert their own sociocultural values in opposition to those imposed by the various colonial metropolises. One of the chief avenues of opposition to official culture has been parody—the critical quotation of a received literary or cultural text for comic effect. A close look at the parodic spirit at work in contemporary Caribbean cultures and literatures illuminates the peoples' subversion of the history and identity imposed upon them by their metropolitan masters.

Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal, in an article introducing the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin to Latin-American critics, points to the usefulness of parodic/carnavalesque theory in understanding Latin-American and Caribbean literatures, not as submissive to Western models, but as "parody of a cultural text that already contained within it the seeds of its own metamorphosis" (Rodríguez Monegal [1979], 408).¹ He suggests that a focus on parody and the carnivalesque could help us move away from the logocentrism that has characterized critical and historical approaches to Latin America and the Caribbean. He further argues that, at the popular level, the models imposed by official culture "were immediately parodied; fashions were grotesquely exaggerated; the enthroning and dethroning of ideologies was practiced with the greatest haste" (Rodríguez Monegal

¹ *parodia de un texto cultural que en sí mismo ya contenía la semilla de su propia metamorfosis* (Rodríguez Monegal [1979], 408).

[1979], 406).² The parodic use of Western models both in the culture and in the literature joins the carnival spirit alive in the region (he cites *macumba*, *candomblé*, *ñañiguera* as examples) to subvert the official order.

Bakhtin makes carnival the focus of his parodic theory in *Rabelais and His World*, where carnival as folk festival celebrates the destruction of the old, officially sanctioned world. Carnival's parodic nature allows it to build its own world in opposition to both official culture and the narrow seriousness dictated by the ruling classes. It offers, however briefly, a completely different conception of the world, of humanity and of human relations, a world outside officialdom. Carnival, as a festival modeled on nature's cyclical pattern of decay and rebirth, allows for the concentration of "inventive freedom... the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, [the liberation] from that prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (Bakhtin [1984], 34).

Carnival's appeal to the Caribbean masses rests on its temporary inversion of accepted norms of behavior, on the subversion of the "natural" social order it promotes. The parodistic/ritualistic inversions of the established order that are typical of carnival masques in the Caribbean—the grand marches of people dressed in the costumes of the eighteenth-century French aristocracy, the Devil and Jab Jab masques, the Canboulay festival, the masking in the color opposite to that of one's own skin—represent the reversal of the values of respectability from which the black and poor have been excluded, and are a flamboyant rejection of the norms of the middle and upper classes. Carnival enables the disfranchised population to adopt fictitious social roles and to (at least temporarily) break the social boundaries of class and color characteristic of Caribbean societies.

Despite its many similarities to the European carnival, the Caribbean carnival is not a European-inspired nature festival, but rather a celebration rooted in the experience of slavery and the commemoration of emancipation. The origins of the Trinidadian carnival, for example, are to be found in the reenactment of the gathering of slave gangs from various estates to fight fires in the sugar plantation (Pearse [1956], 182). The slaves assembled in response to the sound of horns and shells, and the gangs marched ahead of drivers cracking their whips and prodding them to their work with shouts and blows. After emancipation, the former slaves began to represent the scene as a commemoration of the change in their status. Initially recreated on the night of August 1st, the anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies, the festival of the *cannes brûlées* (burnt canes) or canboulay, as it came to be known, would in time become the quasi-ritualistic opening of the Trinidadian carnival celebrations.

Fernando Ortiz likewise links the Cuban carnival festival to the *comparsas* or masques organized by the *cabildos*, neo-African societies formed by freed slaves from the same region or ethnies. The semireligious societies, modeled on medieval Sevillean *cofradías*, fulfilled an invaluable role in maintaining and nurturing kinship and cultural ties among Cuban blacks, and very quickly became the center of the freedmen's social activity. They would often sponsor dances, the proceeds of which would be used to buy the freedom of enslaved members of their own group, and were later to become the cradles of *ñañiguismo* (Afro-Cuban secret societies from which the *santería* cult developed). More important in our context is the *cabildo*'s fostering of the African-inspired *comparsas*, described by Ortiz as a multi-ethnic parade usually headed by a black man carrying a

² eran inmediatamente parodiadas; las modas eran exageradas hasta lo grotesco; la entronización y la destronización de las ideologías era practicada con toda celeridad (Rodríguez Monegal [1979], 406).

multi-colored paper lantern, followed by other individuals "with strident costumes and more lanterns, surrounded by a crowd where negroes predominated, crying out with dissonant and rum-laced voices a song echoed to exhaustion with maddening monotony, frequently with the most nonsensical lyrics" (Ortiz [1921], 31–33).³ Initially organized as an officially sanctioned commemoration of the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th, the *comparsas* would with time become the most significant element of the Cuban carnival.

The history of carnival festivals in the Caribbean is thus clearly linked to the celebration of the history of the enslaved population's struggle for freedom. From its origins in the *canboulays* and *comparsas* to its present form as a populist national festival, carnival has embodied the spirit of the people's unrestrained (albeit temporary) freedom from official control. The popularity of military bands in Caribbean carnivals, for example, responds to the people's resolve to debunk the power and authority that have been arrogantly paraded before them throughout their history. The countless efforts to contain and repress carnival have always aimed at suppressing this latent impulse toward rebellion and freedom that the authorities discern among the masses in such carnival festivals. For centuries, carnival has served as the crucible for the expression of many varied types of hostility to officialdom, and as new groups have come to identify themselves as "the People" and to reappropriate carnival as their festival, it has evolved into an expression of national identity shared by a broad sector of the Caribbean community in opposition to the ruling system and its (often) foreign officials (Pearse [1956], 193).

This symbolic function of carnival has held great appeal for Caribbean writers seeking a metaphor for the expression of the aspirations of the Caribbean masses. Carnival, and what Bakhtin calls the carnivalesque—not carnival per se but the varied popular/festive forms of folk culture such as the grotesque—become avenues for the articulation of resistance to the dominant culture's tendency to regard its own principles as eternal truths. As a cultural symbol of the people's strength to undermine the static, seemingly unshakable hierarchies imposed by colonial rule, carnival (and the many aspects of the carnivalesque) offered Caribbean writers a means to chart the masses' process of becoming a people, of exploring the meaning of the struggle for freedom and of assessing its direction. Carnival's powerful historical legacy makes it an ideal vehicle for the exploration of the peculiarities of the Caribbean carnival. Nowhere is this clearer than in Paule Marshall's depiction of carnival's ability to contain and preserve the people's latent potential for imposing sociopolitical change in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, 1969. Marshall's use of carnival as symbol is true to the historical roots of the Caribbean carnival, as she shows the direct link between the festival and the history of slave revolts in the region. In this novel, the villagers of Bournehills reenact the historical drama of the Pyre Hill revolt each year in their carnival masque. Cuffee Ned's revolt, which had resulted in the former slaves living for two years as an independent nation, had been "the only bit of history" to have taken place in Bourne Island. The yearly reenactment, a quasi-ritualistic dramatization whose aim is to maintain the spirit of the revolt, is presented as the symbol of Bournehills's pride, for it set the villagers apart from the rest of the inhabitants of Bourne Island as people solidly rooted in their proud past.

Marshall's depiction of carnival as a ritual of liberation builds upon two themes: the ability of a

³ con disfraces chillones y con otras muchas linternas, y rodeándolos a todos una muchedumbre en la que predominan los negros, gritando con voces destempladas y con frecuencia aguardentosas una cantinela repetida hasta la saciedad con monotonía desesperante, y cuyo texto suele ser de los más disparatado (Ortiz [1921], 32–33).

single triumphant "bit of history" to fuse individuals into a "people," and the latent capacity for revolution and renewal found in a people who once shared a heroic experience and are awaiting a chance to repeat it. That latent force is displayed in their oneness as they march through the streets during carnival, when Marshall describes them as a "dark human overflow," resembling a turbulent and rising river which, "if heed wasn't taken and provision made would soon burst the walls and levees built to contain it and rushing forth in one dark powerful wave bring everything in its path crashing down" (Marshall [1984], 289–90). Marshall confers a solid dignity on her villagers as they follow their somber procession down the streets in their depiction of their former enslavement. This solemn dignity contrasts dramatically with their bursting into joyous song and dance following their reenactment of Cuffee's triumph.

In her depiction of carnival, Marshall emphasizes its ability to contain and preserve the community's latent potential for the oneness required for social and political change. The stress is precisely on the villagers' process of achieving the unity of purpose needed to transform them from powerless individuals into a powerful people. To this end, she underscores the carnival masque's relationship to the people's history, a relationship that, because of its cathartic aspects and its emphasis on a shared experience, helps explain the Bournehills people's endurance amid poverty and stagnation. In the novel, the oneness of the people at carnival prefigures the unity with which they will face the crisis of the broken roller at the Cane Vale factory, a crisis that threatens their survival and requires true communal action. In this sense, the ritualistic reenactment of the Pyre Hill revolt during carnival embodies the Bournehills villagers' determination to carve a future out of the fragments of their past of colonization and slavery.

Marshall's use of the carnival festival as a metaphor for the aspirations for self-determination of colonized peoples is perhaps the most unproblematic to be found in a Caribbean novel, since it is true to the ideal of carnival as a faithful expression of the people's spirit. The unambiguous link she traces between the spirit of carnival and the people's ability to act in concert toward a common sociopolitical goal is rarely found among Caribbean writers, most of whom have less sanguine views of the possibilities of the people's triumph against the oppressive neocolonial realities that are central to *The Chosen Place*, *The Timeless People*. [The fact that she is a U.S. writer of Barbadian ancestry is significant here. Paule Marshall recreates a fictitious "Barbados" from the outside, a narratological position that is undoubtedly related to her vision of carnival and Caribbean history. Ed.] Her notion of carnival is closest to the ideal festival described by Bakhtin as a "revolution in itself," which is suggested by the only other masque to be described at length in the novel: the green-clad guerrilla band, a mob of Castro-like mock revolutionaries smoking cheap cigars and brandishing cardboard machetes, which threatens to sweep Harriet, the representative of American neo-colonial power, to her death in the bay.

Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* delves deeper into the complex problem of the people's betrayal of the true spirit of the folk carnival. Like Marshall's work, Lovelace's Trinidadian novel revolves around the history of slave resistance that finds expression in carnival's traditional masking rituals. But, unlike Marshall, Lovelace is concerned with carnival's evolution into mere holiday, into a commercialized tourist attraction with no links to the people's ancestral struggle for freedom. *The Dragon Can't Dance* follows the story of the people of the yard on Alice Street in Calvary Hill through several carnival seasons and a street revolt led by some of the men from the yard who, having declared themselves to be the People's Liberation Army, enjoy a brief period of popular

support. In this novel, as in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, carnival is presented as the embodiment of an oppressed population's inherent capacity to revolt. Aldrick, who year after year plays the dragon in the Calvary Hill masque with quasi-ritualistic devotion, sees carnival as "... the guts of the people, their blood; this is the self of the people that they screaming out they possess, that they scrimp and save and whore and work and thief to drag out of the hard rockstone and dirt to show the world they is people.' He felt: 'This is people taller than cathedrals; this is people more beautiful than avenues with trees'" (Lovelace [1979], 137).

The plot revolves around the uses of the potential for rebellion implicit in carnival, exploring its capacity to spearhead sociopolitical change. To that end, it probes the seemingly gratuitous violence of the pan bands and the role of the calypso tradition in giving a voice to social protest. But it is in Aldrick's dragon dance that we see most clearly the embodiment of the people's dormant violence: "For two days Aldrick was dragon in Port of Spain...He was Africa, the ancestral Masker, affirming the power of the warrior, prancing and bowing, breathing out fire, lunging against his chains, threatening with his claws, saying to the city: 'I is a dragon! I have fire in my belly and claws on my hands; watch me! Note me well, for I am ready to burn down your city. I am ready to tear you apart, limb by limb'" (Lovelace [1979], 137-38). The dragon costume becomes Aldrick's symbolic link with his African past, his means of asserting his selfhood before a city where the powers-that-be have sought to deny him and his people recognition.

Lovelace's choice of the Dragon or Devil Mas', the most popular of all bands in the Trinidadian carnival until the late 1920s, but one whose popularity has declined, is very significant, especially in view of the concern for the people's betrayal of the spirit of carnival that he expresses throughout the novel. The mas', "an ambulatory depiction of Satan and his horde cast from Heaven" (Procope [1956], 276), has deep significance for a people whose ancestors were cast from their homeland into slavery. To be the reigning beast (or dragon) was in the past considered the highest honor possible in the Trinidadian carnival, since the fight of the beasts against theimps who held it by chains hindering its progress was one of the festival's main events. This dance, a stylized struggle for freedom from chains by a potentially violent beast, offers Lovelace a superb metaphor for Caribbean peoples' struggles for freedom.

In *The Dragon Can't Dance*, however, carnival both embodies and contains the impulse to rebellion, demonstrating its latency but threatening to exhaust its possibilities. Lovelace signals the dangers implicit in allowing carnival to become bourgeois, wrenched from its vital links to the people's struggle and no longer the vehicle for the expression of the people's protest. It is a theme echoed in Marion Patrick Jones's *Pan Beat*, 1973, which also centers on the need to channel the violence and energy of calypso and the pan bands into constructive political action. The wrenching of carnival from its roots is exemplified in *The Dragon Can't Dance* by the emergence of corporate sponsors, multinational companies such as Coca Cola, whose money forces the street bands to compromise their traditional styles and customs. This concern, of course, brings to the fore the problematic matter of neocolonialism and the role of multinational companies in threatening the hard-earned independence of Caribbean peoples. Corporate sponsorship for pan bands in Trinidad is seen by many, but by no means by all, as a serious threat to the freshness and vitality of carnival; it looms as a controversial aspect of the modern-day festival, with over-commercialization betraying the spirit of carnival. Thus, to the novel's characters, the sponsorships are tantamount to the disfranchisement of the "little fellars" to whom carnival truly belongs.

It is this very disfranchisement, the realization that a bourgeois carnival is not capable of expressing and containing the substance of the people's struggle, that leads the Calvary Hill band to an aborted revolt, one that elicits some popular support but which the band members are unprepared and unable to lead into concrete political change. The revolt is an extension of Aldrick's dragon dance. It symbolizes the potential for which the band must find an adequate channel, a "threatening gesture" seeking an outlet. The revolt fails because it lacks the means of steering power toward a constructive political conclusion, leaving the rebels "looking to someone else to make a decision," a clear reference to their unpreparedness to wield a power they had never really possessed and had never adequately imagined. The rebellion itself is described in carnival terms with Aldrick, cruising the streets in a confiscated police jeep, feeling as if "imprisoned in a dragon costume on Carnival Tuesday" (Lovelace [1979], 177).

Despite its warning against the abandonment of the rebellious spirit of carnival, the novel ends on a hopeful note. Returning to the Hill after a five-year prison sentence for his role in the revolt, Aldrick finds that Calvary Hill is again playing the Devil Mas' for carnival: "'Devil!' an exclamation jumped out of him. 'You mean people playing devil again?' Maybe he had misread the signs. If people were playing devil...if they were expressing the wish to be devil, evil, powerful, then maybe a new spirit was rising again. Oh Jesus, he thought, Oh Jesus!" (Lovelace [1979], 208-09). In his desire to see the return of the once popular Devil Mas', Aldrick expresses his longing for a return to the traditional festival and for a restoration of carnival's historical and symbolic roots in the people's struggle.

For Aldrick, as for Merle in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, the cathartic experience of carnival signals the beginning of a new life in which they reformulate their personal goals and move from their former passivity to a commitment to sociopolitical action. In both cases, the ability to act positively at the sociopolitical level entails a resolution of emotional dilemmas rooted in the characters' history of oppression as black people. Angelita Reyes, in her study of Lovelace's novel, sees carnival as an annual rite of passage that moves "from an accepted socio-historical state (as things are), to communitas (Carnival and the false sense of equality and happiness), to reincorporation (as things are again)" (Reyes [1984], 109). Her assessment reflects the common view of carnival as a safety valve allowing for the exhaustion of a rebellious spirit that could otherwise explode into political revolt. Lovelace and Marshall, however, present carnival as cathartic, as a ritual that can plant the seed of personal and national transformation. Thus the endings of both *The Dragon Can't Dance* and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* find the protagonists seeking ways to change "things as they are," attempting to channel the rebellious spirit contained in carnival toward breaking the oppressive circumstances to which the people have to return on Ash Wednesday.

Marshall and Lovelace are concerned with carnival as festival and spectacle; they explore the phenomenon as a cultural ritual of renewal. Pierre Clitandre, in *La cathédrale du mois d'août* (The cathedral of the August heat), 1987, focuses instead on one of the key aspects of the carnivalesque—the representation of the human body as grotesque image. The grotesque body, Bakhtin argues in his study of Rabelais, is a body in the act of becoming, it is "a point of transition in a life eternally renewed, the inexhaustible vessel of death and conception" (Bakhtin [1984], 318). Grotesque images of the human body, with their relationship to changing times and their ambivalence, "become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness

of history and historical change" (Bakhtin [1984], 25). It is in the ever-changing body of the people—to extrapolate from the individual to the body politic—that the accidents of history leave their mark.

The relationship between history and the Haitian people's ever-changing and renewed body is central to *La cathédrale du mois d'août*. In the novel, the individual characters seem, paradoxically, both distinct and subsumed into the collective body of the people. Although it focuses on John, a *tap-tap* (bus) driver and his son Raphael, the novel is above all a metaphorical tale of a lost people's desperate struggle to recover its history and, with it, the source of precious water that can restore them to fertility and bounty. The novel celebrates hope and renewal through its emphasis on the carnivalesque and its faith in the regenerating and revolutionary power of voodoo.

Central to the novel is the portrayal of the Haitian people as a carnivalesque/grotesque body—a body that "fecundates and is fecundated, devours and is devoured, drinks, defecates, is sick and dying" (Bakhtin [1984], 319). The grotesque image celebrates the hyperbolized features of both the outward and the inner body. Clitandre's own depiction of the people-as-body is overwhelmingly, although not exclusively, olfactory. The novel contains literally hundreds of references to the potent bodily smells typical of the Rabelaisian marketplace: unbathed bodies smelling like ram-goats, the abominable stench of rotting flesh, the nauseous smell of plague-ridden corpses, the stink of piss and decay, the smell of sweat, blood, and bruises. It is also an image of the body as mutilated, rotting corpse; the text abounds in images of crushed hands, burnt bodies, cut-off penises, roasted balls, sores, of blood soaking and fertilizing the scorched earth. Death haunts the text, and the people are represented as subject to ever-threatening plagues, natural calamities, and repressive terror. But, as is typical of the carnivalesque, death and the dead body are depicted as stages in the renewing of the ancestral body of the people. Thus, the novel treats individual deaths, not as signalling an irrevocable end, but as natural and necessary phases in the cycle of life. Death asserts life, thus insuring the indestructible immortality of the people. The death of an individual, as the death of young Raphael demonstrates, is only a moment in the triumphant life of the people, "a moment indispensable for their renewal and empowerment" (Bakhtin [1984], 34), and is thus devoid of terror and tragedy.

Images of death are counterbalanced in the text by recurrent images of the people's struggle against death through procreation: "Lost people like to have plenty of children. Fornicate all the blessed day. Say it's their only hope: pickney like the fingers of your hand, faster than death can carry them off. And so the babies come, ten, twenty, thirty at a time...faster than death" (Clitandre, [1987], 15).⁴ The theme of "death-renewal-fertility" is underscored through repeated images of blood as a seed buried in the earth and of life springing forth, not only from the human body, but through fantastic profusions of roses, life-giving rain, and life-affirming eroticism.

Clitandre's interest in the erotic aspects of the grotesque image of the body is also a characteristic feature of the carnivalesque, which turns upside down the bodily hierarchy where the head rules, making the "lower bodily stratum" prevail. Eroticism, death, and revolt set the tone for the novel from the very opening, when John, impotent for a long time, lifts off the body of a white man making love to Madeleine, and flings himself at her: "Three days John and Madeleine spent coiled

⁴ Les déracinés aiment avoir beaucoup d'enfants. Ils fornicent toute la sainte journée. Ils disent que c'est ça leur chance: des enfants par dizaines, par vingtaine, par trentaine...pour vaincre la mort (Clitandre [1982], 27–28).

together, moving to the tune of the serpents' hiss that whispered from their closed teeth. And like a voice from beyond the grave the song of the old madam at the bar was still humming away *Caroline Aca-o Small ear black man enragée*" (Clitandre [1987], 6).⁵ This image summarizes key aspects of the text: the Caribbean people's struggle against the impotence forced on them by the white colonizers; sexual activity as a metaphor for revolt; the image of the coiled serpents, symbol of the voodoo cult of Damballah-wèdo; and the accompanying song from the grave, which recalls the sustaining role of the ancestral loas. The earthiness of the eroticism in the novel, with the recurring images of semen and human blood, is linked in the novel to voodoo, the source of the body's (the people's) reinvigoration. "The body is joy and revival," the narrative voice asserts, and this revival of the body is achieved through the voodoo ceremony, "it is reborn every Tuesday at midnight, among the smells of burning oil and essence, in the trance, the bathing of the head, the chants, until being is transformed and the stars fall" (Clitandre [1987], 28).⁶

The life-giving power of voodoo pervades the entire text. The *vèvè* or mystical sign for Erzulie, goddess of the erotic and divinity of dreams, presides over the first part of the novel. The power of Erzulie—"her *élan*, all the excessive pitch with which the dreams of men soar, when, momentarily, they can shake loose the flat weight, the dreary, reiterative demands of necessity" (Deren [1953], 138)—imbues this section of the text. Conceived in the spirit of expansiveness characteristic of the cult of Erzulie, where all anxieties, all urgencies vanish, the section ends with the prefiguration of the power of laughter, the volcanic laughter that erupts in the world of the lost people like a seismic shock, spreading through the Caribbean region. The supernatural laughter corresponds to the image of the netherworld in folk tradition as the place to which fear has fled after its defeat by laughter. Folk laughter, the cosmic laughter of the lost people, represents the end of the "mystic terror of the authority and truth of the past, still prevailing but dying, which has been hurled into the underworld" (Bakhtin [1984], 395). In *Clitandre*, the resulting image is that of laughter sweeping away the past, including the carnival paraphernalia, since carnival, container of the people's spirit of revolt in its temporarily sanctioned aspects, is no longer needed when true revolution is at hand: "The laugh bore away masks, decorated floats, Carnival devils, whiskers from the moustache of a former general, old dresses of women long buried, banners washed out by the rains, paper flags faded by seasons when hails of bullets re-echoed, and all the things which were passing away, grating or whining, sad and majestic puppets who had set for ever in a hollow grin" (Clitandre [1987], 97).⁷

The dreams inspired by Erzulie set the stage for the second part of the tale, which is introduced by the *vèvè* for Petro, an invocation to the spirits of wrath and revolt. The Petro rites in voodoo were born of the rage against the evil fate suffered by Africans transported into the New World, the wrath

⁵ John et Madeleine passèrent trois jours collés l'un contre l'autre, sur l'air du sifflement de serpent qui sortait d'entre leurs dents serrés. On entendait la voix d'outre-tombe de la vieille tenancière du café qui fredonnait encore. *Caroline Acaou Nég novè ti zorey enrajé* (Clitandre [1982], 16–17).

⁶ Le corps est un élément de plaisir et d'apothéose...chaque mardi il ressuscite à minuit, entre les odeurs d'huile brûlée et d'encens, entre la transe, le laver-tête et les chants, jusqu'à la métamorphose de l'être et la chute des étoiles (Clitandre [1982], 43).

⁷ Le rire emportait des masques, des chars bariolés, des charloscars grotesques, des poils de moustaches d'un ancien général, des vieilles robes de femmes longtemps enterrées, des bannières décolorées par les pluies, des drapeaux en papier dépéints par le temps de rafales de Kaboy répercutées en écho et toutes choses qui s'en allaient, grinçantes ou plaintives, augustes et tristes pantins qui avaient perpétué la grimace (Clitandre [1982], 128).

against the brutality of displacement and enslavement (Deren [1953], 62). The second part thus focuses on the people's open revolt against the repressive authorities, guided by the Petro loas into calling for "People power now!" (Clitandre [1987], 123). The Petro loas, born in the mountains, nurtured in secret, repositories of the moral strength and organization of the escaped slaves that led the Haitian revolution, help Clitandre's people retrieve their lost history of struggle and revolt, awakening them to "Another shouting for armed resistance against the great epidemic of repression" (Clitandre [1987], 122).⁸ Even the fierce wave of repression that follows the revolt of the trade unionists, the focus of this part of the text, can no longer hold back the people's thirst for freedom. Raphael, killed during the revolt, articulates the message of the Petro loas in the legacy of historical memory he leaves behind: "He had scraped it (into the old cannon) with the blade, as if he wanted to remove the rust of the Season of Neglect, as if to tell his father to keep his promise. That these brave ancestors who forged this free nation, floating like a bird on the blue Caribbean Sea, should not be forgotten" (Clitandre [1987], 128).⁹

In Clitandre's novel, the grotesque/carnavalesque image of the human body functions as the repository of history, the vessel of memory through which political change will eventually be accomplished. Thus, in Clitandre, the "body" is unambiguously true to itself and to its history, and, although dismembered and drained of blood at times, ultimately indestructible.

Severo Sarduy's *De donde son los cantantes* (From Cuba with a song), 1967, uses the grotesque/carnavalesque image of the body-as-endless-metamorphosis to underscore the chaos and alienation of the colonial history of the Caribbean. Whereas Clitandre celebrated the historic, ever-growing collective body, Sarduy places the grotesque image of the alienated, individual body at the center of his system of images. The carnivalesque elements of the text are thus emptied of their historic legacy by virtue of their separation from the body of the people.

Sarduy emphasizes the ever-metamorphosing grotesque body through his mutating characters: Mortal—a blond, Castillian, power-seeking male—and Auxilio and Socorro, ceaselessly self-transforming transvestites in search of an ever-elusive sense of self. The carnivalesque atmosphere of Havana's prerevolutionary Chinatown Opera offers the backdrop against which three cultures—Spanish, African, and Chinese superimposed on each other to form the Cuban culture—play their game of hide and seek. This identity quest takes the form of a pursuit of the desired erotic object (Mortal seeking Flor de Loto, Auxilio and Socorro seeking Mortal), and the resulting erotic frustration stands as a symbol of the Caribbean people's alienating desire to be "an-Other," a symbol of the search for an identity that mirrors the colonizer's blond, pale, and white Otherness.

Hence the emphasis on transformation—on Mortal's mutations from lustful general to aspiring senator to Christ entering Havana; on Auxilio and Socorro's transformations from cabaret dancers to leather-clad motorcyclists to devoted followers of Christ. But all transformations lead to frustrated desire, since the boundaries between the self and the Other are obscured in the text. Who is the self and who is "the Other" are not easily answered questions in the postcolonial world of

⁸ ...qui lançant des slogans appelant à la résistance organisée contre la grande épidémie de violence (Clitandre [1982], 157).

⁹ John se rappella qu'il s'était penché pour prendre le couteau et s'était dirigé un peu plus loin vers le vieux canon et qu'il l'avait gratté avec la lame, comme s'il voulait en ôter cette rouille des Temps de l'Abandon, comme s'il voulait dire à son père de tenir sa promesse et que les courageux ancêtres qui forgèrent cette nation libre, flottant comme un oiseau dans le bleu de la mer des Caraïbes, ne sont pas des hommes à oublier (Clitandre [1982], 164).

the novel. Identity and history, and historically-determined identity, are presented as riddles: "The riddle of riddles. The sixty-four thousand dollar question, the definition of being.... This is the situation: We have stayed behind and the gods have left, they boarded the ship, left by the truckload, crossed the border, took a shit in the Pyrenees. They all left. This is the situation: we left and the gods remained. Sitting down. Lying low, taking a siesta, delighted with life, dancing the Ma Teodora, the primal *son*, the repetitive *son*, swinging in the air, like lynched corpses" (Sarduy [1967], 12).¹⁰

Sarduy emphasizes the ungraspability of history and of the self in a text where history is carnivalized and presented as alienating grotesque image. But this image is no longer embraced by the people, as is palpably clear in the first chapter, where Auxilio and Socorro, bizarre in their metamorphosis as glamorous, silver-haired, spike-heeled beauties, know themselves to stand "accused" by the other patrons in the "Self-Service." The prevalence of the carnivalesque is reinforced by the continuous masking of all the characters, of all the bodies going through endless changes to hide the ordinary reality underneath, a reality that is far from idealized identity. The image of the General searching for Flor de Loto in her dressing room, unaware that he had just seen her emerge from the room as a bald asthenic Chinese waiter in a *guayabera* and slacks, is emblematic of the carnivalesque game of identities of the text.

Sarduy plays with images very similar to those of Clitandre's grotesque body, but without Clitandre's faith in that body's eventual triumphant recovery of its history. Whereas Clitandre's "body" was the principal potential agent of its own liberation, Sarduy's "body" appears to be caught on the treadmill of colonial identity and history. The hail of bullets from the helicopter hovering above Auxilio, Socorro, and the dismembered body of Mortal/Christ that ends the novel is the only indication that a historical change is possible. But even this image is highly ambiguous, mutating, as it is unclear who is shooting at whom and for what purpose.

Sarduy's novel contains many metaphors of the body as book, as "readable object" on which a carnivalesque parody of history and salvation is written (Rivero Potter [1983], 504). In an interview with Jean Michel Fossey, Sarduy emphasizes the connection between the body, the word, and the carnivalesque dance (the dance of the "lower bodily stratum"): "The writer is a material, situated subject and not an 'inspired' floating author. As in the Tibetan mandalas, everything explodes from the genitals and goes up to the hand. I write naked, and sometimes I dance around looking for the words, looking for them until my body turns into a language and the language on the page turns into a body, into something tangible, tactile, which dances and looks in turn.... [The] body is the "generator" of writing, but the body is also the object the writing is directed to" (quoted in Rivero Potter [1974], 506).

Sarduy's carnivalesque writing, emerging as he states from the Bakhtinian "lower bodily principle," focuses on the transvestite image, on the grotesque play of opposites and intentionally distorted proportions. One aspect of cultural "transvestism" is Sarduy's elaborate parody of Christian ritual. The grotesque/erotic aspects of desire are presented through the systematic parody

¹⁰ La adivinanza de las adivinanzas. La pregunta de los sesenta y cuatro mil dólares, la definición del ser... Ésta es la situación: nos hemos quedado y los dioses se fueron, cogieron el barco, se fueron en camiones, atravesaron la frontera, se cagaron en los Pirineos. Se fueron todos. Ésta es la situación: nos fuimos y los dioses se quedaron. Sentados. Achantados, durmiendo la siesta, encantados de la vida, bailando la Ma Teodora, el son inicial, el son repetitivo, dando vueltas en el aire, como ahorcados (Sarduy [1967], 12).

of Christ entering Havana, a Palm-Sunday "carnival" that desacralizes the religious stratum of Cuban culture, stripping it of its transcendence. The scenes of Christ entering Havana transform eroticism into mystical devotion. The carnivalesque is embodied in the sacrilegious attitude of the participants, a process that Auxilio's writing of the scriptures on "her" body illustrates: "We must appeal to popular devotion, no matter what it takes" (Sarduy [1967], 137),¹¹ she says, before proceeding to cover her body with the sacred words. "Come, all devotees, here's the flesh made word!" (Sarduy [1967], 137),¹² she announces, and then "unchains" her body in a mad dance to the beat of drums and John Coltrane's horns. Auxilio's dance is symbolic of the parodic/carnivalesque spirit, and it prompts Mortal, the Christ-like figure himself, to join this carnivalesque dance of death and rebirth: "He wanted to dance, he knew that dance was rebirth, that after death we will be confronted with the mambo orchestra... That dancing is meeting the Dead" (Sarduy [1967], 137, 147).¹³

Most critical writing on Sarduy's novel has striven to divest *De donde son los cantantes* of any explicit or implicit political meaning. Alicia Rivero Potter speaks for most critics when she writes that Sarduy endeavors to turn the written word into something physical, over-abundant, tangible, and sensual, to make of the book a physical, erotic, playful body in the service of pleasure rather than of the message (Rivero Potter [1983], 506). This is true to an extent; the pleasure in the word, in linguistic play, and in the grotesque image attests to Sarduy's interest in the text as text. But the book is so rooted in Cuban history that any claim to a disassociation from history does not ring true. The novel is marked precisely by its carnivalesque presentation of Cuban historical narratives. From the parody of Auxilio and Socorro as Castillian devotees becoming creolized ("To summarize: taking siestas gnawed at their bones, turned them yellow, gave them pernicious anemia; no doubt about it, they fell prey to the Caribbean callaloo—so delicious!—*ajiaco* stew became their weakness, together with the daily *habanera* and the mattress," Sarduy [1967], 114),¹⁴ to Dolores's emulation of the Countess of Merlin, the nineteenth-century Cuban aristocrat and memoir writer ("I want a bath. A bathtub full of rum. And I want to be fanned with giant palm fronds. This is the life the four of us deserve. Today we will toss gold coins at little black boys!," Sarduy [1967], 75),¹⁵ the reader is subjected to constant parodic rewritings of the Cuban historical "text."

History is indeed the target of this elaborate parody; Mortal's descent from the Sierra to Havana as the savior can be read as a parody of a false "savior's" (Castro's?) descent from the Sierra Maestra. The systematic debunking of the savior figure is framed in political terms: "He thought of himself as a patriot, a Martí-like orator... He imagined himself in a haranguing gesture, atop a tricolor tribune... [although] he wasn't made for the proletariat: the tumult asphyxiated Him" (Sarduy [1967], 128, 140).¹⁶ The pseudohistorical details that fill the text, such as Mortal's earlier

¹¹ ¡Hay que apelar a la devoción popular, sea como sea! (Sarduy [1967], 137).

¹² Venid, devotos: ¡he aquí la carne hecha verbo! (Sarduy [1967], 137).

¹³ quería bailar, sabía que el baile es el nuevo nacimiento, que después de la muerte nos enfrentarán con la orquesta de mambo.... Que bailar es encontrarse con los Muertos (Sarduy [1967], 137, 147).

¹⁴ Resumen: la siesta les royó los huesos, las amarilló, anemia perniciosa; nada, que les dio el soponcio caribeño—tan sabroso!—por su lado más flojo, que es el del *ajiaco*, el del *danzonete* cotidiano y el del *colchón* (Sarduy [1967], 114).

¹⁵ Quiero un baño. La bañera repleta de ron. Y luego que me abaniquen con grandes pencas. Ésta es la vida que merecemos las cuatro. ¡Hoy tiraremos monedas de oro a los negritos! (Sarduy [1967], 75).

¹⁶ Se creía que era un patriota, un orador martiano... Se imaginaba en un gesto de arenga, subido a una tribuna tricolor... no estaba hecho para el proletariado: el tumulto Lo asfixiaba (Sarduy [1967], 128, 140).

political downfall when he was accused of white slavery, drug smuggling, and clandestine importation of liquor by a drug- and alcohol-smuggling prime minister who had himself procured a *danseuse* for the president, are too close to Cuban political reality under Batista to be dismissed as inconsequential. The accumulation of such detail is evidence of Sarduy's intention to carnivalize official historical discourse, of his concern with giving voice to his own interpretation of Cuba's often grotesque history, where every savior proves false and the people are caught in an identity-less carnival where every gesture is a mask.

Sarduy's use of carnival differs markedly from the celebration of the popular/festive spirit that characterizes works such as *The Chosen Place*, *The Timeless People*, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, and *La Cathédrale du mois d'août*. His carnival is a festival of mirrors, of alienating metamorphoses like those of his ever-changing characters. Disillusionment seems to lie at the root of this debunking of history. It is unclear to what extent this disillusionment is ideological, although Sarduy pointedly signs his novel "Paris, March 1965," thus distancing himself from Castro's revolutionary Cuba. What seems clear is that, in spite of his delight in the carnivalesque, Sarduy's carnival has deteriorated into Lovelace's worst nightmare, that of a carnival wrenched from its historical roots in the people's struggle for freedom. For Mortal, Auxilio, and Socorro—alienated from the people in a constant play of masks—there is no freedom.

Sarduy's alienating "carnival" finds an unlikely echo in René Depestre's novel *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves* (Hadriana in all my dreams), 1988, which empties Haitian history of its content. Set in Jacmel, the novel is the story of the apparent death, zombification, and wake of the beautiful (and white) Hadriana Siloé, the narrator's idealized erotic object. A large part of the text is devoted to detailed descriptions of the preparations for Hadriana's wedding, planned as a "carnival without precedent," and of the elaborate voodooesque wake that follows her death-swoon at the altar. Depestre uses her story as the point of departure for a somewhat peculiar meditation on Haiti's history that seeks to deny the very significance of the devastating chronicle of the Haitian people's historical fate through its subordination to the narrator's single-minded quest for erotic fulfillment with Hadriana.

In Depestre's novel, history is depicted as a *jeu de masques*, a carnivalesque parody that reduces to a senseless game of disguises crucial aspects of the class and race divisions of Haitian society. Depestre's description of the carnival figures who dance around Hadriana's coffin in ghostly abandon is a convocation of three centuries of Haitian history: Indian caciques, Elizabethan corsairs, barons and marquises of Louis XIV's court, black and mulatto officers of Napoleon's Grand Army, Pauline Bonaparte, Toussaint Louverture, Pétion, Christophe, and, discordantly, Stalin. But this carnival exploits the traditional classlessness of the carnival festival to deny the deeply-rooted differences that divide Haitian people along class and race lines. In this indiscriminate parade all prominent figures—regardless of the nature of their historical role or the relative value of their deeds or misdeeds—are granted equal significance. No value judgments are made, no irony accompanies the dance of Pauline and Toussaint or the appearance of a masque of military officers dressed as maroons. The juxtaposition of the incongruous, irreconcilable images of the Haitian military, with their record of betrayal of the people, and the maroons who led the struggle for Haitian independence, is characteristic of the profound contradictions that abound in Depestre's representation of history.

This dance of history, which Depestre presents as Jacmel's reverential tribute to the white,

virginal Hadriana, further exacerbates the novel's failure to assign differing values to the historical figures he conjures. The people's cult of the dead Hadriana, "whom they loved and admired as a fairy" (Depestre [1988], 51),¹⁷ seems to render null and void the struggle for independence from white control incarnated in the figures of Pétion, Louverture, and Christophe, here seen dancing in homage around the white woman's coffin. Furthermore, in an odd disavowal of the chronicle of hurricanes, political intrigues, and collapses in the international price of coffee that led to the downward turn in Jacmel's prosperity in the mid-twentieth century, Depestre attributes the city's decline to Hadriana's disappearance, an event that plunges Jacmel into precipitous decay, leaving the city adrift in a sea of woes: "Together with the beauty of his daughter, time, hope, doubt, reason, compassion, tenderness, the rage to live, had also evaporated from the town of Jacmel. It seemed to have surrendered to a somber fate, tossed by waves of evil tribulations which included, in equally devastating measure, unappeasable agents of desolation and ruin, fire, hurricanes, drought, the presidency-for-life, malaria, the State, erosion, the homo papadocus, all blending into each other in a sort of unstoppable osmosis" (Depestre [1988], 111).¹⁸

This fable of Hadriana's impact on Jacmel reads like a return to archaic and superseded myths of white goddesses, symbols of fertility and bounty, whose disappearance brings withering and extinction. Jacmel's decline following Hadriana's disappearance is reminiscent of Clitandre's portrayal of the almost cosmic drought that follows the theft of the comb belonging to the Rivermaid, the white Wanderer of *La cathédrale du mois d'août*. The Wanderer's impatience to recover her lost treasure leads her to an unholy alliance with the directors of the *Incorrperaytid*; this alliance, aimed at squeezing the life out of the slum dwellers, results in conditions very similar to those of Jacmel's devastation. The two episodes, however, are treated quite differently. Depestre's text abandons the people of Jacmel to their sad fates, for they are reduced to embodying the narrator's sense of personal desolation at the loss of his beautiful object of desire. This depiction contrasts sharply with the struggle of Clitandre's people to regain their precious source of water, a struggle that ends with the stoning to death of the Wanderer, whose shapeless body is left lying in the dust.

Depestre's representation of the devastating impact of Hadriana's death on Jacmel is rendered ironic and illogical when we learn that, through the decades of Jacmel's sorrowful decay, Hadriana was in fact alive. She managed to flee the sorcerer who had attempted to zombify her and enjoyed relative prosperity in Jamaica, where she had settled with the dowry that was still pinned to her wedding gown when she was buried. The irony intensifies when the reader realizes that the narrator's fulfillment of his erotic quest is in no way conducive to Jacmel's deliverance from the accursed state prompted by her disappearance. Depestre, however, circumvents the legitimate questions posed by Haiti's painful historical legacy as seen through the fate of Jacmel, declaring them to be of lesser importance than the solution of his erotic quest. The tale ends with the assertion that the final reunion of Hadriana and the narrator signals the end of the need for a "historical"

¹⁷ qu'ils aimaient et l'admiraient comme une fée (Depestre [1988], 51).

¹⁸ Avec la beauté de sa fille, le temps, l'espoir, le doute, la raison, la compassion, la tendresse, la rage de vivre s'étaient également évaporées de la terre jacmélienne. Celle-ci paraissait assujettie à une sombre destinée, ballotée par des vagues de vicissitudes malignes où intervenaient, à parts aussi dévastatrices, fauteurs inassouvis de désolation et de ruines, à la fois le feu, le cyclone, la sécheresse, le pian, la présidence à vie, le paludisme, l'État, l'érosion, l'homo papadocus, soumis entre eux aux échanges d'une sorte d'osmose inéluctable (Depestre [1988], 111).

narrative, since "we have chosen to hold to the belief that the joys and sorrows of love have no history" (Depestre [1988], 191).¹⁹

When Depestre actually ponders the question of the significance of Haitian history, to which an entire chapter is dedicated, the question posed is one familiar to readers of his earlier work, that of whether the Haitian people can be seen as a collective zombi. Depestre represents zombification as the apparent dissociation of the people's body from their will, the result of the brutality of slavery and racist masquerade that assigned positive and negative essences to skin color. This is a dangerous notion in that it debases the Haitian people to "the category of human cattle, malleable, pliable to one's will" (Depestre [1988], 128),²⁰ denying the people's centuries-long history of struggle against natural calamities, dictatorship, and repression which, however unsuccessful, has been nonetheless real. In Depestre's presentation, however, the Haitian zombi emerges as the "biological fuel par excellence, what is left of Caliban after the loss of his identity, his life having been literally cut in two: the *gros bon ange* of muscular strength condemned to eternal forced labor; the *petit bon ange* of wisdom and light, of guilelessness and dreams, exiled forever into the first empty bottle found lying around ..." (Depestre [1988], 130).²¹ The peculiarities of this view of history, which strips the Haitian people of any possibility of self-determination, are underscored by Hadriana's own escape from zombification, which implies that Hadriana, being white, beautiful, and rich, can quickly recover her will, whereas the Haitian people because they are black, gullible, and poor, are trapped in zombidom forever. This depiction of the Haitian people as zombis negates any possibility of their transcending a history of postcolonial poverty and political repression since, as zombis, the Haitian people are incapable of rebellion: "'Let's join our *gros bons anges* in a struggle for freedom': those are words one is not likely to hear from a zombi's mouth" (Depestre [1988], 131).²²

Thus, in *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*, the carnivalesque does not fulfill its metaphorical function as the expression of the people's thirst for freedom. Depestre's exploration of the history of the Haitian people diminishes them as zombified, will-less creatures, and carnival, usually a symbol of rebirth, emerges as merely a festival of resurrection for Hadriana, a failed effort to "wrench Nana from death and to light the star of her flesh in our lives" (Depestre [1988], 77).²³ The narrator dismisses the historical questions as less important than his concern for Hadriana's fate: "Set aside these disquisitions so falsely imbued in mythology and in the sociology of decolonization. For the second time in your life Hadriana Siloé knocks at your door in the middle of the night. Get up and bring back the loved one to the home of her childhood!" (Depestre [1988], 133).²⁴

¹⁹ nous avons préféré nous ranger à la croyance que les travaux et les jours fastes de l'amour n'ont pas d'histoire... (Depestre [1988], 191).

²⁰ ...dans la catégorie d'un bétail humain taillable et corvéable à merci (Depestre [1988], 128).

²¹ combustible biologique par excellence, ce qui reste de Caliban après la perte de son identité, sa vie étant littéralement coupée en deux: le gros bon ange de l'effort musculaire condamné aux travaux forcés à perpète; le petit bon ange du savoir et des lumières, de la candeur et du rêve, exilé à jamais dans la première bouteille vide qui tomberait sous la main (Depestre [1988], 130).

²² Joignons nos gros bons anges à une action pour la liberté: voilà des paroles qu'on n'est pas prêt d'entendre dans la bouche d'un zombi (Depestre [1988], 131).

²³ arracher Nana de la mort et d'allumer l'étoile de sa chair dans notre vie (Depestre [1988], 77).

²⁴ Laisse tomber la mise en forme de ces propositions faussement féruées de mythologie et de sociologie de la décolonisation. Pour la deuxième fois en une vie, Hadriana Siloé frappe à ta porte en pleine nuit. Lève-toi et ramène l'être aimé à la maison de son enfance! (Depestre [1988], 133).

Depestre's tale of the "dead" white virgin opens with a carnivalesque metamorphosis: that of Balthazar Granchiré's transformation into a highly-sexed butterfly, a sort of winged phallus that goes on a rape rampage, ravaging unsuspecting young women as they sleep. This example of the grotesque in the text, of the carnivalesque preeminence of the "lower bodily stratum," is the most blatant, though by no means the only example of the deeply-rooted sexism that pervades the novel. Granchiré's metamorphosis, presumably the punishment for his sexual transgression with a sorcerer's *femme-jardin*, ironically (and illogically) gives him license to unleash his sexual powers on unsuspecting women, allowing both him and the text to debase women by turning them into victimized sex objects. Forced sexual "joy" is the fate of the women who fall prey to the butterfly: "The most spellbinding orgasms will wreak havoc in the beautiful lives that your satan of a phallus will have bowed to your pleasure" (Depestre [1988], 26).²⁵ This objectification of women is bolstered by the portrayal of Hadriana as Sleeping Beauty, a lifeless, inanimate, passively awaiting sex object. Depestre conscientiously "saves" her from Granchiré's erotic rampage—the only young woman in the novel not "savagely deflowered"—saving her for the narrator's ultimate pleasure at the end of the text.

The false eroticism of the text, false to the degree that it objectifies female sexuality and is built on male-centered fantasies of erotic dominance, is linked to racially-determined attitudes on sexuality. The text is overly concerned with sexual relations between black men and white women. Not only does Granchiré, black male-cum-butterfly, ferociously attack white and mulatto women, leaving them covered in his semen and their blood, but the novel presents Hadriana's carnivalesque wake as a musical volcano that "reduces to ashes the legendary obstacles between Thanatos and Eros, overcoming the barriers raised between the sperm of black males and the eggs of white females" (Depestre [1988], 77).²⁶ The link between a woman's white skin and her role as desired erotic object is highlighted in Hadriana's meeting with the sorcerer who attempted to zombify her. His announcement that, once their copulation has been accomplished, "everything that is right side out in your life as a white female will be turned wrong side out to show its blackness" (Depestre [1988], 198)²⁷ suggests that Hadriana's whiteness will disappear with her virginity. Hadriana manages to escape that fate, but her deliverance only strengthens the connection between her whiteness and her continued role as desired virginal (i.e. white) erotic object. This validation of whiteness, presented for the most part without irony in the text, is stressed when Hadriana enters Jamaica without a visa since "white skin, even more than a diplomatic passport, was tantamount to a visa granted by divine right" (Depestre [1988], 190).²⁸

Depestre's text ultimately resists meaning, as it seems to strive to empty history of its content by placing the erotic quest above it. But the erotic quest itself is deprived of sense in the text, since it negates the free erotic *jouissance* of the carnivalesque in the name of the triumph of the grotesque phallic image. It is an erotic quest that places women in the same context as the zombified Haitian people, one lacking a will to revolt, the other lacking the freedom to desire. Depestre's depiction of

²⁵ Les orgasmes le plus ensorcelants ouvriront des débâcles dans les belles vies que ton satan de phallus aura réduites à sa merci (Depestre [1988], 26).

²⁶ réduisit en cendres les obstacles légendaires entre Thanatos et Éros, au delà des interdits jetés entre les spermatozoïdes de mâles noirs et les ovules de femelles blanches (Depestre [1988], 77).

²⁷ tout ce qui est à l'endroit dans ta vie de femelle blanche sera mis à l'envers nègre (Depestre [1988], 180).

²⁸ la peau blonde, mieux qu'un passeport diplomatique, avait la valeur d'un visa de droit divin (Depestre [1988], 190).

both women and the Haitian people in *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves* "re-colonizes the very semantic traps that colonial semiology has fabricated and that he has spent his life endeavoring to expose" (Dayan [1986], 583).

The "semantic traps of colonial semiology" are at the heart of Luis Rafael Sánchez's *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* (Macho Camacho's beat), 1976, a novel that recreates Puerto Rican reality from a critical perspective, reflecting a view of the island's colonized society as thoroughly hysterical, hyperactive, effervescent, parodic, and contradictory. The text is a carnivalized tableau of the country's reality displayed through a grotesque, parodic language made of elaborate transgressions, whose aim is that of dethroning the absurd hierarchies of Puerto Rican colonial discourse. In *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*, Sánchez builds a novel entirely on the unofficial elements of Puerto Rico's speech, a novel in "Puerto Rican" where almost every sentence is conceived as a breach of the established linguistic norms, a novel where language refuses to conform to middle-class conventions of respectability.

The carnivalesque quality of *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* is evident from the opening pages. The novel is structured as a radio disk jockey's long-winded introduction to Macho Camacho's spectacular hit song, "Life is a Phenomenal Thing." The other characters, all of them part of the d.j.'s audience, are stuck in one of the horrific traffic jams typical of the San Juan rush hour, and find themselves suspended in the narrow time frame between the d.j.'s introduction to the guaracha and the end of its playing time. The paralysis of the traffic jam, reinforced by the paralysis in time, functions throughout the novel as a metaphor for the effects of colonialism on Puerto Rican society, which is depicted as bottled up and irremediably obstructed. In Puerto Rico, "the successive colony of two empires and an island in the archipelago of the Antilles," all characters are "tied up, held up, caught up in a traffic jam as phenomenal as life Made in Puerto Rico, the tie-up is an active sample of the [Caribbean] capacity for obstruction" (Sánchez [1980], 5, 17).²⁹

His attack on the dominant discourse is Sánchez's best weapon against the alienated, bottled-up colonial world recreated in the novel (Gozo [1985], 127). This attack takes the form of a parodic representation of the people's subversion of the refined tones of official culture and speech. The novel interweaves the narrator's urbane and literate voice with the linguistic peculiarities of the Puerto Rican population: the upbeat and nonsensical language of the d.j., the seductive language of advertisements, the ever-changing language of the media-bombarded slum dwellers, the language of radio and television, of film and comic strips, the language of middle-class conspicuous consumerism, the language of popular magazines, the anglicized language of the americanized bourgeoisie, and the ideology-laden language of political groups.

This complex linguistic texture suggests the tone and style peculiar to the market or fair, "the special marketplace atmosphere in which the exalted and the lowly, the sacred and the profane are leveled and are all drawn into the same dance" (Bakhtin [1984], 160). From the initial "you" that opens the novel, the reader is reminded of the particular climate of the marketplace and of the figure of the barker addressing a crowd. His voice musters a force that negates the paralysis implicit in the traffic and time jams that frame the novel, counterbalancing them with a vibrant language, upbeat

²⁹ aquí en Puerto Rico, colonia sucesiva de dos imperios e isla del archipiélago de las Antillas... está atrapado, apresado, agarrado por un tapón fenomenal como la vida made in Puerto Rico, muestra ágil el tapón de la capacidad criolla para el atolladero... (Sánchez [1976], 13, 27).

like the rhetoric of the d.j. and the lyrics of Camacho's song, full of rhythm, of pulsating qualities that match the beat of the popular song: "It was said by a proper man: the country doesn't work, the country doesn't work, the country doesn't work: repeated to the point of provocation, repeated like the *zéjel* at the end of a *guaracha*: facing a red light that was black because the traffic signal wasn't working, the proper man indignant, his stomach contracted with indignation, his mandibles rigid: the country doesn't work. The passengers signed up in two opposing parties: one a minority of timid people in agreement and the other a vociferous majority who proceeded to intone with a verve reserved for national anthems Macho Camacho's irrepressible *guaracha*, 'Life is a Phenomenal Thing'" (Sánchez [1980], 11).³⁰

The novel's emulation of the beat and rhythm of the *guaracha* is used by Sánchez to conjure a carnivalesque sense of reality where hyperbole, lack of restraint, and the renunciation of logic predominate. Benny's reaction to having his splendid "ferruled Ferrari" stuck in a traffic jam, with all its intimations of the preeminence of the "lower bodily stratum," is typical of the carnivalesque use of language in the novel: "Benny proceeds to defecate on and on top of the maternal relations of a considerable number of virgins and saints... Benny defecates, relieves himself, moves his bowels, evacuates, pollutes, befouls, and all other synonyms that proceed from the base, vile, vulgar infinitive *to shit* on the gentilics, appellatives, and patronyms of the honorable people who earned us the choice between heaven and hell. Saint Philigonus, Saint Ausentius, Saint Spiridon, along with their mothers: shat upon. Saint Salome, Saint Tullia, Saint Leocadia, along with their mothers: shat upon" (Sánchez [1980], 52).³¹ Yet the reverberating quality comes not from the character's own language, but from the narrator's display of linguistic versatility. The language of the characters is as empty and alienating as the mass-media models it emulates, a language laden with clichés, molded on the rhythmic but repetitious message of commercial jingles, popular songs, and tabloid magazines—an alienated language seemingly devoid of power to serve as a vehicle for growth and rebirth. In its rhythm overpowers content, functioning as a veil that masks the unsound values of a colonial reality. "Life is a phenomenal thing" becomes the national anthem of a population too alienated to recognize that "the country doesn't work."

And indeed the country portrayed by Sánchez "doesn't work." There is nothing at all phenomenal about Puerto Rico as portrayed in the novel. It is a contradictory, paradoxical, absurd, erratic, mercurial society where injustice, abuse, and lack of communication prevail, so that nothing is resolved in a conciliatory synthesis, but in the violent confrontation of opposite forces (Gozo [1985], 125). It is a society of separations and difference where the disparity and isolation of the characters are taken to grotesque extremes. Thus the text allows no communication between the characters, except for the link provided by their listening to the same radio station. Their isolation

³⁰ Lo dijo un hombre hecho y derecho: el país no funciona, el país no funciona, el país no funciona; repetido hasta la provocación, repetido como *zéjel* de *guaracha*; frente a la luz roja que era negra porque el semáforo no funcionaba, indignado el hombre hecho y derecho, el estómago contraído por la indignación, las mandíbulas rígidas: el país no funciona. Los pasajeros incibieron dos partidos contendientes: uno minoritario de asentientes tímidos y otro vociferante que procedió a entonar, con brío reservado a los himnos nacionales, la irreprimible *guaracha* del Macho Camacho, "la vida es una cosa fenomenal..." (Sánchez [1976], 21).

³¹ Benny procede a defecarse en y sobre la parentela maternal de un número considerable de vírgenes y santos... Benny defeca, exonera el cuerpo, depone, evacua, obra, ensucia y demás sinónimos procedentes del bajuno, soez, grosero infinitivo *cagar* en los gentilicios, apelativos y patronímicos de la gente honorable que ganó para nos la opción de la gloria y el infierno. San Filigonio, San Ausencio, San Espiridón, junto a sus madres: cagados. Santa Salomé, Santa Tullia, Santa Leocadia, junto a sus madres: cagadas (Sánchez [1976], 68-69).

in space emphasizes their social isolation: that of the senator's mistress, impatiently awaiting her delayed *laboris fornicatio*, fearful that she may miss her idol Iris Chacón's TV show once again; that of Benny, apologizing to his car because Puerto Rico "hasn't got the autostrada that was built for the smooth flow of Ferraris by the immortal Benito Mussolini" (Sánchez [1980], 106);³² that of Graciela Alcántara de Montefrío, "most ladylike lady" perusing a life-styles-of-the-rich-and-famous magazine that reminds her of her youthful flight to a Swiss finishing school to escape the insular vulgarity "which it was, is, and will be a Christian duty to flee" (Sánchez [1980], 35).³³ They are separated by the overwhelming social barrier of their widely diverging relationships to official language and culture.

The language privileged by Sánchez in the novel, the language of the people, is the Rabelaisian language of the marketplace—that of unofficial culture, the language of the have-nots. Although parodied (sometimes mercilessly) by the narrator, this language offers, in its subversion of official Spanish and textbook English, an example of the Puerto Rican people's capacity to carnivalize official culture and the foreign models it imposes. It is characterized chiefly by its protean quality, its capacity for constant renewal, its ability to continuously parody itself. It is a language with an unrealized potential to be an agent of change, unrealized here because it is at the service of an alienating mass-media message that the novel counsels us to reject.

The language of the upper classes, on the other hand, is founded on the principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and the lower never merge. These upper classes reject the popular song form of the guaracha, its language and its proletarian perspective. The senator, catching himself in the act of singing its refrain, feels the guaracha on him like a taint: "Macho Camacho's guaracha, its vulgar furor, has tainted him, contaminated him, laid him waste: high or low, a little or a lot, the guaracha: a tiara of vulgarity, a headdress of trash, a banner of the rabble, has alighted on his lips" (Sánchez [1980], 122).³⁴

This linguistic polarization is used by Sánchez to emphasize the economic and social polarization of Puerto Rico; it is linked to patterns of class exploitation addressed in the novel through the labyrinthine aspects of the island's sexual mores. The characters' very sense of being seems bound up in their erotic personas. The senator is overly concerned with his "established credentials as a tempestuous lover and (his) widespread fame as a meticulous wooer" (Sánchez [1980], 18).³⁵ His mistress draws her assurance from having "more than enough studs who want to mount me for myself and five other women" (Sánchez [1980], 8),³⁶ while his wife Graciela is not "the kind of lady who considers *that* important," pronouncing the pronoun with moral repugnance, tying it up with "knots of sacred disgust" (Sánchez [1976], 137).³⁷ These highly stereotypical characterizations of the Latin lover, the tempestuous mulatto woman, and the frigid white wife are used by Sánchez

³² porque le falta, porque no tiene la autostrada que construyó para el deslizamiento de los Ferrari el inmortal Benito Mussolini (Sánchez [1976], 131).

³³ por la estrepitosa vulgaridad insular de la que era, es, será rigor cristiano huir (Sánchez [1976], 49).

³⁴ La guaracha del Macho Camacho, su furor vulgar, lo ha maculado, contaminado, asolado, altito o bajito, poquito o muchito, la guaracha: tiara de la ordinareza, peineta de la broza, estandarte de la tuza, se ha posado en sus labios (Sánchez [1976], 151).

³⁵ y mi cartel establecido de amante tempestuoso, y mi fama pregonada de cortejo meticuloso (Sánchez [1976], 28).

³⁶ la machería que me quiere trepar da para mí y cinco mujeres más (Sánchez [1976], 18).

³⁷ yo no soy la clase de señora para la que *eso* es importante. Con repugnancia moral pronuncia el neutro y lo amarra con soguillas de un asco sagrado (Sánchez [1976], 168).

to explore the forces that have led the poor to regard their sexuality as one of their few marketable commodities. Colonialism, the patriarchy, the media's sex-obsessed messages, all coalesce into a singular stage where traditional and revolutionary sexual mores wage a battle for supremacy. In the carnivalesque twists of sexual exploitation in the novel, it is no longer clear who exploits whom since, while the senator seems bound to obsolete notions of macho performance, his mistress appears secure in the infinite marketability of her charms: "Sucking the juice out of his pocket is what I love. Plucking him like a chicken is what I love. Hypnotizing him in the wallet is what I love.... Sucking out his last penny is what I love.... That's it, that's it: make something out of her dirty work: dollars, dollars, dollars: hot coals in her eyes: dollars, dollars, dollars: malefic and hair-raising: dollars, dollars, dollars..." (Sánchez [1980], 64–65).³⁸ Sánchez allows the senator's mistress sexual freedom in her erotic liaisons (particularly with her three cousins Hugo, Paco, and Luis—named after the Spanish renditions of the names of Donald Duck's nephews) not enjoyed by any other character in the novel, all of whom seem paralyzed by Puerto Rico's stultifying gender roles. As the representative of the people's perspective in the text, her erotic openness mirrors the openness of the people's language, stressing their collective role in challenging obsolete and class-bound cultural patterns. By turning the erotic tables, and thus implying a reversal of the officially-accepted patterns of sexual behavior, the mistress joins the parodic spirit at the heart of the Puerto Rican people's carnivalization of official language to reveal the glimmer of the possibility of transforming Puerto Rico into a country that works.

Wilson Harris' fictional Guyanese *Carnival*, 1985, seems worlds away from the irreverent marketplace atmosphere of Sánchez's Puerto Rican novel. A meditative, evocative exploration of carnival as allegory, Harris's work pursues the distilled essence of carnival as the key to "free us from the absolutes that clothe our memory and to reveal a potential that has always been there for mutual rebirth within conflicting, hollow generations" (Harris [1985], 49).

Harris's novel is structured as a Dantesque descent into the "modulated Inferno, modulated Purgatory, of twentieth-century colonial limbo" (Harris [1985], 42). In this non-divine comedy of colonial history, the narrator (Jonathan Weyl) follows his old friend Everyman Masters, murdered in a London flat and now his guide backwards in time, into an exploration of the enigmatic and contradictory elements of the Caribbean past. This spiritual journey through the time and space of the "Caribbean Carnival of masks" should, as Everyman counsels Jonathan, reveal how the "fiction of Memory" is made of complex truths and falsehoods, of innocence and guilt, how it is fraught with ambiguity and characterized by the juxtaposition of opposites. The exploration of history as the "comedy of parallel powers," or "parallel of opposites," should lead to the "renaissance of Carnival to compensate the inexplicable demise of El Dorado" (Harris [1985], 18). Harris's basic faith in the possibility of a reconciliation of opposites is at the heart of his tale, and the novel narrates the quest for healing from the painful wounds of the colonial past.

Young Masters's journey into the past begins with the recollection of his rape by a curiously appealing yet sinister stranger whose heinous act opens the way to an understanding of the psychology of rape and conquest, planting in Young Masters the seed of "Ambition to rule," to

³⁸ Beberle el jugo del bolsillo es lo que yo quiero. Pelarlo como a un pollo es lo que yo quiero.... Chuparle hasta la última perra es lo que yo quiero.... Eso, eso: hacer ganancia de su enchulamiento: los pesos, los pesos, los pesos: brasas lucientes por los ojos: los pesos, los pesos, los pesos: maléfica y escalofriante: los pesos, los pesos, los pesos (Sánchez [1976], 83).

master a universe that had despoiled him. "The fiction of Carnival," the narrator tells us, "began indeed to gestate from that moment" (Harris [1985], 28). This "seed of trauma" had led him "to erect the obscure colonial status of sugar or rice overseer into Carnival prince of the world" (Harris [1985], 28). Masters's need to atone for his having succumbed to the lure of Empire, his guilt for having been an agent of the "imperial tribulations within the plantation," gives the novel its particular penitential and yearning tone. Masters sees his own murder as a just punishment that releases him from the uncanny guilt that had always possessed him.

This need for atonement, so central to the novel, is presented as the outcome of Masters's hapless moral choice. Confronted with what Weyl perceives through the many masks of memory as "the division between the two realms he had glimpsed through barred gates and segmented masks, namely, the realm of oblivion or absolute limbo and the realm of Carnival evolution into a family of spirit" (Harris [1985], 41), Masters had opted for colonial oblivion, only to be offered, through his acceptance of death as atonement, an opportunity to undertake his journey toward synthesis.

Thus the second movement of his journey returns him to the marketplace, the stage for history and class revolt. It is in the marketplace, according to Harris (and Bakhtin), that we come abreast of the "potential (the capacity within all of us to be born anew) in all regimes and civilizations" (Harris [1985], 48). Everyman Masters's marketplace is the stage for a confrontation between Lady Bartleby and Flatfoot Johnny, czar of New Forest's 1926 carnival, a confrontation emblematic of the problematic relationship between high and low that, throughout history, carnival has effectively (albeit temporarily) transcended. Czar Johnny's challenge to the authority of the mighty Lady Bartleby echoes Aldrick's dragon-challenge to the city of Port of Spain in Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*: "Lady you know how damm hard I work? You think you know? I move galaxies of sugar. You have no clue. You too proud to step out of me way. ME. Czar Johnny! You want to gaol me, yes, chain me to you but Lady I could burn you ..." (Harris [1985], 52). But Czar Johnny's "revolution" is aborted by the voice of caution whispering in his ear a warning about "the mutual devouring principle within a chained civilization," awakening him to the "omen of coming death for one or the other" (Harris [1985], 52).

Czar Johnny's failed marketplace rebellion allows Harris to address the symbolic relationship between carnival and the people's struggles for independence that has been so crucial for most of the authors discussed here. Harris attempts to reconcile the metaphor of carnival to Caribbean realities, seeking possible explanations for the history of aborted revolutions in the region. "Perhaps," Weyl tells us, "it was the foreboding that Carnival felt about independence for the colonies of the Inferno, an independence that would lay bare a variety of stigmata that would bleed in the 1950s and 1960s, but succumb to a brute hardening of the flame of blood, to tribal institutions that made all the more ironclad every ritual grievance of the 1970s and 1980s" (Harris [1985], 61). But Harris, very much in the spirit of Lovelace with whom he shares a vision of carnival, allows Johnny's failed revolution to end with the "presentiment of the androgynous miracle of carnival revolution" (Harris [1985], 65). This openness to Carnival's promise of rebirth and renewal echoes Harris's characteristic faith in the possible renewal of man, his belief in some intact though perhaps unattainable reality that is nonetheless an incentive to resist the "seductive death-wish," to "unravel the humour of the birth-wish, the humour of fertility that translates lust into imagination's harvest" (Harris [1985], 109). The question posed in *Carnival* is thus how best to proceed to unleash the liberating power of laughter embodied in the carnivalesque spirit, how best to transcend

a "colonial age lacking in genuine revolutionary hope and deceived by all sorts of fallacies and ideologies?" (Harris [1985], 90).

Harris's response focuses on the colonial age's failure to lay the foundations for a fulfillment of the promise of carnival. In Johnny's marketplace confrontation, the "transfigurative wound or revolution came within an ace of realization but in his immaturity, her immaturity, my immaturity—in the way we were locked into self-perpetuating order and primitive habit—the revolution eluded us again" (Harris [1985], 67). This elusiveness of revolution is linked in the text to the failure to recognize the people's complex relationship to the "tyrant-psyche," the "complex apprehension of the tyrant blood as native to oneself" (Harris [1985], 71). This is indeed the purpose of Masters's journey back to his own past, a ritual of self-recognition that reveals to him his complicity with the tyrant, his need to both forget and relive his previous choice of the "realm of oblivion" over "the family of spirit." Jonathan Weyl's journey into Purgatory, where he witnesses the drunken, oblivious dance of the boulders in a haven of nothingness, awakens him to the paradox of memory—to the seemingly contradictory need to reach for and resist oblivion: "How could I participate in movements for release," he asks himself, "if I have been released so absolutely that I forfeit the memory, the process, the life, the struggle for ongoing release?" (Harris [1985], 109). The key to the "Renaissance of carnival" is thus to be found in recognition and forgiveness, and is embodied in the child entrusted to Weyl and his wife on his return from his descent into Masters's "Carnival theater." The girl, born to Jane Fisher, the reincarnation of Masters's first would-be murderer, nine months after Masters's death, "represents the transformation of vindictiveness into hope, Harris's unquenchable faith in the capacity of the human imagination to retrieve the seeds of a fruitful union between the antagonists of historical confrontations" (Maes-Jelinek [1985], 92), a recovery of the true carnival spirit that had appeared lost forever in the oblivion of the twentieth-century colonial limbo.

From Marshall to Harris, the varied manifestations of the relationship between carnival and our understanding of the struggles of Caribbean peoples attests to the festival's hold on the creative imagination as a symbol of social and historical transformation. The very diversity of the manifestations of the carnivalesque/grotesque is in itself proof of the enduring power of carnival and the grotesque to unchain "inventive freedom" in the service of the destruction of old pre-conceived notions of history and the world. Marshall's carnival is a "revolution in itself." Lovelace's dragon dance is the expression of the people's latent capacity to revolt. Clitandre presents the ever-new image of the people as an indestructible body. Sarduy gives us an alienating carnival of mirrors. Depestre has lost faith in the carnivalesque body's return from zombification. Sánchez glories in the irreverent language of the marketplace. Finally, Harris creates an allegory of carnival as repository of the people's dormant capacity for synthesis and revival. The revolutionary spirit of carnival, with its roots in the Caribbean people's struggle for freedom from slavery and colonial control, paves the way for the expression of a new free and critical historical consciousness.

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Don Juan and Christopher
legendary seducer with his
old couple has taken the
Seduce. 1576, to a very fine
Seduce), 1630. In his eye
Columbus. Two Belgian
Michel de Ghelderode, W
and Christopher Columbus
Ghelderode's *Christopher*
evening of pure Don Juan
Moutherian derived from
inhabitants of the New World
later Moutherian's Don Juan
minor French author Don
Don Juan and Columbus

This juxtaposition of
blurring of myth and real
cultural heritage that we
fictional: On the other
achieved the status of legend
ever referred to as "a Ca
perhaps involved in the
to reduce us with the craft
Inherent in the idea of a
for all of us. Bearing this
seducer of the second in
responsibility for new being
beginning of one thing
through his ability to seduce
but far from ideal for the
the benefit and judgment of