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## Colonial and postcolonial Gothic: the Caribbean

Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him – all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men.

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

The Gothic – as Walter Scott observed in his commentary on Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* – is above all the “art of exciting surprise and horror.”<sup>1</sup> The genre’s appeal to readers, in Scott’s view, comes from its trying to reach “that secret and reserved feeling of love for the marvelous and supernatural which occupies a hidden corner in almost everyone’s bosom.” As it happens, this “literature of nightmare” (MacAndrew, *Gothic Tradition in Fiction*, p. 3) was, from its earliest history in England and Europe, fundamentally linked to colonial settings, characters, and realities as frequent embodiments of the forbidding and frightening. This mixed genre was still less than forty years old when Charlotte Smith – the eighteenth-century poet and novelist admired by so many in her time, including Jane Austen – set her novella “The Story of Henrietta” (1800) in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, where the terrors of the heroine’s situation are exacerbated by her atavistic fears of Jamaica’s African-derived magicoreligious practice of Obeah and the possibility of sexual attack by black males.<sup>2</sup> By the 1790s Gothic writers were quick to realize that Britain’s growing empire could prove a vast source of frightening “others” who would, as replacements for the villainous Italian antiheroes in Walpole or Radcliffe, bring freshness and variety to the genre. With the inclusion of the colonial, a new sort of darkness – of race, landscape, erotic desire and despair – enters the Gothic genre, and I here want to show and explain the consequences of that “invasion” throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

To begin with, the frightening colonial presence that we find in such English literary texts as Smith’s “The Story of Henrietta,” Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) and “The Grateful Negro” (*Popular Tales*, 1804), or Thomas

Campbell's depiction of African barbarity in *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799) mirrors a growing fear in British society around 1800 of the consequences of the nation's exposure to colonial societies, nonwhite races, non-Christian belief systems, and the moral evils of slavery. The fear of miscegenation, with the attendant horror of interracial sexuality, enters public discourse at about the time Walpole began the Gothic novel. Edward Long, in *Candid Reflections . . . Upon the Negro Cause* (1772), voices English anxieties that stem from the fluctuations of colonial power, the need to foster and simultaneously control black physical strength, the ever-threatening possibility of slave rebellion, and the potential spread of anticolonial, antimonarchic ideologies in British-held territories in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Note especially his description of the horrors of sexual miscegenation as an infectious illness:

The lower class of women in England are remarkably fond of the blacks; for reasons too brutal to mention they would connect themselves with horses and asses if the laws permitted them. By these ladies they generally have a numerous brood. Thus, in the course of a few generations more the English blood will become . . . contaminated with this mixture . . . this alloy may spread so extensively as even to reach the middle, and then the higher orders of the people, till the whole nation resembles the *Portuguese* and the *Moriscos* in complexion of skin and baseness of mind. This is a venomous and dangerous ulcer, that threatens to spread its malignancy far and wide, until every family catches infection from it.<sup>3</sup>

Alan Richardson has therefore argued that the literary representation of Obeah in British fiction "illustrates the power of representation to generate, direct, or exorcise" such fears of racial boundary crossing, functioning, in this exorcism, rather like the cathartic practice of Obeah itself.<sup>4</sup> A similar argument can be made for the introduction of anxieties aroused by colonization into the very fabric of Gothic fiction at a time when proslavery forces and abolitionists in England were engaged in a fierce ideological struggle about labor and race. Indeed, a number of eighteenth-century Gothic novelists were directly involved in the slavery debate: William Beckford, author of *Vathek* (1786), had inherited a vast fortune accumulated by three generations of Jamaican sugar planters and actively represented the interests of West Indian slave owners in Parliament; Matthew Gregory Lewis, when writing *The Monk* (1796), was heir to several West Indian plantations dependent on slave labor. Indeed, he would eventually address his own notions of plantation society in his *Journal of a West India Proprietor* (1834), after having included black slave characters as supporting players in his biggest Gothic stage success, *The Castle Spectre* (1797). Gothic literature would be invoked as often to give voice to the fears awakened by colonial realities

as it was used by abolitionists to dramatize the horrors and tortures of enslavement.

Howard L. Malchow has consequently argued, quite rightly, for a rereading of the nineteenth-century Gothic as responding to the “social and sexual, [but especially] racial, apprehensions of the literate middle and lower middle classes” in England (*Gothic Images*, pp. 4–5). Citing Mary Shelley’s extensive knowledge of Bryan Edwards’s proslavery history of the West Indies, he reads *Frankenstein* (1818) as echoing public anxieties about “other” races that were aroused by the Maroon rebellion in Jamaica in 1760 and the slave-led revolution in Haiti in the 1790s, ultimately claiming that Shelley’s creature, colored partly black, is, among other things, “Frankenstein’s Jamaican monster” (p. 191). Similarly, Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), as Malchow renders it, uses its Spanish Gothic and East Indian settings to explore the problems of personal and national identity that had become so central to British culture as the extent of its colonial holdings increased. Malchow’s analysis of British popular culture and cannibalism, which he links to allegations of sexual abuse of women by nonwhites, fear of miscegenation, and fascination with “perverse” practices such as sodomy, shows how myths that had originated in British folklore become racialized when seen through the prism of Gothic conventions and moved to a colonial setting. The genre often turned the colonial subject into the obscene cannibalistic personification of evil, through whom authors could bring revulsion and horror into the text, thereby mirroring political and social anxieties close to home.

The links between the colonial and the Gothic are particularly transparent in lesser-known, noncanonical works, where the textual devices are less successfully masked, as in the anonymous *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827).<sup>5</sup> This two-volume work, set in Jamaica, traces the career of Roland, a white preacher whose teachings about the equality of man and attempts to lead a slave rebellion are corrupted by his underlying desire to forcibly marry the daughter of a local planter. The novel, in its attempt to denounce Roland’s unnatural desire to overthrow the legitimate social order represented by the plantation, turns him into a “villain of Gothic dimensions,” whose “fevered mind twists increasingly towards violence as the tale progresses,” culminating in “nightmare desperation.”<sup>6</sup> A Eurocentric narrative haunted by the recent memory of the Haitian Revolution, it finds a hero in the black Obeah man, Hamel, who moves from enthusiastic revolutionary fervor to denunciation of the cause of revolutionary freedom. Hamel, a black man linked to his ancestral culture through his practice of Obeah, ultimately turns his back on “civilization” and sets out on a solitary journey to Guinea. In his ability to retreat to a mythical African homeland, Hamel is luckier than his

mixed-race counterparts in this and similar texts, the “Gothic Unnaturals,” as Malchow describes them, who stand in that contradictory space between “loyal subject and vengeful rebel,” the tainted product of the undisciplined sexual passions of their white fathers” and the “savage inheritance of their non-white mothers,”<sup>7</sup> whose fate would be the subject of many a Gothic tale.

More particularly, though, the links between the literary production of terror and colonial literature are vital to the slave narrative and the abolitionist novel – particularly Mary Prince’s *The History of Mary Prince* (Barbados, 1831), Juan Francisco Manzano’s *Autobiography* (Cuba, 1840), and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab* (Cuba, 1841) – where Gothic conventions play a crucial role in unveiling the atrocities of the slave system. Prince’s work, as is the case with many a slave narrative (see Winter, *Subjects of Slavery*), provides “a space for the safe rehearsal of pseudo-masochistic, erotic, and heroic fantasies” that bring it close to the titillating potential of some aspects of Gothic fiction.<sup>8</sup> The narrative’s deeroticizing of Mary Prince’s experiences through their insertion into the textual parameters of the sentimental novel, when coupled with the text’s display of Mary’s body as a site of torture – an “Otherness that seemed to make itself visible and willingly available for the reader’s gaze”<sup>9</sup> – displays textual tensions that reverberate across the Gothic genre. Robin Winks sees these tensions as responsible for turning slave narratives into “the pious pornography of their day, replete with horrific tales of whippings, sexual assaults, and explicit brutality, presumably dehumanized and fit for Nice Nellies to read precisely because they dealt with black, not white man.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in *Sab*, although a Romantic text with strong connections to the sentimental novel, Gómez de Avellaneda resorts to Gothic conventions, applied sparingly but effectively, to address the viciousness of the slave system and the radical nature of the black–white love triangle at the center of the plot. Manzano’s narrative of his own experiences of physical and psychological trauma, with its focus on unveiling the brutalizing effects of slavery, opens with the primal experience of being entombed in a dark coal chute as punishment, and this fall becomes the metaphor of his life – “a fall from grace, a precipitous downward descent . . . into an invisible nonbeing.”<sup>11</sup> As in Mary Prince’s narrative, Manzano’s emphasis throughout his text is on the inherent sadism of the slavery system, a cruelty projected from the individual slaveholder to the system itself, as we have seen previously in *Hamel, the Obeah Man*.

*Hamel* goes beyond Prince and Manzano’s texts, however, in its exploration of the mysteries of Obeah. In this respect it typifies how some of the least understood cultural elements of colonial societies since the 1820s are appropriated into the Gothic, where they are used to reconfigure the

standard tropes of the genre, either by the colonizer to be used in the ideological struggle against the colonial subject him/herself, or by the colonial in order to address the horrors of his/her own condition. The many Obeah men, “voodoo” priests, zombies, and sorcerers that people Gothic fiction, the many plots that revolve around the threat of mysterious practices associated with animal sacrifice, fetishes, and spells, all contribute to make of the colonized space the locus of horror necessary for the writing of Gothic literature.

The colonial space, however, is by its very nature a bifurcated, ambivalent space, where the familiar and unfamiliar mingle in an uneasy truce. Andrew McCann, in his analysis of Marcus Clarke’s Australian Gothic novella, *The Mystery of Major Molineux* (1881), argues that “the Gothicizing of the settler-colony as a site of repression also anticipate[s] the dynamics of an analytical process in which the critic unearths the ‘repressed’ of colonization: collective guilt, the memory of violence and dispossession, and the struggle for mastery in which the insecurity of the settler-colony is revealed.”<sup>12</sup> As in the myriad tales of *wazimamoto* (bloodsucking, vampire-derived firemen) that crop up throughout eastern and central Africa in the 1910s and 1920s – tales through which African men sought to address “the conflicts and problematics of the new economic social order” under a colonial regime growing increasingly more technological – vampires, zombies, and Obeah men have been uniquely positioned to represent the conflicts and ambiguities of colonial situations.<sup>13</sup>

Yet it is finally in Caribbean writing that a postcolonial dialogue with the Gothic plays out its tendencies most completely and suggestively. I therefore want to concentrate in what follows on the Caribbean as the premiere site of the colonial and postcolonial Gothic since the early nineteenth century. The Caribbean, it turns out, is a space that learned to “read” itself in literature through Gothic fiction. At first it appeared as the backdrop to terror, whether in travelogues, where it was depicted as the site of the mysterious and uncanny, or in histories that underscored the violent process that led to its colonization. But as the region’s various literary traditions began to emerge during the final decades of the nineteenth century, Caribbean fictions – often through parody – mirrored the devices and generic conventions of their European models. The Caribbean Gothic has consequently entered into a complex interplay with its English and continental counterparts in a colonizer–colonized point-counterpoint whose foremost concern has finally become the very nature of colonialism itself.

The perception of the Caribbean as a site of terror dates back to the myriad tales of atrocities committed against white planters during the Tacky Rebellion in Jamaica in 1760 and three decades later in the gory and brutal

slave rebellion that destroyed the colony of Saint Domingue in what is now Haiti. The Haitian Revolution, the foundational narrative of the Caribbean Gothic, as Joan Dayan has examined so perceptively in *Haiti, History and the Gods* (1997), becomes the obsessively retold master tale of the Caribbean's colonial terror. The birth of Caribbean literatures, particularly of the literatures of the Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean, is intrinsically connected to the exploration of the tensions and perversions of the political, economic, physical, and psychological bond between master and slave that, especially in Haiti, had culminated in widespread destruction and violence, rape, mutilation, and untold deaths.

Gothic literature – whether written in Britain or the Caribbean – in its attempt to address the violence of colonial conditions, has focused on this region's African-derived belief systems, chiefly Haitian Vodou, Jamaican Obeah, and Cuban Santería, as symbolic of the islands' threatening realities, of the brutality, bizarre sacrifices, cannibalism, and sexual aberrations that filled the imagination of authors and their audiences with lurid, terror-laden imagery. The Caribbean, as a colonial “dystopia of savagery and backwardness” replete with Obeah and Vodou practitioners, thus emerges in numerous texts published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries “as a tropical hellhole” plagued by superstition and witchcraft.<sup>14</sup>

In the Anglophone-Caribbean Gothic, the tradition most directly linked to British Gothic conventions, Obeah, as the African-derived religion most heavily represented in the slave population of the British West Indies, surfaces as the source of both uncanny magical practices and revolutionary fervor and violence. The term, given to a set of “hybrid” or “Creolized” beliefs dependent on “ritual incantation and the use of fetishes or charms,”<sup>15</sup> points to two very distinct categories of practice. The first involves “the casting of spells for various purposes, both good and evil: protecting oneself, property, family, or loved ones; harming real or perceived enemies; and bringing fortune in love, employment, personal or business pursuits”; the second incorporates “African-derived healing practices based on the application of knowledge of herbal and animal medicinal properties.” Obeah thus conceived is not a religion as such but “a system of beliefs grounded in spirituality and the acknowledgment of the supernatural and involving aspects of witchcraft, sorcery, magic, spells, and healing.”<sup>16</sup>

The practice of Obeah, seen by British colonial authorities as a threat to the stability of the plantation and the health of colonial institutions, had been outlawed in most Caribbean islands since the eighteenth century, after being perceived as one of the few means of retaliation open to the slave population. Obeah men, moreover, were seen as potential leaders who could use their influence over the slaves to incite them to rebellion, as had been

the case in the Jamaican rebellion of 1760. “The influence of the Professors of that art,” wrote the authors of the *Report to the Lords* of 1789, “was such as to induce many to enter into that rebellion on the assurance that they were invulnerable, and to render them so, the Obeah man gave them a powder with which to rub themselves.”<sup>17</sup> Edward Long, after all, had already discussed the role of a “famous obeiah man or priest in the Tacky Rebellion in his *History of Jamaica*” (1774) – a work notorious for its virulent racism – and stated that among the “Coromantyns” (slaves shipped from the Gold Coast) the “*obeiah-men*” were the “chief oracles” behind conspiracies and would bind the conspirators with the “fetish or oath.”<sup>18</sup> This link is a salient element in the history of the Haitian Revolution, which included the Vodou ceremony at Bois Caïman, at which the leaders of the rebellion finalized their plans for their attacks on whites. This episode remains a central moment even in Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier’s novel *The Kingdom of this World* (1949), where it is related with many a Gothic flourish.

Obeah, then, as the primary conduit for an ideology of rebellion and for the communication of the knowledge of poisons, spells, and other subtle weapons to be used against the white population, is an ever-present element in Gothic texts produced in and about the West Indies. In West Indian literature it is most representatively portrayed in a classic text of early Jamaican literature: Herbert George De Lisser’s *The White Witch of Rosehall* (1929). Based on the highly distorted legendary tales revolving around the much-maligned historical figure of Annie Palmer, mistress of the Rosehall plantation, this novel gathers all the familiar Gothic conventions into a systematic, yet ultimately limited, critique of British colonialism in the West Indies.

De Lisser seems particularly concerned here with deploying almost every conceivable Gothic convention for the purpose of showing how, throughout the years, Annie Palmer had evolved into a mosaic of all the evils that could attend whites in the “nasty dangerous tropics.” The Palmer of legend, a young Irish girl born Annie May Patterson, had been orphaned at an early age and been raised by a “voodoo” priestess. This connection to Haiti, in De Lisser’s text, serves to underscore the unnaturalness of her character and upbringing – she was “white, lovely, imperious, strong, fearless,” and born with powers developed with the aid of friends well versed in old African magic – and to introduce a series of elements – necromancy, spirit possession, grave robbery, the role of the incubus, and the plantation house as haunted space – that have long been central to the Gothic genre. At age eighteen, Annie as a remarkably beautiful girl is believed to have used these skills to cast a spell on John Rose Palmer, master of Rosehall, to lure him into marriage, thereby bringing the threat of dispossession of the legitimate male plantation owner through the power of Obeah to the very core of this Gothic

text. By her mid-twenties – such was her reputation for fearlessness and depravity – she had poisoned Palmer, thereby gaining control of the Rosehall plantation, strangled her second husband, adding his estates to her Rosehall holdings, stabbed her third husband to death, and taken numerous slave lovers whom she is reputed to have killed as she grew tired of them. De Lisser, borrowing from legend, focuses on Palmer’s building of a balcony overlooking the courtyard of Rosehall, from which she would watch as she had slaves slashed to death, finding in the spectacle a source of titillation and sensual delight that becomes emblematic of her evil nature.

Palmer held control over her slaves and employees not only by bodily fear – “by dread of the whip and the iron chain” – but also by the threat of potent spiritual terrors, by the conviction she had instilled in them that she could summon fiends from hell at will and could beat down the resistance of any enemy through the secrets she had learned from her “voodoo” priestess nurse. This unnatural and unfeminine disregard for life, her un-British lack of respect for law and property, and her appropriation of the slaves’ own tools for rebellion through her command of Obeah, all accounted for her unmatched wealth and might. Her position, however, tied as it was to planter hegemony, lasted only until the historical slave uprising of the 1831 Christmas holidays, when dozens of Jamaican planters were massacred. Among the first to die, at the age of twenty-nine, was Annie Palmer herself, killed by a “voodoo” priest whose magic had not been stronger than Annie’s own and who sought revenge for the death of his granddaughter, murdered by the white witch. She had instilled such horror on the slaves of her plantation that they refused to bury her body, and a spell was cast on her tomb to keep her spirit at rest.

*The White Witch of Rosehall* blends the terror-producing aspect of Palmer’s command of Obeah with the familiar Gothic convention of the pursued protagonist by focusing the plot on Palmer’s murderous pursuit – through the deployment of her magical skills – of Millicent, an outspoken, free colored girl who becomes Annie’s rival for the affections of Rutherford, a young English newcomer to Jamaica. In her pursuit of Rutherford and persecution of Millicent, Palmer embodies both the frightening succubus of Gothic fiction, bent on awakening sexual desire, and the Caribbean *soucouyant* who sucks Millicent’s spirit out of her body until she becomes a soulless shell and dies.

At the very center of the plot of *The White Witch of Rosehall* we find a confrontation between Annie and Takoo, Millicent’s grandfather, a former slave and Obeah man and as such the spiritual and political leader of the Rosehall slaves. Takoo, as a free man still constrained by the structures of slavery and the plantation, must measure his powers against those of Annie,

a white woman, in their struggle for the life of his granddaughter, whose self-assurance in standing up to Annie Palmer as a rival for Rutherford's love stems from her confidence in her grandfather's position as a kind of sorcerer. Annie flaunts her superior skills as a witch in her dramatic defeat of Takoo, choosing to do so at the very moment that would have concluded his exorcism of the spell Annie had placed on Millicent. When Takoo can finally avenge his granddaughter – he strangles Annie Palmer to death during the slave uprising, in which he takes a leadership role – this revenge is only possible as a political act, as part of a revolt whose goal is to end the plantation system as they know it.

Over the years the legend of Annie Palmer, as preserved in *The White Witch of Rosehall* in all its Gothic qualities, has come to exemplify the morally corrupting influence of the plantation system, itself responsible for the creation of an environment where “only a vicious society could flourish.” C. L. R. James, writing about the French planter society in Haiti, described it as a society of “open licentiousness” and “habitual ferocity,” where the whites were accustomed to the indulgence of every wish. It was a society marked by the “degradation of human lives,” where men sought “to overcome their abundant leisure and boredom with food, drink, dice, and black women,” having long before 1789 “lost the simplicity of life and rude energy of those nameless who laid the foundation” of the Caribbean colonies.<sup>19</sup> The Annie Palmer of legend, a woman of voracious lust and uncontrollable brutality, embodies these negative “Creole” qualities of colonial and plantation rule.

*The White Witch of Rosehall* thus makes its Gothic antiheroine the supreme reflection of the colonial Jamaica that, as a slave colony, by its very nature incites corruption and sin. England, as the repository of strong and lasting moral values, is embodied by Rutherford, as principled and decent in his Englishness as Annie is debauched in her Creoleness, and who, as heir to his father's English and Caribbean estates, comes to Rosehall posing as a humble bookkeeper in order to learn plantation management from the bottom up. Seduced into a brief but intensely passionate affair with Annie Palmer, into whose seductive claws he falls resoundingly in his naive idealism, Rutherford must struggle to regain his moral strength and position himself as Millicent's protector in order to fight Annie Palmer's colonial reign of terror.

Ultimately, however, De Lisser's critique of plantation society fails to answer the very questions the novel poses about the nature of colonialism and slavery. Through the unfolding of the various interweaving plots of the novel, it becomes clear that De Lisser's critique of plantation life is too heavily dependent upon patriarchal sexual politics. The novel's focus on the evils of unbridled female power – a “corruption” by its very definition of the

“natural” power hierarchies of the plantation – and its resolution, which by “taming” and destructing Annie’s illegitimate power amid an aborted slave revolt allows the plantation system to remain essentially intact, leaves open (by means of Rutherford’s departure from Jamaica never to return) the whole arguable issue of whether it is the plantation system or an excessive female power within it that is pernicious in the colonial environment. *The White Witch of Rosehall*, in the end, allows the Gothic excesses of its heroine’s career to obscure the colonial evils that Gothic conventions served to expose so well in the text. In its corruption of Obeah, here reduced from its cultural and religious richness to trickery and charlatanism in the hands of a white witch, De Lisser finally diminishes the scope of his critique of plantation society.

In short, the traces of African religion and fragments of ancestral rituals that form “the kernel or core” of Caribbean cultures become in texts such as *The White Witch* the “mark of savagery” that justifies colonialism, while providing the required element for Gothic terror.<sup>20</sup> In other twentieth-century Caribbean Gothic literature, however, one can see this phenomenon operating most commonly in the titillating figure of the Haitian zombie itself, the prototypical Gothic bogeyman. Zombification, with the attendant horrors of necromancy, possession by evil spirits, and bloodsucking *soucouyants*, is the perfect target for sensation-seeking foreigners and readers of the Gothic.<sup>21</sup>

The mesmerizing figure of the zombie, the living/dead creature deprived of its soul and thus a Caribbean version of Frankenstein’s monster, consequently dominate the region’s writing throughout the twentieth century almost whenever it has any Gothic flavor at all. Zora Neale Hurston reveals a fascination with zombies to visitors and researchers such as herself in *Tell My Horse*.<sup>22</sup> Katherine Dunham, in her turn, seeks to define zombies in *Island Possessed* as either truly dead creatures brought back to life by black magic, “but by such a process that memory and will are gone and the resultant being is entirely subject to the will of the sorcerer who resuscitated [them], in the service of good or evil,” or as persons given a potion of herbs brought from ‘Nan Guinée by a bokor who “fall into a coma resembling death in every pathological sense” and are later disinterred by the bokor, “who administers an antidote and takes command of the traumatized victim[s].”<sup>23</sup> Zombies, Alfred Métraux argues, can be recognized “by their vague look, their dull almost glazed eyes, and above all by the nasality of their voice, a trait also characteristic of the ‘Guédé,’ the spirits of the dead . . . The zombi [thus] remains in that grey area separating life and death.”<sup>24</sup>

Research into the ethnobiology and pharmacopoeia of zombification (of which Wade Davis’s studies, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* and *Passage of*

*Darkness*, are perhaps the best-known examples<sup>25</sup>) has gone a long way to demystifying a phenomenon long believed to be solely the result of sorcery and black magic. Davis has demonstrated how zombification works as a form of “social sanction” administered in the service of Haitian secret societies – whose function is to protect “community resources, particularly land, as they define the power boundaries of the village” – so as to punish those who have violated its codes.<sup>26</sup> Disclosure by western researchers of the secrets and functions of zombification, however, has done very little to dispel the belief in Haiti that anyone whose death is the result of black magic may be claimed as a zombie.<sup>27</sup>

Zombification continues to be perceived in Haiti as a magical process by which the sorcerer seizes the victim’s *ti bon ange* – the component of the soul where personality, character, and volition reside – leaving behind an empty vessel subject to the commands of the bokor. Such a notion has done even less to allay the dread induced by the prospect of zombification. The various western horror genres may have made of the zombie a terrorizing, murdering creature, as evident by the number of horror films that have made the zombie the most recognizable Caribbean contribution to the Gothic genre in film and literature. Haitians, on the other hand, do not fear any harm from zombies, yet they may live in fear of being zombified themselves. In Haitian culture, Maximilien Laroche has argued, death takes on “a menacing form in the character of the zombi . . . the legendary, mythic symbol of alienation . . . the image of a fearful destiny . . . which is at once collective and individual.”<sup>28</sup> Zombification conjures up the Haitian experience of slavery, of the disassociation of man from his will, his reduction to a beast of burden at the will of a master. “It is not by chance that there exists in Haiti the myth of the zombi, that is, of the living-dead, the man whose mind and soul have been stolen and who has been left only the ability to work,” René Depestre has argued. “The history of colonisation is the process of man’s general zombification. It is also the quest for a revitalising salt capable of restoring to man the use of his imagination and his culture.”<sup>29</sup>

The figure of the zombie enters the Gothic genre in full force in 1932, when, as Haitian resistance to American occupation intensified, American film audiences were treated to *White Zombie* (directed by Victor Halperin), a minor classic distinguished by its elaboration of two seminal elements in zombification: Bela Lugosi’s portrayal of a Haitian “voodoo” sorcerer as a fiend who uses zombies as workers in his sugar fields (which links zombification to black labor in the colonial plantation) and the film’s focus on the ensnaring of a young white woman, the eponymous “white zombie,” by the sorcerer’s evil magic (which resonates with eroticized Gothic notions of sorcerers as defiling fiends). The terrorized Haitian peasant, transformed

into a terrorizing zombie lost in the depths of his own unspeakable horrors, literally comes to embody “a fate worse than death.” Stories of zombification in the Haitian Gothic, it turns out, combine the critique of colonization that we have seen in Obeah-centered tales, the allegorical impulse manifest in the identification of slavery and colonization with zombification, and the threat of defilement of the heroine all as standard ingredients of the colonial Gothic.

If such legacies of the Haitian Revolution form the master-narrative for the Gothic representation of slave revolt in the Caribbean, the tale of Marie M. is the master-tale from which most Gothic accounts of zombification derive.<sup>30</sup> Called by Zora Neale Hurston “the most famous Zombie case of all Haiti,” it is the story of the death in 1909 of a young upper-class woman from Port-au-Prince who died of loss of blood at the hands of her grandmother “and a prominent man.” Buried with much pomp, Marie was nonetheless found five years later in a rural town, wild, unkempt, and demented. Her coffin was dug up, and in it was found the wedding dress in which she had been buried, but the remains proved to be those of a man. Métraux tells his own version, about a girl from Marbial, engaged to a young man she very much loved, who was “unwise enough to reject – rather sharply – the advances of a powerful *hungan*.”<sup>31</sup> The spurned lover uttered numerous threats, and a few days later the girl was suddenly taken ill and died in the hospital at Jacmel. Some months after her burial, unconfirmed rumors spread of her having been seen in the company of the *houngan*, and a few years later, during the antisuperstition campaign, the *houngan* is said to have repented and returned the girl to her home, “where she lived for a long time without ever recovering her sanity.” Arthur Holly, a Haitian doctor who claimed to have treated the young woman in question, offered his own version in *Les Däimons du culte Voudou et Dra-Po* (1918): “The young daughter of our intimate friends was believed to be dead and was consequently buried. She was disinterred by a Vodou practitioner and recalled from her state of apparent death three days after the funeral. She is alive today and lives abroad.”<sup>32</sup> C.-H. Dewisme, more recently, speaks of having found countless versions of the story: in some, as in Hurston’s, she had been discovered by former classmates; in others, friends of her family on a hunting trip had come across her in a garden, eating with her hands “like a beast.”<sup>33</sup> Found to have completely lost her mind, in several of these versions, she had been taken to the United States, where she was examined by the most famous neurologists and psychiatrists, who declared themselves powerless to help. In despair, her parents placed her in a convent in France, where she died many years later.

Jacques-Stephen Alexis, one of Haiti’s foremost twentieth-century writers, consequently offers, in “Chronique d’un faux amour” (“Chronicle of a False Love,” 1960), the first-person narrative of a young zombie confined

to a convent in France, pining in her captivity and mourning her unfulfilled sensuality: “Here I have been for ten years awaiting my first night of love, the night that will awaken me and bring me back to daylight, the night that will wrench me from this uncertain and colorless hinterland where I vegetate, where my head rots between two realms” (p. 103, my translation). In Port-au-Prince she had been a beautiful, light-skinned, upper-class girl who had fallen in love with a mulatto young man of low birth but ample fortune. Taken on a visit to his adoptive father – a sorcerer and “former satrap general, and today a great lord of the plain, a grand feudal planter who cannot measure what he owns” (p. 135) – she falls victim to his soiling desire: “His gaze winds a forest of tangled-up lianas around me, a syrupy gaze that glides from my forehead to my nape, down my neck, my shoulders, running through my body like a cascade of ants with lecherous stings” (p. 137). Brimming with lust, he gives her the zombie poison to inhale in her wedding bouquet, and she collapses during her wedding ceremony, recovering her mobility when she is disinterred and the antidote is administered. Unable to escape her captor, she is condemned to live as a zombie, dressed in her white wedding dress embroidered in silver and her bride’s veil, until the old man dies and she is sent to her convent in France. Alexis makes the most of the entrapment motif to convey the claustrophobic psychology of Gothic space in this tale, both through the imprisonment of his narrator in a convent and through her prior confinement in a coffin and subsequent captivity.

Fictional versions of the story of Marie M.’s zombification, such as Alexis’s, posit sexual desire – the erotic – as a fundamental component of the zombified woman’s tale, hinting at, although rarely addressing, the urge to transcend or subvert race and class barriers as one of the elements of the sorcerer’s lust. The various accounts of Marie emphasize the girl’s whiteness or light skin against the sorcerer’s darkness; her wealth and position against his lack of social standing; and her buoyant, love-filled, wholesome desire against his sinister, debasing lust. This racial tension, this fear of miscegenation and interracial desire, has been an element of the Gothic since the earliest days of the genre. In a colonial setting, in an environment where racial differences have had profound social, political, and economic repercussions, they acquire greater meaning and significance, becoming yet another element through which the Gothic enters into the critique of colonialism.

The same elements reappear in René Depestre’s *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves* (1988), a text that, through similar intertwinings of zombification and the erotic, returns to the exploration of the connections between zombification and a critique of colonization already evident in Alexis’s text.<sup>34</sup> Set in Jacmel, Haiti, the story follows the apparent death, zombification, and carnivalesque wake of the beautiful, white Hadriana Siloé. This story of a

young woman's zombification and eventful restoration to a "rightful" lover, however, is the point of departure for a somewhat problematic meditation on Haiti's history that is highly dependent on carnivalesque imagery. There are plenty of Gothic motifs in the text, but they appear in their parodic form, carnivalized and thereby distanced from their traditional connection to horror and evil.

The text opens with a Gothic transformation, that of Balthazar Granchiré, who is turned into an incubus as punishment for his sexual transgression with a sorcerer's *femme-jardin*; but his metamorphosis into a highly sexed butterfly, a sort of winged phallus that goes on to ravage unsuspecting young women as they sleep, has too much of the comic, despite its deeply rooted sexism, to produce horror. The same can be said of the text's description of the carnival figures that dance in ghostly abandon around the young woman's coffin as it rests in the town's main square. Using carnivalesque ghosts rather than horrific ghouls, more Halloweenesque than phantasmagoric figures, Depestre in this parade summons 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 carnivalesque celebration of death 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 historical figures, regardless of the nature of their historical role, the relative value of their deeds or misdeeds notwithstanding, are granted equal significance. The juxtaposition of the incongruous, irreconcilable images of the Haitian military, with their record of betrayal of the people, alongside the maroons who led the struggle for Haitian independence is characteristic of the profound contradictions in Depestre's representation of history in the text. These contradictions negate the conviction of the existence of iniquity and vice that gives to the colonial Gothic – as seen through the symbolic representation of the zombie – its potential for historical and social signification. Zombification moves from horror to a *jeu de masques*, a carnivalesque parody which reduces to a senseless game of disguises crucial aspects of Haiti's class and race divisions.

The carnivalesque aspects of the text notwithstanding, Depestre's novel still ponders the question of the Haitian people's collective zombification through their history of colonization, slavery, and dictatorship. The notion, within the context of this parodic postcolonial Gothic, debases the Haitian people to "the category of human cattle, malleable, pliable to one's will" (*Hadriana*, p. 128, my translation), 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 zombie 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" (p. 130). This depiction of the Haitian people as zombies negates any possibility of their transcending a history of colonialism, slavery, postcolonial poverty, and political repression since, as zombies, they 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" (p. 131).

Depestre's hopelessness about the possibility of transcending the life–death symbiosis of the zombie-centered tale finds its counterargument in Pierre Clitandre's *La Cathédrale du mois d'août* (1980; *The Cathedral of the August Heat*, 1987), a text in which the Gothic elements parodied in Depestre's *Hadriana* reappear as vehicles for the reaffirmation not of the sorcery of the bokor but of the life-affirming and revolutionary qualities of Vodou itself. Although it focuses on John, a Haitian *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 their history and, with it, the source of precious water that can restore them to fertility and bounty. It celebrates hope and renewal through its emphasis on the carnivalesque and its faith in the regenerating and revolutionary power of Vodou.

Like Depestre's novel, *The Cathedral of the August Heat* is a hybrid text that blends the Gothic and the carnivalesque in its celebration and lamentation over the very materiality of the Haitian people's bodies. The hyperbolized, quasi-Rabelaisian grotesque images of the Haitian collective body are primarily olfactory: 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. These images blend with Gothic, frightful images of the body as a mutilated, rotting corpse. The text abounds in images spawned from political terror: crushed hands, burnt bodies, cut-off penises, roasted testicles, sores, the blood that soaks and fertilizes the scorched earth. Death haunts the text, and the people are represented as subject to ever-threatening plagues, natural calamities, and repressive terror. The Gothic resonance of these images notwithstanding, death and the dead body are depicted as stages in the renewing of the ancestral body of the people, not as the limbo of zombification. The novel treats individual deaths not as signaling an irrevocable end but as natural and necessary phases in the cycle of life. Death ultimately asserts life, thus ensuring the indestructible immortality of the people.

Gothic resonances frame the second part of the tale most of all, once it is introduced by the *vèvè* (sacred symbol) for Petro, an invocation to the spirits of wrath and revolt. The Petro rites in Vodou, born of the rage against the evil fate suffered by Africans transported to the new world and the wrath against the brutality of displacement and enslavement,<sup>35</sup> fulfill a function in this text similar to that of the Gothicized Obeah of British fiction of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: that of fomenting and sustaining the desire for revolt among slaves and exploited peasants. During the Haitian people's open revolt against the repressive authorities (Clitandre, *Cathédrale*, p. 123), the Petro *loas*, the gods of the Vodou pantheon 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. Clitandre draws upon familiar Gothic conventions in describing the intimate communication between humans and *loas* that leads to "Another shouting for armed resistance against the great epidemic of repression" (p. 122, my translation), and in conveying the horror of the fierce wave of repression that follows the revolt of the trade unionists. 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" (p. 128).

Even more recently, Mayra Montero, in her short story "Corinne, muchacha amable" ("Corinne, Amiable Girl," 1991),<sup>36</sup> returns to the Gothic tropes carnivalized by Depestre and Clitandre, turning them inside out so as to expose their sexist, racist, and political underpinnings. Young Appolinaire Sanglier, "wallowing in the despair of his love like a victim of a blood spell," seeks the aid of Papa Lhomond, a *houngan* who knows "how to work the living dead," to turn light-skinned and yellow-eyed Corinne into his zombie wife (pp. 836–37). Corinne, the daughter of a white priest and a prostitute, is coveted for a beauty that owes much to her being partly white. But she is engaged to marry a politically active deaf-mute, aptly named Dessalines Corail, and is disdainful of the love-sick Appolinaire. Her zombification on the eve of her wedding will be as much a punishment for her disdain as the means of guaranteeing that, after her marriage to Appolinaire, "she will not become such a whore as her mother." Appolinaire dreams of her as she will be after she "returned from the blue well of the deceased, clean and submissive like God intended, with the pale gaze of those who never think, without that scowl of disgust she gave him every time he came near" (p. 836).

Here Montero is interested both in deploying the familiar Gothic conventions to lay bare the zombification of women as an act of power over them and in linking this issue to the larger one of the Haitian people's struggle against the Duvalier government, here represented by the dreaded Tonton Macoutes, the regime's feared militia. Set on the eve of an election, with Corinne's fiancé one of the most active workers on behalf of an anti-Duvalier local candidate, the story juxtaposes Corinne's determination to choose a husband freely against the people's struggle to elect a candidate committed to social justice. Both will be denied this right. Montero never dwells on the pathos of Corinne's situation, so there is no sentimentality wasted on describing the fate of the brave young girl who has dared to challenge Appolinaire's desire and the Tonton Macoute's wrath. Her individual fate is not Montero's central concern; it is depicted as bound to that of the Haitian people. As she lies in a deathlike stupor in her fresh grave, with Papa Lhomond and Appolinaire racing against time to dig her up before she suffocates, the people, her fiancé among them, are brutally attacked as they seek to exercise their democratic right to vote. The description of the massacre has too much of a connection to historical realities to be read as merely literary:

Appolinaire slowed down. He noticed the half-severed necks and arms and concluded they had been killed by machete blows . . . When he turned the corner, without having the time to avoid it, he found himself facing a mob that was suddenly upon him, dragging him along little by little. Some men were sobbing loudly, their faces covered with blood and their clothes torn . . . He returned to his house near dawn, avoiding the soldiers piling up bodies on tarpaulin-covered trucks. ("Corinne, Amiable Girl," pp. 844–45, 846)

There is plenty of horror in descriptions such as this, but they slip away from the traditional Gothic almost as effectively as Depestre's carnivalesque images, moving the traditional motifs to a new realm of meaning.

The living dead remain a disquieting presence in "Corinne, Amiable Girl," another chapter in the narrative of the Haitian people's ongoing struggle for freedom from political and economic oppression. Montero denies the people's zombification through the very materiality of their butchered bodies, their "half-severed necks and arms." The dead bodies piled up anonymously on trucks and the still-living body of Corinne awaiting rescue into the half-life of zombiedom represent an unresolved historical quandary for which the zombie as metaphor can offer no deliverance.

Still, the Cuban-born Montero, a long-time resident of Puerto Rico, is, of all contemporary Caribbean writers, the most indebted to the Gothic tradition, which she has made her own, transforming the familiar conventions through her deep knowledge of Caribbean magicoreligious traditions and

her concerns for social justice. Montero, as she did in “Corinne, Amiable Girl,” appropriates the Gothic in *Del rojo de su sombra* (1992; *The Red of His Shadow*, 2001) to address the vicious and corrupt politics and African-derived religious beliefs that link the Dominican Republic and Haiti despite the enmity that has existed between the countries for centuries. In this, her most purely Gothic novel to date, she tells the disturbing tale of the contest of wills between the leaders of two Vodou societies – Mistress Zulé, an inexperienced but gifted priestess, and Similá Bolesseto, a notoriously violent and devious priest – and the disastrous impact they have on their religious communities, composed mostly of Haitians who have crossed the border into the Dominican Republic to cut sugar cane in slavery-like conditions. The world conjured up by Montero as a backdrop to this struggle is terrifying in its festering hatred, self-destructive greed, and sexual jealousy. The struggle, played out through the casting of spells meant to torture, maim, and kill, becomes more horrifying when the *loas*, those capricious Vodou gods, use the worshippers they possess during rituals as their puppets in bloody dramas of their own, with even more disastrous results.

In *Tú, la oscuridad* (1995; *In the Palm of Darkness*, 1999) Montero returns to the production of horror that served her so well in “Corinne, Amiable Girl” to tell the story of American herpetologist Victor Grigg, who, with the aid of his Haitian guide Thierry Adrien, is on a quest to find an elusive and dangerously threatened blood frog, extinct everywhere but on a dangerous, eerie mountain near Port-au-Prince. In the volatile and bloody setting of the Haitian mountains, controlled by violent thugs, by weaving together the stories and vastly different worldviews of her two protagonists, Montero uncovers a new haunting postcolonial space built upon the conflict between a scientific worldview and a more animistic one: the extinction of a species due to a collapsing environment; the troubled landscape of Haiti, peopled with zombies and other frightening, otherworldly creatures; political corruption and violence, senseless murder, sexual violence, and religious turmoil. In *Tú, la oscuridad*, as in “Corinne, Amiable Girl” and *Del rojo de su sombra*, Montero has reinvented the Caribbean Gothic, pushing the conventions of the genre from a critique of colonialism to an even wider engagement with social justice and political commitment.

Long before Montero, though, *I Walked with a Zombie*, a 1943 Hollywood film directed by Jacques Tourneur and loosely based on Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, was the first of many cinematic rerenderings of British Gothic texts set against a Caribbean background. Its young protagonist, Betsy, a Canadian nurse, comes to the fictional island of San Sebastian to care for

Jessica, the wife of a plantation owner who has been transformed into a zombie by a “voodoo” curse and is now a soulless shell, weeping eerily at night, her will at the mercy of the drums beating unnervingly after every sunset. As in *Jane Eyre*, the young nurse falls in love with the master of the estate, and the romantic triangle is eventually dissolved through the death of the zombie, who is shown to have been an unfaithful wife. This movie – described by critics as an “enchanted film possessed of a subtlety at odds with the conventions of its genre and a beauty which might be described as otherworldly” – is also at odds with its genre in its “imposing respect” for the supernatural, its positive presentation of Vodou, and its “evocative link to unstated themes of the island’s tragic racial history and the life–death symbiosis which governs the lives of the central characters.”<sup>37</sup>

Although the movie strives to shed light on the island’s history of colonial oppression through its representation of the realities of plantation life, it is visually dependent on the Gothic conventions that represent Vodou as that which is only half-comprehensible and half-frightening. The film’s longest and most haunting scene offers a catalogue of Gothic motifs as it follows Betsy and Jessica through the rustling cane fields to a Vodou ceremony, a true voyage of penetration into a strange and foreboding world punctuated by the increasingly spellbinding beating of drums. The cinematography, which alternates between shades of black and white as it tracks the women’s movements from light to shadow, outlines the image of their pale faces against that of the imposing figure of Carrefour, the black guardian of the crossroads, a zombie “who materializes with disquieting suddenness on their path.”<sup>38</sup> At the ceremony itself, the eroticism of the drumming and frenzied dancing of the initiates menacingly frames Jessica’s passive, semiconscious figure. Dressed in a robe reminiscent of that of a vestal virgin being offered for sacrifice, she steps into the vortex. The black bodies rustle past her as did the canes, their near-touch eroticized as emblematic of the forbidden, while her passivity makes her unable to forestall the taboo touch. Awakened by Jessica’s attitude to the possibility of luring her back to the *hounfort*, the mulatto *houngan* and his subservient female acolytes, in subsequent evenings, attempt to summon her with the drums, aided by a blond “voodoo” doll before which he performs a highly eroticized dance characterized by jerky forward thrusts of the hips and groin. Earlier in the film the cinematographer has underscored the film’s sexual imagery when he captures Betsy waking in the middle of the night to listen to the sound of Carrefour’s shuffling footsteps. As she lies in bed, she is framed behind the ornate iron grille that protects her window, with Carrefour’s phallic shadow standing threateningly against the wall that also holds a painting of a menacing, decaying Gothic fortress in the Udolpho tradition.

*I Walked with a Zombie* warrants attention in the present context because it is a thematic and visual reminder of how Gothic traditions rooted in British literature become relocated to a colonial setting. It shows how, in the Anglophone Caribbean (particularly in the work of those writers directly influenced by the novels of Emily and Charlotte Brontë), the Gothic tradition has come to provide a path to a fresh understanding of colonial conditions. The surprising number of Caribbean texts we can connect directly to *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* – from Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), V. S. Naipaul’s *Guerrillas* (1975), Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* (1984), and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and Rosario Ferré’s *Maldito amor* (1986; *Sweet Diamond Dust*, 1988) to Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) – span forty years of Gothic literature in the Caribbean, proof of a continuing dialogue through which Caribbean writers seek to reformulate their connections to and severance from a European language and tradition.

In *Guerrillas*, for example (Naipaul’s colonial rewriting of *Wuthering Heights*), the Trinidadian writer offers a version of the Gothic rooted in the conviction that the colonial system responsible for exploitation and terror in the Caribbean has left too deep a wound on the body and psyche of the colonized nation to allow for recovery. Naipaul’s postcolonial Heathcliff, Jimmy Ahmed, a pseudovisionary touted as a black leader in London, returns to his colonized island home in order to form a farming commune and repeat slogans he himself knows to be pointless. He dreams of becoming a “hero,” the embodiment of the fictional hero about whom he himself is writing a novel, the feared and respected protagonist of a ground-shaking revolt whose exploits would resound in the England he has left behind. His complex relationship with Roche, a former South African activist who has already written a book about his imprisonment and torture (thereby proving his heroism), and Jane, Roche’s English girlfriend and Jimmy’s would-be lover, mirrors in its turmoil and despair that of Heathcliff, Catherine, and Edgar Linton. In the bitterness of his Heathcliff-like sense of dispossession, Jimmy plans a revolt whose futility will only confirm the ultimate powerlessness and irrelevance of the resourceless islands of the Caribbean.

It should not be surprising that, in looking for British models with which to engage in an ideological/textual dialogue, Caribbean writers have found fertile ground in the works of the Brontë sisters. One motivation may be the vivid imagery and evocative environment of the Yorkshire moors as presented in *Wuthering Heights* (and to a lesser extent in *Jane Eyre*), an atmospheric richness capable of being recreated in the lush and threatening Caribbean landscape. These atmospheric correspondences are almost palpable in the Gothic renderings of the Caribbean natural environment that we find in West Indian novels set in Dominica, for example. Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso*

*Sea* – which uses actual characters from *Jane Eyre* as though it were a portion left out of the original novel – depicts the island’s riotous vegetation and dramatic landscape with an intensity that prompts Rochester, who has married the Creole Antoinette (later known as Bertha), to equate it all with evil. Lally, the narrator of another Dominican classic, Phyllis Shand Allfrey’s *The Orchid House* (1953), faced with the menacing power of the island’s nature, ruefully concludes that it offers nothing but beauty and disease. Jamaica Kincaid, in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, conjures up the world of Dominica not to recreate it in its physical or social nuances but to inscribe in it a casual cruelty, to superimpose on it a world in which the ghosts of colonialism still haunt the relationships of contemporary men and women. In her depiction of Dominican nature Kincaid’s narrator, Xuela, refuses to endow it with any semblance of positive meaning, stripping it of anything but cruelty and desolation.

Still, it is primarily in the haunting characters of Heathcliff and the mad Bertha Mason Rochester, both defeated “colonials” othered in their questionable racial provenance, swarthy and un-English, that Caribbean writers find their strongest foothold in the west European Gothic. The failed family romance of *Wuthering Heights*, the placid English domesticity temporarily shattered by the intrusion of foreign elemental passions, we must remember, lasts only as long as Heathcliff does. His obsessive haunting persists only until his death, when the marriage of the surviving heirs of Earnshaw and Linton restores an illusion of happiness and proper English complacency. In *Jane Eyre* too, where the death of the mad colonial wife is a prerequisite for the English heroine’s happiness, the English Gothic introduces the colonial as a disturbing agent, a haunting presence, only to dispatch him/her when the time comes for happiness-ever-after.

Jimmy Ahmed, as a Caribbean Heathcliff, embodies Naipaul’s profoundly pessimistic conviction that popular revolts such as the one his character is meant to lead are pointless gestures. Jimmy’s Caribbean and Jane’s England – as the text contends through its insistence on inscribing itself into the Gothic plot of *Wuthering Heights* – cannot escape what history (and literature) has made them: former colony and former imperial power, both societies mutilated and caught in cycles of exploitation. The revolt, when it finally comes, is a meaningless skirmish, and Jane’s brutal murder – a hollow gesture – only underscores the islanders’ incapacity for transcending the legacy of colonization. In *Guerrillas*, as Michael Neill has argued, “matching Naipaul’s indignation at the destructive legacy of imperialism, [there] is a deepening despair at the seemingly irremediable confusion left in its wake. It implies, in its way, a critique of imperialism even more radical than [others]: for it wants us to contemplate the possibility of organic societies damaged

beyond repair, of a world incapable, in any imaginable future, of putting itself together again.”<sup>39</sup>

Jimmy, stranded in his colonial Thrushcross Grange, trapped in the structures of Brontë’s text, is struggling for meaning in a society – and a text – that refuses to grant it. He wants to be feared, relevant, but from the opening pages of the book the text and its characters seem intent on depriving him of significance. “I don’t think Jimmy sees himself as Heathcliff or anything like that,” Roche explains to Jane, speaking of his having named the farming commune Thrushcross Grange, “[he] took a writing course, and it was one of the books he had to read. I think he just likes the name” (p. 2). Jimmy’s plight, however, is that of being caught in the structures of someone else’s plot – a sort of Heathcliff *manqué* – so much so that he is fated to a shoddier version of his model’s Gothic purgatory of violence and passion. At the same time, his antiheroic trajectory, being more flagrantly social and political than that of Brontë’s tormented hero, is played out on a larger canvas – that of the colonialism debate – and his ultimate defeat becomes a metaphor for colonial failure.

Naipaul’s dialogue with *Wuthering Heights*, however, is primarily structural and symbolic. *Guerrillas* mirrors Brontë’s text in its examination of the outsider as catalyst, and of his ultimate downfall as representative of colonial despair, but the author’s vision of the Gothic in this text is not stylistic. Naipaul is less concerned with deploying the conventions and motifs of Gothic fiction as an aid to his narrative as he is with larger structures of meaning. Jamaica Kincaid, in her turn, deploys all the traditional elements of Gothic fiction in *The Autobiography of My Mother* in a more elaborate and systematic critique of postcolonial society. In Xuela, her female version of a Caribbean Heathcliff, she returns to the model of *Wuthering Heights*, a seminal text in her own formation as a writer, to inspire the passionate intensity and atmospheric power of her nightmarish vision of Caribbean history. Xuela, fierce and fearless, is a defiant figure endowed with remarkable prescience and farsightedness. Gifted with knowledge beyond reason, she, like Heathcliff, can hear the unheard – the sounds of ghosts, spirits, and *djables* in the deep of the night – and understand the deep-seated cruelty of colonial and postcolonial relations. It is in her ability to detach herself from the passions surrounding her while paradoxically nurturing her own profound hatred that the character achieves her mirroring rapport with the passion-driven ruthlessness of her Brontëan prototype.

The world Kincaid creates as a setting for Xuela’s tale is one where all ties of compassion and affection have been severed. Kincaid, as Cathleen Schine puts it, “intentionally simplifies the life around her main character, rendering it free of all everydayness, purifying it until it sparkles with hatred

alone.”<sup>40</sup> In one of the novel’s earliest episodes, after Kincaid has established the bonds of casual cruelty that mark her relationships with others, the young Xuela falls in love with a pair of land turtles, the first things she admits to having truly loved. Yet she responds to what she perceives as their refusal to obey her commands by packing their necks with mud, forgetting them in the space where she has trapped them and killing them in the process. For all the narrator’s references to the cruelty inherent in Dominican nature, the text underscores that cruelty is not the result of an indifferent nature but of an historical process that has led to widespread moral deformity.

In a society where the colonizers’ historical narrative has silenced the vanquished’s version of events, the basis on which a positive identity could be founded, the only defense against an absence of history, Kincaid argues, must be an articulation of the wounds of forced silence through an eloquent, deafening denunciation of the evils sustained in the name of colonial expansion. In *The Autobiography of My Mother* this narrative of symbolic denunciation is rendered through the interrelated Gothic themes of motherlessness, lovelessness, miscegenation, and the differences between the languages of the colonizer and the colonized. Kincaid, in conceiving this tale of a daughter of a Carib foundling who has died in childbirth and a man of mixed African and European race who is torn apart by his legacy, refuses to inscribe Xuela’s tale in the world of romance, romance being “the refuge of the defeated” who need soothing tunes because their entire being is a wound. The Gothic is better suited as a vehicle for Kincaid’s stance of denunciation, linked as it is to her literary model, Brontë’s Heathcliff, and affording her a clarity of vision which Heathcliff would have envied.

The legacy of the Gothic in *The Autobiography of My Mother* can be glimpsed most clearly in the text’s handling of dreams and the supernatural and in the various ways it articulates notions of evil linked to colonial realities. The mother whom Xuela has never met, for example, haunts the book as she haunts her daughter, appearing frozen in a recurring dream, descending a ladder, only the hem of her white dress visible. Xuela, after a tortuous abortion that leaves her in a nightmarish daze, embarks on a phantasmagoric voyage of possession along the periphery of her home island, Dominica, a journey which she describes as her claiming of her birthright of the villages, rivers, mountains, and people. The lengthy passage, rich in the incoherence and surrealism of dreams, allows her to see her father’s face, in all its resemblance to the conquerors, as a map of the world that encompasses continents, volcanoes, mountain ranges, horizons that lead into “the thick blackness of nothing” (p. 91). The characters surrounding Xuela, like her father, perform their particular versions of evil out of a bitterness and hatred rooted in their plight as colonized and exploited victims. Her father, divided from his

own people by the very wealth he has accumulated through his emulation of the colonizers, leaves her as a baby in the care of his cruel and indifferent laundress; her stepmother attempts to kill her with a poisoned necklace. Her half-brother, weak and irresolute, dies from a debilitating parasitic worm, which fills his body with pus and emerges from his leg just as he dies. Her half-sister, an emotionally crippled, vengeful, envious, sad, and embittered woman, bears the crippling injuries she sustains after a freak accident as a mirror of her psychic scars. Moira, whose husband Xuela marries after her death, is a “waxy, ghostish,” lifeless bigot who dies from her addiction to a hallucinatory tea made of local leaves provided by Xuela, which eventually turns her skin black and leads her to a painful, agonizing death.

The Gothic nuances of *The Autobiography of My Mother* allow Kincaid to compose with vivid hues a fictional world in which the colonizer and his mimics are validated at the expense of the colonized, a world in which those like Xuela, clear-sighted enough to understand the evil impact of the process – to grasp it visually from watching its Gothic signs on the bodies of the defeated – must assume the task of building a positive sense of self out of the remnants of colonial destruction. Xuela’s narrative uses traditional Gothic imagery with striking effect to show what happens to those not visionary enough to reject collusion with a process that can only result in self-hatred and self-destruction. In her character’s refusal to accept the colonizer’s views of those like herself, Kincaid posits Xuela’s obsessive, almost grotesque self-love as an alternative to self-loathing and the pernicious effects of assimilation. That she can accomplish this through a narrative steeped in the traditions of the Gothic attests to the genre’s malleability and to the expressive richness it achieves in postcolonial adaptation.

Nowhere is this richness better displayed in a Caribbean text than in Jean Rhys’s rewriting of *Jane Eyre*. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the narrative of Antoinette Cosway, eventually the madwoman in the attic of Brontë’s work. Rhys’s exploration of Rochester’s exploitative relationship with Antoinette, the West Indian heiress whom he marries for her fortune, depicts the cultural and economic clash between England and the West Indies and the tensions between colonizer and colonized through a thematic emphasis on Antoinette as victim and on the Gothic mansion, Rochester’s Thornfield, as emblematic of patriarchal/colonial power. Nowhere has the Gothic mode crossed oceans more powerfully or in more of a sharp dialogue between the postcolonial and the English Gothic. *Wide Sargasso Sea* – a text remarkable for its evocation of landscape, its treatment of Obeah and the presence of colonial ghosts, its recasting of the haunted Mr. Rochester of *Jane Eyre* as a haunting Gothic villain, and its persecuted heroine – has consequently become a seminal West Indian text, spawning many secondary and tertiary

links between itself, Brontë's text, and a younger generation of Caribbean writers.

The critical literature on Jean Rhys, the Brontës, and the Gothic tradition is extensive. Critics have found the ramifications of the relationship between these very different writers – particularly Rhys's challenge of such a canonical text as *Jane Eyre* in the service of redressing a "wrong" in the narrative of/about the colonial – an endlessly fascinating exercise.<sup>41</sup> It is of particular interest in our context because so much of what brings the two texts together – besides the obvious echoes of characters, places, and plot elements – is Rhys's masterful use of Gothic elements, from her use of landscape as a frightful, menacing backdrop through her appropriation of Thornfield Hall as a parallel space to the Caribbean plantation house to her sophisticated use of race and Obeah as sources of unease and terror. Rhys's play with intertextuality allows her to transcend definitions and categories, to reformulate forms – particularly that of the Gothic novel – and to open the way for a seemingly inexhaustible possibility of meanings. Rhys's "violation" of Brontë's text, it has been argued, results in the breaking of the integrity of *Jane Eyre*: the "mother text is maimed, and in essence, disarmed."<sup>42</sup> Yet Rhys can also be seen as forcing *Jane Eyre* "to be measured by a set of assumptions outside those of the master quest narrative."<sup>43</sup>

Rhys's opening of European texts to a new type of critical scrutiny – the very realization that the canon, particularly the ever-popular Gothic canon, can be interpolated, accosted, defied, and even disregarded – has made *Wide Sargasso Sea* a "mother text" in its turn, opening the way for some remarkable intertextual correspondences between it and other Caribbean texts. Of primary interest in these correspondences is the presence of the Gothic mode, even among writers – such as Rosario Ferré of Puerto Rico – working in literary traditions with little or no Gothic elements of their own.

In *Maldito amor* (*Sweet Diamond Dust*) in the 1980s, Ferré establishes a thematic link to Jean Rhys – and through her to Charlotte Brontë – that underscores the importance to her work of recognizing a female tradition, a separate Caribbean and women's canon in which she can establish herself as a writer. In *Sweet Diamond Dust*, as earlier in her short story "Pico Rico Mandorico," a rewriting of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," Ferré pays homage to Rhys's pioneering literature, writing a tale which, although very much her own, resonates with echoes from *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys and Ferré share thematic concerns over the decline of the planter class in the Caribbean and the exclusion of women from sources of power in patriarchal societies. Ferré approaches these dual concerns in her novel through the possibility of transferring ownership of the Diamond Dust sugar estate, and with it economic and social power, from an old high-bourgeois family to the

mulatto nurse who has married the late heir. The problems of such a transfer manifest themselves vividly in the text through Ferré's highly Baroque prose and intricate, almost paranoid presentation of the intrigue, lies, misogyny, and manipulation that lead to the destruction of wills, deceitful renderings of history, and eventually murder, all played out against the backdrop of the ruin and bankruptcy brought on Puerto Rican sugar planters after the American invasion of 1898. What delights in this text is, above all, how well Ferré is able to incorporate into it, in ways quite Creolized and Hispanicized, a broad range of traditional Gothic elements that add texture and depth to her critique of Spanish colonialism and American neocolonialism. Her ambivalent exploration of her protagonist's potential madness, the mysterious circumstances of her husband's accident, the ambiguous nature of the presentation of erotic desire, the wariness that dominates relations across class, race, and gender, all serve to heighten suspense and awaken the multilayered insecurities and fears that link the text with Rhys and, through her, with centuries of Gothic texts. Gloria's setting the plantation on fire at the end of the text – an act that signals her refusal to participate as a woman and a mulatto in the corruption and exploitation of a postcolonial system – is also an act of identification with similarly placed Creoles of dubious racial and class heritages, as well as with Antoinette Cosway and, through her, Bertha Mason.<sup>44</sup>

This dialogue with the Gothic continues in present-day Caribbean writing, especially in writing by women. There is a passage in *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), Michelle Cliff's tale of how Clare Savage, the protagonist of her earlier novel *Abeng* (1984), moves from a quest for spiritual integrity into revolutionary martyrdom, when Clare picks up a book at random, a copy of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* brought from a second-hand bookstore. Her impulse to identify with Jane's plight – with "Jane. Small and pale. English" – is rejected in favor of an identification with Bertha –

Yes, Bertha was closer to the mark. Captive. Ragôut. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican. Caliban. Carib. Cannibal. Cimarron. All Bertha. All Clare.<sup>45</sup>

This catalogue of Bertha's possible signifiers – in a text where Gothic horrors are reproduced through the brutal futility of revolutionary struggle – testifies to the many ways in which the Caribbean and the colonial in general have entered into Gothic fiction as the frightful other, the defeated, the eerie, the disappeared, the dead, only to be transformed over the succeeding years. Clare's embracing of the marginal, her willingness to stand with Bertha in the midst of her own Gothic tale, is a powerful reminder of how the Gothic, especially in the Caribbean, has become a part of the language of

the colonized, appropriated, reinvented, and in that way very much alive in worlds far beyond western Europe and the continental United States.

NOTES

- 1 *Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction*, ed. Ioan Williams (New York: Barnes, 1968), p. 87.
- 2 For a discussion of Charlotte Smith's "The Story of Henrietta" in the context of West Indian Obeah, see Alan Richardson, "Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1787–1907" in *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, ed. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 171–94.
- 3 Edward Long, *Candid Reflections Upon the Judgment Lately Awarded by the Court of King's Bench, in Westminster-Hall, On What is Commonly Called the Negroe-Cause* (London: T. Lowden, 1772), p. 82.
- 4 Richardson, "Romantic Voodoo," p. 175.
- 5 *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1827).
- 6 Barbara Lalla, "Dungeons of the Soul: Frustrated Romanticism in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Literature of Jamaica," *MELUS* 21:3 (fall 1996): 10.
- 7 Cited from H. L. Malchow in Douglas A. Lorimer, "Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain (Book Review)," *Victorian Studies* 41:4 (summer 1998): 681–84.
- 8 Mario Cesareo, "When the Subaltern Travels: Slave Narrative and Testimonial Erasure in the Contact Zone" in *Women at Sea: Travel Writing and the Margins of Caribbean Discourse*, ed. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Ivette Romero-Cesareo (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 110.
- 9 *ibid.*, p. 111.
- 10 Cited in Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: the Development of Antebellum Slave* (London: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 45.
- 11 Miriam DeCosta-Willis, "Self and Society in the Afro-Cuban Slave Narrative," *Latin American Literary Review* 26:32 (1988): 9.
- 12 Andrew McCann, "Colonial Gothic: Morbid Anatomy, Commodification and Critique in Marcus Clarke's *The Mystery of Major Molineux*," *Australian Literary Studies* 19:4 (October 2000): 399.
- 13 Louise White, "Cars Out of Place: Vampires, Technology, and Labor in East and Central Africa," *Representations* 43 (summer 1993): 41.
- 14 James Ferguson, "*Haiti, History and the Gods* (Book Review)," *Race and Class* 38 (1997): 94.
- 15 See Richardson, "Romantic Voodoo," p. 173.
- 16 Karla Frye, "Obeah and Hybrid Identities in Elizabeth Nunez Harrell's *When Rocks Dance*" in Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Sacred Possessions*, p. 98.
- 17 *Report to the Lords of the Committee of the Council Appointed for the Consideration of All Matters Relating to Trade and Foreign Plantation* (London, 1789).
- 18 Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), II, 451–52, 473.
- 19 C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 27.

- 20 See Joan Dayan, "Erzulie: a Women's History of Haiti" in *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers*, ed. Mary Jean Matthews Green (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 21 Harry A. Franck, *Roaming Through the West Indies* (New York: Century Co., 1920), p. 164.
- 22 Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 179.
- 23 Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 184–85.
- 24 Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (New York: Schocken, 1959), pp. 250–51.
- 25 Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (New York: Warner Books, 1985) and *Passage of Darkness: the Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
- 26 See Davis, *Passage of Darkness*, pp. 8–10. See also Bernard Diederich, "On the Nature of Zombi Existence," *Caribbean Review* 12 (1983): 14–17, 43–46.
- 27 Davis's anthropological work, supported by scholarship and science, itself fell victim to Hollywood's craving for sensationalism where zombies are concerned. The film based on his book *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988; Universal; directed by Wes Craven, produced by David Ladd and Doug Claybourne) is replete with evil voodoo sorcerers, sexual torture, and cries of "Don't let them bury me. I'm not dead!"
- 28 Maximilien Laroche, "The Myth of the Zombi" in *Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature*, ed. Rowland Smith (London: Longman, 1976), p. 47.
- 29 René Depestre, *Change, Violence II*, 9 (Paris: Seuil, 1971): 20.
- 30 For a detailed account of the story of Marie M. and its many fictional retellings, see Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's "Women Possessed: Exoticism and Eroticism in the Representation of Woman as Zombie" in *Sacred Possessions*, ed. Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, pp. 37–58.
- 31 Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, p. 284.
- 32 *Les Daimons du culte Voudo et Dra-Po* (Port-au-Prince: n.p., 1918).
- 33 C.-H. Dewisme, *Les Zombis ou le secret des morts-vivants* (Paris: Edition Bernard Grasset, 1957), pp. 146–47.
- 34 For a longer, more detailed discussion of Depestre's novel see my "Authors Playin' Mas': Carnival and the Carnavalesque in the Contemporary Caribbean Novel" in *History of Caribbean Literatures*, ed. A. James Arnold, volume III (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1997), pp. 215–236.
- 35 Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 1970), p. 62.
- 36 Montero originally published "Corinne, muchacha amable" in *Cuentos para abuyentar el turismo*, ed. Vitalina Alfonso and Emilio Jorge Rodríguez (Havana: Arte y Literatura, 1991), pp. 285–306. My translation is cited here from the journal *Callaloo* in 1994 and is reprinted as "Corinne, Amiable Girl" in *Remaking a Lost Harmony: Short Stories from the Hispanic Caribbean*, ed. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1995). References in the main text are to the *Callaloo* version.

- 37 Blake Lucas, "I Walked with a Zombie" in *Magill's Survey of Cinema: English Language Films*, 2nd series, volume III, ed. Frank N. Magill (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Salem Press, 1981), p. 1094.
- 38 *ibid.*, p. 1096.
- 39 Michael Neill, "Guerrillas and Gangs: Frantz Fanon and V. S. Naipaul," *Ariel* 13:4 (1982): 54–55.
- 40 Cathleen Schine, "A World as Cruel as Job's," *New York Times Book Review*, 4 (February 1996): 7.
- 41 Salient studies include Anthony E. Luengo's "Wide Sargasso Sea and the Gothic Mode," *World Literature Written in English* 15 (1976): 229–45; Joyce Carol Oates's "Romance and Anti-Romance from Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 61 (1985): 44–58; and Dennis Potter's "Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and Jane Eyre," *Massachusetts Review* 17 (1976): 540–52. For an excellent overview of Rhys's career as a Caribbean writer, see Elaine Savory, *Jean Rhys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 42 Ellen G. Friedman, "Breaking the Master Narrative: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" in *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, ed. Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 122.
- 43 *ibid.*, p. 124.
- 44 For a detailed examination of the ending of *Sweet Diamond Dust* as related to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, see Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat's "La 'Loca del desván' y otros intertextos de *Maldito amor*," *MLN* 109 (1994): 283–306.
- 45 Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 116.

