From Faking It to Making It:
The Art of Cultural Adaptation in the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates tendencies of cultural negotiation and adaptation within a Caribbean context. Appropriately, it examines adapted texts, such as novel to film or biography to musical, and looks at sociocultural adaptive mechanisms as a means of coping with a colonial past and neocolonial present. Through my analyses of a variety of original texts and their visual adaptations, I map evolving cross-cultural perceptions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and cultural exploitation. While drawing theories from Adaptation Studies, I aim to promote a more inclusive, well-rounded logic of how cultural discourses in the Caribbean gain strength and are reified in culture.

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INTRODUCTION
INHERITING THE TRAIT OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION

The pages that follow detail a process of discovery; a quest, as much for the author as it will be for the reader. Caribbean culture is multifaceted, complex, and ever-changing. Its societies' ability to adapt to life before and during colonization, no doubt, has contributed to its rich cultural layers. Its adaptive tendencies are implied in many recent theories on Caribbean cultural identity, such as Cuban historian Fernando Ortiz's view of *transculturación*. Stemming from the cultural impact of colonization on the Caribbean, *transculturación* comprises acculturation, or the acquisition of a new culture; deculturation, the loss of a culture; and neoculturation, the creation of new cultural forms (Ortiz 90). For Jamaican sociologist Stuart Hall, identity in the Caribbean is shaped by constant transformation, adaptation, and evolution. In his words, Caribbean identity "belongs to the future as much as to the past," and "we cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about one experience, one identity, without acknowledging its other side" (Hall 394). By "its other side," Hall refers to its past, because its present maintains various cultural traits of its past affected by history. The present, in other words, is an adaptation of the past. In like manner, Saint Lucian historian Derek Walcott compares the Caribbean to a precious vase that was once shattered by colonization, but has been reconstructed with new pieces, or diverse, "cultural dialects" (11). Representing the lasting consequences of European colonialism in the region, the glue that holds the pieces together are its "white scars." In other words, this new vase is a reconstructed version of

the past that contains a fusion of cultural elements due to the shared suffering and resistance efforts of a plethora of Caribbean cultures. Anthropologist Sydney Mintz's creolization theory, similarly, describes the formation of Caribbean cultural identity through processes of adaptation and evolution. These processes, for Mintz, begin with the shared history of slavery, plantation work, the destruction of native populations, the coexistence of the masters and the enslaved in an unfamiliar region of the world, and the mixture of cultures and languages (191-192). Despite the fact that Ortiz, Hall, Walcott, and Mintz speak from different academic fields and regions of the Caribbean, their theories on its culture are connected by a common thread: the affirmation of Caribbean societies' ability to evolve, cope with, and many times resist the hegemonic social forces of colonialism.

I am interested in these processes, which I see as parts of a larger cultural trait for adaptation. This dissertation, in effect, is a search for the footprints of cultural movement and the fossils of cultural evolution, or adaptation, within a Caribbean context. Examining these tendencies through original Caribbean literatures alone will not be enough for the depth of this study. No, in order to better trace the movement of cultural concepts over time, I must consult examples of Caribbean cultural works that have been adapted. The cultural works of which I speak are original written texts. When these original written texts are adapted, I mean that the original texts have been rewritten or reinterpreted by other authors who have chosen to retell the original plot according to their tastes. More specifically, since we live in a world where writing is not the only mode of communication, I wish to focus on visual adaptations of the written text, by

directors, visual artists, or playwrights within Caribbean society. By the visual reworking of a text, I mean any visible reinterpretation or alteration of plot, structure, or language by a new author. In this way, my use of the term *text* encompasses not only the written— novels, essays, short stories, poems, song lyrics— but also films, plays, and other visual means of creative expression. I believe that focusing on the visual in addition to the written is needed for acquiring new perspectives that are specific to different modes of communication and expression. In all cases, the visual adaptations that I analyze are either film or musical theater and are thus younger forms of expression than the written. Through this lens, we can see how cultural issues are being expressed and perceived from older forms of communication to newer forms. In effect, my study requires an interdisciplinary approach that allows me to consider Caribbean texts from a number of viewpoints. Similar to Benítez-Rojo's discourse on *Chaos* and the "the new scientific perspective" in *The Repeating Island* (2), I will often connect distinct disciplines as a method of research in order to maintain "a philosophical attitude (a new way of reading the concepts of chance and necessity, of particularity and universality) which little by little is sure to permeate other fields of knowledge" (3). Adaptation studies is one such approach.

Adaptation studies analyzes the relationship between an original text and its adaptation while asking the questions— "What is an original? Should an adaptation be true to the original? What are the differences and similarities between media? What is authorship?"— as editors Jorgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, and Erick Frisvold Hanssen point out in their introduction to *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*

(3). A scholar of adaptation studies may ask how faithful the narrative structure and dialogue exchange in a film adaptation of a novel are to its original source of inspiration. Additionally, one may ask if the relationship between a novel and its film version results in an enhanced meaning of the original text, as it is possible to see the two as in constant dialogue with one another. I see this and many more explanatory possibilities behind the study of the art of adaptation.

Adaptations can, for example, serve as translations, imitations, evolutions, and even mutations. An adapted text is sometimes a translation of its original in that the original work is interpreted from the language of writing to the language of screen or stage. In other words, the adaptation's purpose may be simply to translate a work from one mode of expression to another. From this stance, we can question, is it possible to translate effectively a lengthy biography to a Broadway musical hit? If so, what are the sociocultural implications of this translation? If an adaptation is a translation, it is also, in many ways, an imitation or mimesis, or one art form trying to mimic another while using a common story to measure the success of the mimesis. With this idea, we find ourselves caught up in the sticky web of fidelity. Maybe the film's protagonist convincingly imitated the one from the original author's short story; nevertheless, if that reinterpreted character fails to follow the original storyline faithfully, some viewers of the adaptation are sure to be disappointed. The question of fidelity will always be a recurring issue for adaptation studies critics, as Robert Stam's research tells us (Stam 5-6). Though his explanations refer to the distaste for filmic adaptations, generally speaking, Robert Stam's theories can shed light on why adaptations often offend admirers of their

originals. He argues that because images can provoke passion, *iconophobia*, or the fear of destroying interpretive notions that people gather from reading an original text, can negatively affect readers of adapted works. For example, a reader who delights in an author's imaginative descriptions of the characters in a novel might feel disappointed or betrayed by the selection of Hollywood actors chosen to portray them in a later film. In sum, if the visual images provided do not meet viewer expectations, the film might seem inadequate to some. Similarly, *logophilia,* or a fear of reinterpreting what is considered the Word (as in reinterpretations of the Bible) might be behind some of these negative reactions towards adaptations, as well as *anti-corporeality,* or a distaste for the seemingly "embodiedness of the filmic text." Stam says that literature is seen as a more cerebral, transensual and out-of-body plane. To put it another way, much is left to the imagination in literature. Meanwhile, the images provided in film generate a visual and physical experience that causes the body rather than the just the mind and the imagination to react. Think of the shock-factor that some horror films rely on. While a written text can gradually build suspense and evoke powerful emotions, the rapidity of shocking images in films, say, of a sudden ghostly apparition, for example, can make the audience "jump" or remain physically "on the edge of one's seat." Consequently, since the involvement by the body in film tends to discredit the art form as being less serious and less transcendent, many who argue for the superiority of the written text imagine a body-mind hierarchy. In addition, the *myth of facility*, according to Stam, suggests that the shorter work (usually a film rather than a novel) is inferior to the longer work because of the notion that it requires less brainwork. Class prejudice might also play a part in adaptations' presumed

inferiority since historically, "vulgar" and dumbed-down spectacles (such as film and certain song and dance performances, perhaps) were reserved for the poor. Finally, all of these tendencies towards supposing film's lack of intellectual value stem from *parasitism,* or the idea that adaptations burrow into the essence of the original work and steal its vitality.

I am less interested in measuring fidelity between the works that I analyze, and much more in what happens when the essence of the original work gets lost in translation or muddled in attempts at imitation, as it often does. When this occurs, the adaptation reveals mutation or evolution, or some change in the cultural messages from one version to the next. In other words, the way an original novel portrays a society's outlook on race relations may have somewhat shifted centuries later in its film adaptation to reveal new perceptions on race. Often, we can detect evolutions in thought, or new coping mechanisms to adapt to colonial hegemonic thought within these reinterpreted works. At other times, what we witness is not acceptance of social order, but a mutation of that order in that messages or symbols within the reinterpreted version resist the hegemonic systems reified in the original work. The way I see the evolution of cultural tendencies and perceptions in adapted works is not unlike Richard Dawkins's meme theory from *The Selfish Gene* (1976). For Dawkins, memes are "units of cultural transmission and imitation" (2015, 405) that represent cultural traits similar to the way genes encode biological traits. Accordingly, meme theory can explain cultural evolution like science explains genetic evolution: genes replicate, adapt, and mutate over time through a series of biological processes while, in theory, cultural phenomena undergo these same changes

via complex social imitation forces. Memes are not immediately identifiable because they grow and evolve within a society in an unplanned way. Like genetic evolution, the process is gradual, and only traceable after much time has elapsed.[1] Within these pages, accordingly, I will ask about how sociocultural forces of the past contribute to today's sociocultural phenomena. Are there visible patterns in past sociocultural happenings? Are two seemingly unrelated social phenomena in reality related? What are the sociocultural forces driving the creation of an original text and an author's choice to adapt it through a different light? I believe that all of these questions can be answered via Adaptation Studies, and I will aim to do so in the chapters to come.

All of the works that I will discuss deal with instances of "faking it to make it," or a character's tendency to hide their family origins, cultural identity, or class status in order to fit into a setting where all odds are against certain sociocultural types who cannot rid themselves of the "stain" of their own heritage, despite all their best efforts. Chapter One, for example, takes us to Cuba where we examine the iconic figure of the tragic *mulata*'s quest to "better her race" by marrying a white man. More specifically, I look at the story of Cecilia Valdés in Cirilo Villaverde's nineteenth-century novel, *Cecilia Valdés o la loma del ángel*, because it is a work that has been reinterpreted by many authors through a variety of creative mediums. In 1932, for example, Agustín Rodríguez

[1] Consumers of social media, for example, are familiar with the term meme as it applies to the form of online communication in which a person pairs an attention-grabbing photograph or animation with text in order to express an emotion or social statement. These creations are usually humorous or ironic and tend to get passed along and altered according to the social context surrounding the crafter of the meme. Dawkins's memes represent cultural phenomena that replicate, adapt, mutate, and sometimes become extinct over time, but in a much slower way than Internet memes.

and José Sánchez Arcilla bring Cecilia's story to the Teatro Martí de La Habana in zarzuela form. Later, in 1981, she appears on the big-screen in Humberto Solás's filmic adaptation, *Cecilia* (1981), and finally back on the page in Reinaldo Arenas's postmodern novella, *La Loma del ángel* (1987), to name a few of the adaptations. In my investigation, I visit briefly each of these adaptations and others, but I focus mainly on Solás's film. I look at how the film's employment of opposing lighting tonalities externalizes internal racial identity crises of Cuban society, both past and present, underline the oppressive elements that keep racial segregation and class superiority in place, and highlight the societal self-destruction that inevitably follows Cecilia as she lives a life of "faking it to make it," or striving to appear white while rejecting her African roots. In the end, the film adaptation represents a mutation of previous ideas of race in Cuban history and works to resurrect the novel's nineteenth-century tale with a contemporaneous relevance to twentieth-century Caribbean societies.

In Chapter Two, my quest takes us to Cartagena de Indias on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. Opposite the aspirations of Cecilia, the character in question is a white child living in colonial Colombia who appears to cohabit naturally within the Afro-Colombian culture without regard for differences in skin tone. While Cecilia strives for whiteness, this child, Sierva María from Gabriel García Márquez's novel, *Del amor y otros demonios*, has adopted the cultural identity of her family's African slaves. Here, I look at her racial or ethnic "faking" in director Hilda Hidalgo's 2009 Costa Rican-Colombian film adaptation of the same title, to confront the ways in which imitating another cultural identity can inspire self-reflection and self-awareness for the people perceiving it. Sierva

María, of course, is the imitator, because she imitates the cultural identity of the Afro-Colombian slaves. The female characters portrayed in the film are those who seem captivated by Sierva María's cultural difference. I note that Hidalgo's employment of the female characters' silent interactions and gazes directed at Sierva María draws on the novel's inadequacies and compliments its original meaning by creating a space for new cultural dialogue on the perceptions and concerns of Caribbean women.

Next, I take my analyses to Haiti as it is portrayed within the pages of Dany Lafferiere's short stories, "Vers le sud," "Les garçons magiques," and "Le bar de la plage" in *La chair du maître* (1997), and on the set of Laurent Cantet's film adaptation of these stories, *Vers le sud* (2005). I look at the concept of "faking it to make it" on different levels. For example, Caribbean societies often find themselves obligated to "fake" Paradise, or uphold the image of the Westerner's vacation paradise in order to win its approval and financial support through tourism. Thus, instead of dedicating its energy and resources to resolving economic problems from within the country and enriching local cultural customs, Caribbean society must focus on the happiness of the wealthy tourist. Both versions of the plot bring these issues to the forefront and condemn them, but Cantet's version challenges these notions visually through symbolic representation of cross-generational empathy, frustration, and responsibility within the Haitian community that was not present in Laferrière's stories.

In Chapter Four, I consider various fictionalized adaptations of a non-fictional villain of Dominican history: dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. I look at how adaptations can either reify the image of historical figures like Trujillo, or they can challenge this

image. *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) by Julia Alvarez, for example, reifies Trujillo's malevolent, omnipotent image while Juan Delancer's Spanish-language film adaptation, *Trópico de sangre* (2010), deconstructs it through a comical portrayal of *El jefe*. The film brings to light the many ways that Trujillo faked his own cultural identity and heritage in order to succeed and maintain domination over the Dominican people.

In Chapter Five, we island-hop all the way to New York City, in Nuyorican Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical hit, *Hamilton* (2015), an adaptation of biographer Ron Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton* (2004). Indicating the migration of the Caribbean narrative's sociocultural adaptation and mutation patterns to the U.S., I argue that the Nevis native Alexander Hamilton has become a repeating adaptation who can help us to situate New York City within a Caribbean context. The visible fusion of different artistic styles of dance and other self-expression in two of the musical's numbers, "Yorktown: The World Turned Upside Down" and "The World Was Wide Enough," reflects this, as well as the historical identity struggles that come with culturally "faking it to make it." By analyzing cultural adaptation and instances of "faking it to make it" through adapted versions of original texts, I aim to promote a more interdisciplinary, inclusive, and well-rounded logic of how cultural discourses in the Caribbean gain strength and are reified in culture.

CHAPTER ONE
BLACK SHADOWS, WHITE LIGHTS IN HUMBERTO SOLÁS'S *CECILIA*

Societies are saturated with symbolic icons that reveal cultural tendencies, past and present. In Cuba, for example, we identify many of these that, because of their social appeal and ability to adapt to the psychological needs of various generations, have gained strength and become representatives of Cuban culture in different ways. For some, an image that might come to mind is *el revolucionario,* or the revolutionary, a symbol of Cuban pride and the fight for independence. Che Guevara's face, such as the enormous outline on the side of Havana's Ministerio del Interior building in La Plaza de la Revolución, is one familiar example of *el revolucionario* image that has become famous or infamous, depending on the person perceiving it. Societies with anti-Castro sentiments, for example, might instead associate *el revolucionario* with communism, an ideology that is undesirable in those societies. Equally as recognizable as the iconic Che for Cubans might be *el guajiro*— the image of the Cuban countryman, a lover of the land and culture— like those depicted in Cuban artist Eduardo Abela's painting, *Los guajiros* (1938). These regionally unique images can evoke strong emotions and, in the case of the *guajiro* figure, can generate a sense of comfort and nostalgia. Others might be symbols of traditional Cuban rhythm and international entertainment, such as *el rumbero* or *el salsero*, represented by a generic cabaret figure, or perhaps the images of famous musical sensations like those painted on the side of Cafetería Guardabarranco in Little Havana, Miami.

Religious and spiritual images too, like the Yoruba Orishas, are iconic of Cuban culture, and can also represent different ideas for different societies. For many living within Cuban society, the Orishas might represent hope, faith, and a sense of protection, while those with different religious beliefs might find the practices of Vodú, Santería, and Espiritismo blasphemous and cryptic. These practices might instead symbolize witchcraft.

Certainly, within the rich cultural layers of Cuba hide countless cultural symbols that have materialized, evolved, and thrived for various social reasons, and one of the most complex and telling of these has been the image of *la mulata trágica*, represented, no doubt, by the face of Cecilia Valdés, the fair-skinned *mulata* protagonist from Cuban author Cirilo Villaverde's nineteenth-century short story (1839) later expanded to classic novel, *Cecilia Valdés o la loma del ángel.* Villaverde's writings helped reify the image of the *mulata* and her social tribulations— her eternal task of "faking" whiteness to "make it" in colonial Cuba. More specifically, in the novel, Cecilia seeks to "better her race" by marrying a white man— a path that Cuban blacks and *mulatas* sometimes sought in the nineteenth century and even later as a way to overcome steep racial barriers. Yet, while Cecilia may never have risen to her desired "white status" in the novel, she did indeed rise beyond the page as an immortal cultural symbol for Cuba. However, when Villaverde concluded his novel, Cecilia's story was far from over. Various authors would later revisit and reshape the traditional image of this national icon.

Although the list of adaptations of the Cecilia figure extends beyond the scope of this analysis, in this chapter, as a means of mapping her rise to cultural symbol, I first

provide a survey of some of the more interesting and at times less-studied adaptations (because of their novelty) of Cecilia Valdés. Seeming whiter in skin tone with each recreation of her image, most of these representations can be seen as attempts at removing any outward semblance of African heritage. One of these is director Humberto Solás's, *Cecilia* (1981), a filmic adaptation that addresses the question of race during a time when Cuba was, according to Fidel Castro's social reforms, a place of racial neutrality. Similar to other visual representations of this figure, Cecilia (played by Daisy Granados) in the film appears to lack any visible ties to her presumably African heritage. Still, Solás's *Cecilia* challenges the post-Revolutionary notions about racial sameness, perhaps in ways that the directors never intended. I argue that the film's cinematographic techniques such as blocking, framing, and especially lighting, call attention to the psychological and social pitfalls of trying to erase one's racial roots. In effect, the manipulation of these cinematic elements results in an externalization of internal racial identity crises of Cuban society, both past and present, underlines the oppressive elements that keep racial segregation and class superiority in place in Cuba, and highlights the societal self-destruction that inevitably follows these issues.

The *Mulata*'s Quest Through the Ages

The tragic *mulata* figure follows an extensive trajectory in Cuba, with her first appearance in early abolitionist slavery novels. All at once, she became the subject of Félix Tanco's *Petrona y Rosalia* (1839), Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1839, 1882), Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* (1839), and later Antonio Zambrana's *El negro*

Francisco (1873). Additionally, she began to gain presence in poetry, which Claudette Williams explains in *Charcoal & Cinnamon: the Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature*:

> Cuban poets also began to fashion an image of the *mulata*, initially with vague contours and shaped in the then-dominant Romantic mold. Gradually, some writers of the period began to discern the locally distinctive characteristics of her identity and to add native elements to the inherited discourse. This was one of the early signs of a process of cultural differentiation that heralded the making of a nationalist tradition. (12)

We owe this "nationalist tradition" to the *mulata* figure's fitness for survival, which has both generated and been propagated by the creative "inherited discourse" that has accompanied her rise to iconic status. And the *mulata*'s image would continue to evolve and take on new characteristics. During the 1920s and 30s, she appeared in stage productions, like zarzuelas— the inexpensive, comedic musical performances that, according to Susan Thomas, "provided a conventional public space to confront unconventional behaviors and identities, a musical and theatrical frame in which the desirable and problematic unruliness suggested by racial, gender, and class differences could be defined and contained" (4-5). Indeed, the *mulata* image did contribute to the creation and growth of this space for racial dialogue. Along with the other social types portrayed in zarzuelas— the *gallego* and the *negro*— her character quickly became a recognizable one for spectators. She was "at once sensual femme fatale, tragic victim,

and a symbol of national identity" as well as "a syllabically articulated, popular songstress whose midrange singing was often couched in street dialect" (Thomas 5).

Composers Ernesto Lecuona and Gonzalo Roig represented her in this light in their zarzuelas. Originally, Lecuona had intended to adapt Villaverde's novel directly in his 1930 zarzuela, *María la O*, but never requested official permission from the family. Nevertheless, *María la O* was successful. Despite its title and the fact that his characters had different names from those in *Cecilia Valdés*, it is clear that Villaverde's novel was more than just a source of inspiration for Lecuona. The plots are strikingly comparable— both showcase the story of a desired *mulata*'s amorous encounter with a white, Spanish aristocrat who is, unbeknownst to his darker-skinned lover, engaged to another (white) woman. In both works, additionally, a friend of the *mulata* female protagonist, José Inocente in *María la O* and José Pimienta in *Cecilia Valdés*, eventually plots to kill the deceitful Spanish aristocrat for doing emotional harm to his beloved. Different from the novel (in which Pimienta does kill Leonardo), in Lecuona's zarzuela, María herself ends up killing her unfaithful lover, Fernando. *María la O* was well received among Cuban audiences— "an instant hit" (5), according to Susan Thomas— and was even later adapted to cinema in Adolfo Bustamante's 1948 film of the same title. Thomas notes several key differences between the zarzuela and the filmic versions of *María la O*, especially in their endings. In the film, when María finds out about Fernando's affair, she prays to Afro-Cuban deities, asking them to kill Fernando and then devises a plan to arrange his murder. Similar to Villaverde's ending of *Cecilia Valdés*, right before carrying out the plan, María realizes that she is pregnant with Fernando's baby— a detail

not included in the zarzuela. Consequently, she cannot bring herself to kill the father of her child. Instead, a group of free blacks kills him, as they believe the Orishas want him dead.

Unlike Lucuona, Gonzalo Roig did request permission to adapt Villaverde's novel for his 1932 zarzuela entitled, *Cecilia Valdés*, and was granted the rights to do so. While many have criticized Villaverde's novel for being too invested in his realist ideology, Roig's zarzuela combines only the most salient aspects of Villaverde's overly-detailed plot— the incestuous details, love affairs, and melodramatic aspects— to produce a vibrant, rhythmic show. Roig's zarzuela ends with Cecilia in prison, where she must serve time for Pimienta's killing of Leonardo. There, she reunites with her mother under a statue of la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, a symbolic moment since this religious figure is important to those who practice Regla de Ocha, as Bethany Beyer points out in *Performable Nations*. Regarding the zarzuela's treatment of racial difference in Cuba, Beyer analyzes the zarzuela's ending as "a hopeful, optimistic ending (unlike the novel)." She goes on to explain that

> Rather than remaining stereotyped as dangerous, sexualized mulatas that threaten white male power,[37] Cecilia and Charo find salvation and recognition through drawing close to another female archetype: the Virgin.[38]In this hyperbole-filled scene, set in the depths of prison, grace is bestowed, and all becomes clear. Uncertainty disappears, since Cecilia has, in essence, a new identity that consumes the old one. (62-63)

The immense success and popularity of the zarzuela, without doubt, contributed to Cecilia's rise to cultural icon. There were other stage productions that were influenced by the Cecilia plot, but the next significant adaptations of Villaverde's novel were not of the musical genres. These included Solás's film in 1981, which will be the topic of the pages to come, and Cuban author Reinaldo Arenas's Freudian reworking, *La loma del ángel* (1987), a satire that pokes fun at Villaverde's realism. Arenas's playful version is replete with irrational exaggeration and contemporary Cuban street vernacular.

Another adaptation worth mentioning is director Gerardo Chijona's comedy film, *A Paradise under the Stars/ Un paraíso bajo las estrellas* (1999). Set in the 1990s, this Cecilia story flips the original completely on its head. The Cecilia prototype is a white blonde named Sissy (Thais Valdés) who wants to become a cabaret star in the Tropicana nightclub but must offer up her body to her perverted boss (a black man who we find out is really her biological father) if she wants the lead role. This detail explains why, to the surprise of the white Leonardo figure, Sergito (Vladimir Cruz) and the rest of the family, Sissy eventually gives birth to a black baby. Sissy is first accused of being an adulterer, since the baby's black phenotype could not have come from the white Sergito's genes or her own white genes. Thus, the baby becomes a symbol of her presumed infidelity. But Sissy, swearing by her innocence, is equally confused. Chijona's film's big conclusion is that in the end, regardless of skin tone or one's presumed genealogy, "todos los Cubanos somos familia." Nevertheless, there are several notable remarks that though meant to be comedic, are still charged with notions of black inferiority. The black baby, for example, is called a "monstruo" for her black phenotype. Furthermore, Sissy, like Cecilia, faces

objectification for her beauty and sexuality throughout the film and never escapes this "fact" of society. Instead of becoming a sexualized slave to the white male, however, her flirtatious boss and a black authority figure symbolizes the next step up on the ladder of fame for the pretty white girls in the cabaret.

Following these adaptations, Cecilia appeared on the canvas. Cuban artist Cosme Proenza, for example, produced an oil painting, "Retrato de Cecilia Valdés," in 2002 of a very white-looking, blondish Cecilia Valdés who, depicted in a classical style, is dressed in wet-draped gossamer robes of different colors and a feathered headdress. In Proenza's interpretation, Cecilia is placed in front of a seemingly Mediterranean backdrop, recalling some of the Early Renaissance paintings of Sandro Botticelli. Considering that the original Cecilia character lives in constant racial and cultural identity crises and social disadvantage, Proenza's mystified image of Cecilia is flawed in a number of ways. Implausibly goddess-like, Cecilia seems crowned for her white beauty and feminine virtue instead of what she represents in the book— a victim of social injustice and eternal prisoner of cultural liminality. Furthermore, the generic white city in the background of the painting departs from any attempt at a local setting, which makes Proenza's Cecilia appear even more foreign to the Cuban context. Consequently, one might conclude that the artist fails to recognize the historical and cultural diversity that makes up both Cecilia's and Cuba's cultures.

Still, Proenza's portrayal is only one of many flawed visual representations of this icon. In 2010, Cuban director and artist Tony Nodarse designed an animated version of Roig's song from the zarzuela, "Cecilia Valdés," that was nominated for best *video*

infantil, or children's film, at the Premios Lucas, an annual Cuban music video awards ceremony. In the cartoon, Cecilia sings the original "Soy Cecilia" song from the operetta with the voice of Alina Sánchez, the former pupil of Roig, soprano singer, star of Roig's zarzuela in 1965, and lead role in the film, *El otro Francisco* in 1974 (Orovio 5). If Nodarse's animation was supposed to be "un afán de acercar la literatura a los niños" (*El mito* 27), or an effort to bring literature to children, as Almudena Mejías Alonso asserts in her commentary of the various adaptations of Villaverde's story, one must question Nodarse's choices when portraying race, and especially his illustration of the *mulata* image. Presumably an educational version of the icon, this version of Cecilia not only appears far removed from any sign of her African roots— besides the three black women that seem to dance faithfully around her for the duration of her song— she is portrayed as an impossibly disproportionate female. With a figure that recalls Walt Disney's iconic Barbie-like princesses, Cecilia's sparse torso and lack of ribs could never support the enormous curves drawn in by Nodarse, nor could the tiny neck bolster her sizeable, bubbly-eyed head. Even more, when compared with those of the other black dancers in the animation, her features are obviously exaggerated. As Cecilia saunters seductively through the animated streets of La Habana while flirting with the white men and captivating the white women, Cecilia's hair, cleavage, and lips appear significantly more abundant than those of her black counterparts. Besides the differences in physical appearance distancing Cecilia from the black female dancers, one moment is especially interesting during her song when she suddenly abandons the group of black dancers. With a push of her hand, perhaps as if "pushing blackness away" from her reality, she can be

seen swiftly distancing herself physically from these women. What then, might children take away from Nodarse's short, other than misconstrued notions of feminine beauty and race? The idea of white superiority is only perpetuated here. Nodarse labels his own animation as "sophisticated" and "dynamic" (*El mito* 27) because it showcases the original operetta music in a children's genre. Even so, some might miss the pedagogical point of Nodarse's musical short.

In a similar light, David Lisenby relates post-Soviet representations of the nineteenth-century Cecilia to the currently booming sex tourism industry in Cuba and the widely sought-after lighter-skinned *jinetera*, or prostitute. He argues

> These works show how the residual mulatta trope, exemplified by Cecilia, remains an active part of the overall Cuban cultural imaginary. In this light, contemporary iterations of Cecilia Valdes may be seen as a medium of active connection to Cuba's slave-holding history, showing racial paradigms of centuries past to linger disturbingly through aspects of racial inequality in sexual relationships of the present. (np)

In this way, Lisenby aptly notes that as the early images of Cecilia represented a social advancement via racial whitening, the *jinetera* figure of sex tourism also represents a social and economic advancement by taking advantage of international consumerism. Accordingly, other recent visual adaptations continue to "sell" this whitened, sexualized Cecilia, like the acrylic painting, *Cecilia Valdés* (n/d), by Cuban artist Luis Vega, for example. The image shows a close-up portrait of Cecilia's face that, in a ghostly way, seems blurred at the edges. Her facial features and whiteness look strikingly like those of

the Cecilia played by Daisy Granados in Solás's *Cecilia.* In the foreground, six individuals— all of them black men and women dressed in Afro-Cuban ritual garb— appear to be dancing and celebrating the giant, conjured image of Cecilia's face in the background. Could they be praising her literary and social importance for Cuba? Or is this a celebration of her lighter skin tone and ability to discard her visible Africanness? The visual representations of Cecilia's skin tone often generate criticism since this aspect plays a large role in whether or not she looks convincingly *mulata* or whitened to satisfy a whitened society. Here, for example, one could argue that Vega's Cecilia looks too white, and wonder if his representation, too, whitens the idea of *cubanidad.* Vega does recognize at least some aspect of *cubanidad* through his acknowledgement of African contributions to music and dance rituals, yet, he still sexualizes and even dehumanizes Cecilia by giving her cat-like facial features, luscious-looking lips, and wild, voluptuous hair that recalls a lion's mane. All of this and her seductive gaze make her look like she is on the hunt— perhaps for the artist that can give her a fair visual representation.

Unlike Vega's painting and other visual representations that tend to fall short on a believable representation of Cecilia's skin color, Eric Rebull's statue of Cecilia (2014) does not have the "color problem." In front of la Iglesia del Santo Ángel Custodio in la Loma del Ángel where much of the novel takes place, Rebull's life-sized sculpture of the icon can be seen in elegant dress fanning herself. In effect, the bronze medium of the sculpture gives Cecilia's skin color an ambiguous tone, and perhaps could be interpreted as a rejection of whitening a figure that actually represents many colors and cultures.

Indeed, Cecilia has been reborn through the intellectual and artistic discourses that have formed around her image. Notwithstanding other authors' attempts at bringing the old story of Cecilia to contemporaneous audiences via a fresh perspective, it might seem fair to say that there has been a move within Cuban cultural production to further whiten and sexualize her image. For colonial Cuba, specifically, Williams links this sexualization of the *mulata* to the treatment of white muses in poetry of Romanticism and an "attempt to correlate aesthetic discourse and nationalist ideology" (25) within the island. In other words, influenced by the styles of European poetry, the first Cuban poets continued with these trends and themes, such as the celebration of the female figure, but with subtle, "local" changes. Was it a conscious effort made by poets to produce more interesting and perhaps controversial pieces by targeting less-discussed subject matter in their poems? Williams affirms this risky shift in themes for colonial poets in Cuba:

> …one needs to bear in mind that they wrote at a time when Eurocentricism had not yet been seriously challenged. Their deliberate choice of poetic subject is, therefore, a politically significant act, given the hegemony of white female beauty in the prevailing system of aesthetic values…Their depictions reflected [the mulata's] difference (her nonwhiteness) and her refusal to be contained in the conventional Romantic mold. (24-25)

Perhaps even then, creators of entertainment, such as poets, learned to capitalize on sensational subject matter as do producers of series and filmmakers today. Colonial writers observed the *mulata* as a novel theme and idealized her for her difference, or "nonwhiteness." As such, she was exoticized, eroticized, and sold to readers. Her recent

whitening in some of the adaptations mentioned previously, then, might be seen as a similar tendency to sell a sexualized image of history and literature by combining desirable aspects of the black and white phenotypes. Then again, perhaps Cecilia's continually whitened image insinuates that she has achieved her goal of becoming white. One might then interpret this as a collective sentiment that the Cuban black has, at the close of the twentieth century, achieved "white status," according to nineteenth-century social standards, or has overcome racial othering within Cuba. If this is so, however, where have these authors and artists stored the collective memory of African heritage in the Cecilia story?

Cecilia From Page to Screen

Solás's version of the Cecilia story was far from popular. In fact, due to the cost of its production and lack of public interest, it was considered a "disrespect" to both Cuban cinema and Villaverde's novel, as well as a financial disaster (*Cuban Cinema* 388). It was indeed an "imperfect" example of cinema, but not the "imperfect cinema" that the ICAIC strived for, which was the strict philosophy crafted by García Espinosa that filmmakers should differentiate their work from mainstream cinema while producing films that are entertaining, pedagogical, and supportive of the ideas of Fidel's Revolution. Nevertheless, in order to avoid the government's censorship, Solás had to learn to work within confined limits and, as many other filmmakers had to do, learn to transmit personal sociopolitical statements through abstract directive techniques, such as symbolic lighting. In fact, many directors focused on the recreation and reinterpretation of

historical events because these themes "offered better opportunities for more subtle and profound analysis than the revolutionary themes" (Barnard 235). Since teaching the viewer was part of the ICAIC's pedagogical mission, portraying important stages of Cuba's history and especially, in Solás's case, drawing attention to one of Cuba's major literary contributions to the intellectual world, would be two revolutionary purposes difficult for the ICAIC to contest. Solás, after all, had already experienced the interjections of artistic censorship with his Revolution-themed film, *Un día de noviembre* (1972). Portraying the life of a man struggling with the ethical nature of the revolutionary fight, the film was considered too controversial by the ICAIC and was thus prevented from release until 1978. The film was, according to Solás, his "most personal," and lamented that its subject matter had already become irrelevant by the time it was released (Elena 115). Solás continued to struggle emotionally with the artistic limits imposed by the ICAIC.

Following Villaverde's original plot, Solás's film portrays a fair-skinned *mulata*'s quest to "better her race" by marrying a white man. Cecilia is again the sexualized *mulata* who is desperate for the love and acceptance of Leonardo, the spoiled yet emotionally afflicted son of white, wealthy parents. Leonardo is enamored with Cecilia, but due to social standards, his desire to be with her never blossoms into a desire for marriage; a few heated sexual encounters is as far as the relationship goes. His mother, Doña Rosa, is determined to see him marry the white aristocrat, Isabel, who better fits the family's interest in maintaining its elite bloodline. José Dolores, on the other hand, truly cares for Cecilia. This darker-skinned *mulato* musician is also an abolitionist and conspirator

against the Spanish crown. While Leonardo is restricted by his family and the social standards of the white elite in Cuba to keep the race "pure," José Dolores is also restricted by social standards through his visibly *mulato* "condition." Even if Cecilia did love José Dolores, a marriage to him would not help her in her endeavor for social advancement, since this could only be achieved by marrying "whiter." Consequently, his love for the whiter-skinned Cecilia can never be returned. Further problematizing this disastrous love triangle are Seña Chepa, Cecilia's grandmother, and Doña Rosa, Leonardo's mother. They are the domineering figures of the film and play fundamental roles in determining the fates of their children. Solás's film, unlike other representations, emphasizes the influence of Afro-Cuban religions, especially that of the Yoruba faith, upon the lives of the characters, and also ends with Cecilia's suicide.

In Solás's film, light frequently intervenes in the portrayal of the characters, their actions, and attitudes. This detail, of course, is one of the significant differences between the two mediums at hand— novel versus film. To instill mental images that activate the senses of the reader, the novelist relies on words while, by the same token, the filmmaker applies visual effects to prompt physical and emotional reactions within the viewer, like laughter, crying, anxiety, or surprise, for example. I do not plan to analyze in-depth the lighting techniques of Villaverde's novel, as his use of lighting follows a common aesthetic typical of the realist writings of his time, which predates cinema. He claims in his own prologue, after all, that he is proud of being "before all else, a writer who is a realist, taking this word in the artistic sense attributed to it in the modern era" (Villaverde xl). Forthwith, the lighting in Villaverde's novel is an accessory that helps to construct a

convincing stage for the action. The lighting in *Cecilia*, by contrast, works as a transforming tool that interacts with characters and has narrative capabilities that can reveal more than what the audience sees on the surface. Just as lighting serves as a powerful tool for all filmmakers, through the manipulation of cinematographic lighting, Solás can "select the range of tonalities, manipulate the speed of motion, and transform perspective" (Bordwell and Thompson 185).

The first scene in which the lighting in Solás's film "transforms" viewer perspective is the rebellion scene in which the plan to overthrow the Spanish crown in Cuba has been revealed. José Dolores and Cecilia have fled to an ambiguous, ruin-like space in the shadows to escape the chaos. Both are flustered and desperate, because not only has someone exposed the plans of the rebel abolitionist's revolt to authorities, but Cecilia has also discovered that Leonardo is leaving her for Isabel. José Dolores, on the other hand, is furious with Cecilia because he believes that Leonardo is responsible for the information leak and the plan would have been carried out successfully if not for Cecilia's insistence on being with Leonardo. Thus, he throws the sulking Cecilia to the ground. While Cecilia cries alone in the lighted area of the frame, José Dolores backs up almost completely out of the scene into the shade of an old, cracked column. From the dark, he watches Cecilia in her fetal position. With her face pressing against the dirt, she begins to breathe heavily and extends her hands towards the sky. More than a form of grieving the loss of her lover and José Dolores's disappointment, could she be summoning the aide of some divine power? The highlighted movements certainly suggest as much. As she begins to rise from the dirt, José Dolores emerges from the shadow,

changed. He is the same person, but as later events confirm, he is now possessed by another's will. Cecilia's ritual-like form of grieving did in fact evoke divine power— the spirit of Changó, the Yoruba deity of war, now manifested in the body of José Dolores. Narrated through the use of shadow and illumination, the single light illuminating the center of the empty, dilapidated space inhabited by Cecilia and José Dolores seems to facilitate a transformation of these characters into new characters. Above all, the highlighted action reveals inner cultural conflicts of a society that strives for whiteness and the culture of the colonizer, but still needs the culture of the colonized to thrive psychologically.

In the subsequent scene, the camera cuts between three different frames of Cecilia and José Dolores. One of these frames shows a glimpse of the impossible couple— the whitened Cecilia and the darker José Dolores kneeling, face-to-face, and partially embracing one another. The second frame is a direct shot of Cecilia's face, and the third shows a direct shot of José Dolores's face from the perspective of Cecilia's gaze. Enhancing the beautifully melodramatic nature of this scene are the facial expressions, or the intense, desperate gazes. As the camera cuts back and forth between these views, the tearful Cecilia declares that justice must be done. She has not, however, recognized that she is now speaking to Changó. He replies that justice will be done, but that it will not be the justice that Cecilia desires. While Cecilia's justice implies the elimination of Leonardo's mother, José Dolores, driven by the African warrior spirit of Changó, will do justice by murdering Leonardo— a character that can be interpreted as a metaphor for the whiteness that threatens the existence of the African culture within Cuba. Yet, unlike his

mother, Leonardo is still young enough to procreate and continue breeding the discrimination his family has instilled in his character. As such, elimination of Leonardo symbolizes the annihilation of this inherited discriminatory tendency.

The lighting techniques in this scene highlight not only the issue of cultural conflict, but also the related issue of skin color. This is done through hard and low-key lighting. Kris Malkiewicz and Barbara J. Gryboski explain these terms: hard lighting is "when dark shadows are created by a single, off-screen lighting source," and low-key lighting is when much of the film is "underlit, but some parts are correctly exposed or even overexposed" (86). On the one hand, low-key lighting is an important technique for creating the visual mood through light contrast and distribution, according to Malkiewicz and Gryboski (86). In other words, the cinematographer may "distribute" light unevenly in a given *mise en scène* by choosing to brighten or spotlight certain objects or characters while dimming others that are less important or maintained darker for symbolic purposes. Because the contrasting tonalities illuminate only part of José Dolores's and Cecilia's faces in the film, they can symbolize the conflicted way in which these characters perceive their own racial identities. By way of example, Cecilia's white face is brightened by an off-screen light source while the other half is blacked out by opaque shadow. In effect, this illustrates David Silveira Toledo's metaphorical observation that like many people wishing to identify with one social group or another, Cecilia, cannot remove herself from the "shadow of her heritage" (177). Solás and Delgado conjure up the visible representation of this figurative shadow that clings to her throughout the scene. These contrasts establish a symbolic pattern of two divided racial identities and the

inability to claim both due to society's unwillingness to accept racial and cultural difference.

This visual phenomenon reinforces the idea that even though free people of color and *mulatos* were given special legal exceptions due to their lighter skin color, they were actually still enslaved by antiquated social institutions that hindered progress for anyone other than whites. Although liberated from the slavery of physical labor, they were forced into the metaphorical enslavement of mimicry. On the topic of the eroticized *mulata* figure in Villaverde's novel and Solas's aim to contest that vision in the filmic adaptation, Alison Fraunhar notes

> Cecilia's vanity, social climbing and desire for whiteness are her tragedy and cause her downfall. Her performance of Cuban colonial social codes recalls Bhabha's discussion of mimicry; she is a "bad" subaltern whose mimicry of and desire for whiteness oblige her to cross social/racial boundaries, and a "good" subaltern because she does not (at least in the novel) work to undermine that social order. That is, the whites desire (and fear) the blacks for their purported sensuality, and the blacks want the authority and security that is the domain of the white. (229-230)

But Cecilia's mimicry of white social codes suggests a more complex mutual objectification by blacks and whites. Even as a "free" female *mulata*, she is still objectified by society. Robert Padgug explains the idea of commodification that generally characterizes systems of slavery:

> …the slave can be bought or sold or otherwise alienated and exchanged, and is, as a laborer, subject to an amount of direct force normally greater than that found in other labor relationships. Thus the slave is both a producer of objects (often in the form of commodities) as well as an object himself (often, again, a "commodity"); that is, he is defined as the property of others. (4)

While Padgug refers broadly to slave labor anywhere, this idea echoes in the lives of "freed" *mulatos* in Cuba. Cecilia, for example, is a slave to the intense gaze of desire of the men that she captivates. She symbolizes and embodies pleasure, exotic excitement, and perhaps the envy of their colleagues (i.e., a status symbol). Recalling Padgug's ideas, Cecilia is, at times, "alienated" by both elite whites because of her lineage and by other *mulatos* for not aiding in the betterment of their social condition. In effect, she is pushed and pulled between social groups – whites and blacks— that accept certain aspects of the *mulata* while refusing to accept others. Both groups, however, always accept the *mulata*'s beauty, which is "exchanged" and consumed until they notice her socially unacceptable characteristics. White males, for example, want to possess her beauty but reject her lineage. Blacks, on the other hand, look to Cecilia as a means of overcoming their own genealogical "blackness," but also view her as "other," since her lighter skin color makes her appear socially superior— perhaps a source of bitterness for her darker-skinned family and friends— and because her determination to climb the social ladder distances her culturally from her African roots. Consequently, when one group rejects her, she seeks a place of belonging with the other group. Still, while white men see her as a forbidden fruit to be tasted and savored temporarily, there are two sides to this coin. The

commodified Cecilia mutually commodifies the whites, as marriage to a white male would provide an elevation in social status. Verena Martinez-Alier affirms this technique for social ascension in her anthropological study on the social norms of matrimony in nineteenth-century Cuba: "Among coloured people a very general aspiration was to become as light and to get as far away from slavery as possible" (96). This aspiration, accordingly, could only be achieved through marriage to a suitor with lighter skin and a whiter bloodline. Consequently, the white male becomes a coveted luxury that when possessed, symbolizes power for the *mulata*. Cecilia, then, assumes both the role of the sexualized slave and the chosen *mulata* queen who, because of her beauty and whiteness, must "better the race" by enchanting the coveted white male.

The film underlines this idea of royalty and martyrdom early in the film with her grandmother's telling of the Oshún myth. In Chepa's version of the legend, the beautiful Oshún was born from honey and, like Cecilia, is desired by all men and envied by women. According to Chepa, she was captured by Europeans and brought to Cuba where she is sold as a slave. Her buyer, unbeknownst to all involved in the transaction, is the warrior Changó disguised as a rich white man. After revealing his true identity to Oshún, he teaches her how to trick the whites through the art of disguise. Next, the viewer sees Changó anointing Oshún with honey and a queen's robe as the camera cuts to a scene of Cecilia years later. Taking after Oshún from her grandmother's story, we see Cecilia covering her own body with honey while praying aloud to the Virgin Mary— she asks for a white man that loves her. Similar to the way Oshún learned how to blend in with the whites for her advantage, Cecilia, too, mimics white European culture by praying to a

holy figure that is traditionally of white culture. By performing the rituals of white society, Cecilia believes that she too, is worthy of a “white” future. Yet, gifted with the socially desired virtues of femininity and beauty, she calls on her African heritage for ancient techniques of survival and resistance to oppression.

Lighting contrast especially aids in the production of this dual slave/queen image during the Holy Week celebration scene. At this moment in the film, Cecilia seems to intuit that Leonardo has been murdered which sends her running frantically through the crowded streets screaming his name. Similar to the slave rebellion scene, the atmosphere is dark. We see a street filled with black faces and dancers paying tribute to Oshún and hear sounds of ceremonial drums. Drawing attention to her extreme differences in appearance, the lighting in place makes Cecilia’s whiteness easy to spot in the predominantly black crowd. Despite her whiteness and reluctance to participate in the celebration, members of the crowd crown Cecilia with the traditional Oshún headdress and ceremonial cloak. Though forced into her position as queen of this African ritual, she seems to participate naturally in the dance. Symbolizing her emotional and psychological spiraling from the inability to fully accept her middle color identity and her inherent role as sacrificial *mulata* queen, she dances and spins in a fury. Ultimately, she is forced into this dance that will lead her to her self-destruction.

If the lighting works to spotlight Cecilia’s role as a queen who cannot escape her fate, it also reveals other characters’ contributions to the hindrance of cultural acceptance by distorting their faces. For example, in the wedding scene and especially during the murder of Leonardo, light and shadow seem to mangle Doña Rosa’s and Leonardo’s

faces. As we see José Dolores, dressed and acting as Changó, burst through the cathedral doors, the camera cuts to the image of Doña Rosa's colorless face and emphasized, animal-like, black eyes. Dressed completely in black, she stands shielding an even more pallid, corpse-like Leonardo. While Leonardo has previously been portrayed as a happy, youthful character with pinkish-yellow cheeks, his face is now drained of all color except for the dark shadows around his eyes. More importantly, he seems neither frightened nor defensive, but instead, for lack of emotion and color, appears to be already dead. If he is a corpse, his mother here becomes somewhat of a demonic and gothic entity that possesses his spirit despite the religious backdrop of the Catholic church. In this way, she guards him as if refusing to release his soul from her symbolic underworld of pedigreed blood and elite society.

Even more curious is Doña Rosa's reaction to José Dolores's stabbing of her son. Sinking to the floor and writhing, Doña Rosa groans as if in pain— as if Leonardo's life were leaving her own body. And if this isn't macabre enough for the viewer, the mortally wounded Leonardo finds enough strength to stand and execute a sort of zombie-like walk over to his mother, who kneels with upwardly extended hands. Thus, with raised arms she appears to summon her son's walking corpse. Leonardo's final steps bring him crashing down into his mother's raised arms— a scene that recalls Michelangelo's famous statue, *Pietà.* Similar to the way that statue shows the crucified Jesus Christ lying dead in the lap of the Virgin Mary, Leonardo dies lying across his own mother's lap. However, unlike Michelangelo's religious statue, the film's gothic Doña Rosa-Mary figure can insinuate a corruption of Christian ideals shaped by colonialism. This

corruption, more specifically, points to the way Christianity was often used by the elite as a tool to reason their domination over blacks. As such, Doña Rosa's demon-like depiction is symbolic for her part in barring successful interracial coexistence for future generations, which are represented by Leonardo in this scene. He represents the younger, impressionable generation that on the one hand wants to make his own decisions, but will ultimately abide by the expectations of his parental authorities. For example, Leonardo decides to help Cecilia hide the rebel fugitive. When his mother finds out, however, she takes matters into her own hands by revealing the crime to authorities. Because she imposes her own will over Leonardo's actions, Doña Rosa is ultimately the one that murders her son and the revolution. As she makes it a point to govern his every move throughout the film and shape his destiny to fit the one that she desires, Doña Rosa's true identity as her son's possessor comes forth through the lighting in the wedding scene.

It can also be argued that by killing Leonardo, José Dolores has liberated him from the grasp of his mother's talons. In other words, he has figuratively "murdered" the demon by eliminating a breeding source of segregationist attitudes. While the lighting transforms the nurturing maternal figure into a grim-reaper-like presence, it reveals the symbol of inescapable determinism and inevitable failure that derives from inherited ignorance. In turn, this learned discrimination results in limitations and division rather than unity; or, in metaphorical terms, binding, social chains that can only be loosened by the social progression of previous generations. Leonardo, then, represents the potential prolongation of his mother's socio-politically retrogressive attitude for generations to come, an attitude that Martinez-Alier claims was prevalent among whites in nineteenth-

century Cuba: “The whites were well aware of the positive value of the cultural hegemony they exercised over the coloured community” (92). Doña Rosa, too is aware of her influence in maintaining this hegemonic system. Therefore, through José Dolores’s violent act (which is literally highlighted in the film by the seemingly ethereal light that surrounds him as he bursts through the church doors), he eliminates her ability to replicate these rigid social attitudes through Leonardo’s young mind. No longer having living children, Doña Rosa’s elitist mindset will die along with her.

In this way, the clash between European and African cultures is made clear. José Dolores’s role as Changó symbolizes an empowering rescue of ignored African contributions to Caribbean history. Representing the difficulty of reaching acknowledgement and acceptance of other cultures even in contemporaneous societies, Changó first has to return from the past and forcibly rescue this memory. To do this, he must eliminate the cultural intolerance hindering racially diverse coexistence, which is here symbolized by Doña Rosa as *Pietà* and the Catholic setting as the traditional and historically discriminatory European culture.

Filmic lighting suggests that Cecilia’s maternal figure, Seña Chepa, is just as psychologically damaging to her granddaughter as Doña Rosa is for Leonardo. One might expect the filmmaker to treat the single, African matriarch sympathetically by focusing on her social suffering or self-sacrifice for her family. Instead, similar to the way the white matriarch becomes a manipulator in the wedding scene, the lighting imposed onto Seña Chepa suggests a flawed familial system. Aside from the occasional flicker of a candle or a torch light from an outside passerby, Chepa is almost always

veiled in darkness throughout the film. What the viewer does notice in this scanty lighting, however, are the cave-like walls and the weathered dirt floor of the house. Matching the rugged setting of the house is Chepa's timeworn skin that, from start to finish, makes her appear ancient. While recounting the Oshún legend– which carries the message that to appear white is advantageous— in the beginning of the film to the small child, Cecilia, she looks and sounds as old as she does later in the film, when Cecilia has become a young woman. She appears to have maintained her age and the same pessimistic, complaining disposition, her ever-frowning facial expression, and a gravelly voice. This image diminishes her human form and, like the demonic distortion of Doña Rosa, turns her into a one-dimensional cave creature that never emerges from her socially designated space of "the way things are." The grandmother's image in the film, then, further echoes the theme of challenging outdated, extremist traditions that threaten social progression. On the other hand, her perpetual ancient state suggests that her outlook about race and social division, although pessimistic and antiquated, still lives on in Cuba in the 1980s and simply will not die. With this damaging attitude projected on her granddaughter, Chepa, metaphorically speaking, is a brothel madam who breaks Cecilia's spirit and compels Cecilia to "sell herself" in order to escape her inferiority. After all, Chepa criticizes Cecilia for not further exploiting her beauty to obtain this better future, an attitude not uncommon during Cecilia's time according to Martinez-Alier: "The basic attitude of all these parents was that 'all men should endeavor to advance instead of regress', advance both in relation to one's colour by 'whitening' oneself and in terms of one's distance from slavery" (93). As a result of this mentality shared among the majority

of *mulatos* and Africans, blacks could not develop a consciousness of their own, but instead "made their own the white discriminating ideology imposed on them from above" (Martinez-Alier 96). The racial and social barriers that impede Cecilia's subconscious need for progression and lead to her self-destruction in the film, then, are the products of the elite elders on both sides of the Cuban racial divide. The parents, especially, maintain these social standards and encourage the alienation of those who do not abide by them. Considering that in 1980s Cuba racism was still evident and "blackness was still identified by many people (of different ethnicities) with negative stereotypes, such as antisocial behavior and lack of family values and morality" (*Cuban Cinema* 365), Solás's depiction of the seemingly immortal Chepa can be understood to represent the continued refusal to move past antiquated systems of division, even in the 1980s.

In the final scene, the lighting draws our attention to symbols Cecilia's self-destruction caused by her inability to accept her "middle color." After the chaotic Holy Week scene, we see Cecilia, running desperately through the streets in her Oshún garb and pursued by José Dolores. As he chases her up the stairwell of a bell tower, the action begins to represent Cecilia's resistance of Changó, or her African roots, and her efforts to proceed metaphorically up the social stairwell to reach whiteness. Even at the top of this metaphorical climb, however, she finds social rejection, which is highlighted by the bright, white lights that illuminate her face. In this light, the viewer notes her pale, terrified expression, as she appears, still wearing her gleaming crown of Oshún, at the edge of the tower. In this moment, Cecilia appears to come face-to-face with her undesired, but inevitable future below her— death and social destruction.

Different from Villaverde's ending in which we learn that she will give birth to Leonardo's child, Solás closes the film with Cecilia's suicide. Neither of the endings are necessarily happy endings. In the end of Villaverde's novel, for example, we find Cecilia stripped of her dignity, locked away in an asylum, removed from any chance at a valuable contribution to society, and now the mother of a fatherless little girl, as Leonardo has been murdered. Even before his death, though, Leonardo shows little interest in his new child and its mother, Cecilia. True, Leonardo seems to run to Cecilia's rescue when he learns that she has been thrown in prison for distracting Leonardo from his studies studies, according to his father and Cecilia's accuser. Upon learning of her "delicate condition" of being pregnant while imprisoned, he was "deeply affected" and compelled pay whoever he needed to pay to see her released (Villaverde 486-487). Instead of marrying her, however, he keeps her hidden at his rental property where she serves as his maid. The reader learns that he comes to visit Cecilia less and less and begins to lose interest in her. Despite his original infatuation with his lover, the freshly graduated JD feels the menacing consequences for his irresponsible, now fading "amorous ecstasy," and prefers to forget Cecilia and marry Isabel while continuing to build upon his wealthy family lineage. In the end, he wishes to fulfill his family's desire to maintain *pureza de sangre* (purity of blood). After all, in his mind Cecilia, or "that woman," as he later considers her, "was not his wife, much less his equal" (Villaverde 488). Regardless of these sad facts, the birth of Leonardo's baby can insinuate a success for Cecilia personally in her journey to whiten future generations. In an interview, Solás, too, points out that the *mulato* symbolizes the success of syncretism and its importance in

Cuba's social development (Rueda 157). The eventual death of Leonardo and the arrival of the *mulata* baby in the nineteenth-century context, then, become symbols of new life, progression, racial synchronization, and social advances for blacks. Appropriately, Villaverde's ending fits the attitude of the historical context in which it was written and concerns pertinent social issues of the nineteenth century.

According to Solas's adaptation, the baby in Villaverde's novel never arrived, as it were. Solás, instead, insinuates that the novel's perhaps then-idealistic ending does not apply to the realities of late twentieth-century Cuba. After the struggle, Cecilia still dies representing the very cultural and racial hybrid that she was trying to eliminate. In a sense, Solás's suicidal ending sparks curiosity in this history that "killed itself," so to speak, due to peoples' willingness to keep it hidden. Nevertheless, some critics interpret the ending as an optimistic message of societal progression. Sarah Rosell, for example, describes Cecilia's suffering as a positive transformation from victim to revolutionary figure because her action towards change— albeit, via suicide— challenges the image of the passive slave (15). Still, because Cecilia has to end her own life in order to liberate herself from oppression, it is difficult to interpret this ending as optimistic or progressive for race issues in society. The spirit of the closing images clearly represents defeat, an alternative interpretation of the original work that speaks for itself— even a century later, the need to recognize racial syncretism and enduring societal inequalities in Cuban society still persists. While progress has been made with respect to the erasure of forced physical labor based on skin color, racism is still present, and the tendency to hide or deny African roots eliminates important aspects of Cuban identity. Contrasting with

Villaverde's final image of Cecilia as a new, albeit insane, mother, the *mulata* suicide in the film represents the idea that the strong African influence behind *cubanidad* is in danger due to the failure to embrace the country's hybrid roots. An idea that resonates with the opening scene of the film in which a cave-like tunnel is portrayed and a group of Afro-Cuban people can be seen quietly walking through this space, Cecilia's final act of desperation can insinuate, rather, a progress that is still very much in a transitional state. The tunnel's ambiguous origins and destination underline the group of people's collective movement through a space that perhaps symbolizes a transitional phase of liminality for descendants of Africans in Cuba. We might interpret this collective movement as a shift between one state of reality— the embracing of true origins— and another reality— the colonial whitewashed history of Cuba. To be sure, Cecilia, like the migrating group, is a liminal character who emphasizes the ambiguous reality of the *mulata* condition.

With the use of varying lighting tonalities, Solás and Delgado implicitly project shades of blackness on the viewer, enhancing the culturally diverse images and themes of the film. In other words, Cecilia as an icon of Cubanness, as Michael Chanan suggests, "represents, on the one hand, a tacit acknowledgment by all social classes of the blackness in Cuban blood, and, on the other, of tragedy" (*Cuban Cinema* 391). With the artistic and ethical purpose of the film in mind, it is clear that the cinematic lighting "can create a great many moods, but the task of the cinematographer is to choose the type of lighting that will best help to tell the story" (Malkiewics and Gryboski 2). The lighting techniques used in *Cecilia*, then, aid in telling the story while drawing needed attention to the reworked mood of the film's events. Solás's version of Villaverde's classic

undoubtedly implores viewers and readers to face the unpleasant truths of history and the present. Despite the different centuries in which they were created, both works function as a societal mirror that reflects varying national identity struggles. The filmic adaptation of this nineteenth-century classic provides a pertinent view of race issues that are relative to modern-day Cuban, and more broadly, Caribbean society.

CHAPTER TWO
WHAT SAYS SILENCE IN HILDA HIDALGO'S *DEL AMOR Y OTROS DEMONIOS*

A closer look at the adaptations of the Cecilia Valdés story revealed social trends influencing an ideal image of race versus the realistic image of race in the Cuban Caribbean. As Solás's film highlighted, Cecilia ambitiously and even convincingly passes for white while hiding her African roots. For Cecilia, a whitened image is the ideal image, and some of the adaptations of her character suggest that this Cuban ideal still exists in many ways. This chapter also deals with the notion of "faking it to make it" on various levels and its effects on those that perceive it and comprehend the faking as original or authentic. Unlike Cecilia, the character in question here is a white child living in colonial Colombia who adopts the cultural identity of her family's African slaves. This child is Sierva María, and she appears in Gabriel García Márquez's novel, *Del amor y otros demonios*, a fictional story that imitates the rhetoric of myth or legend, as many of Gabo's works do. There are key differences between the two characters, however, as Cecilia is hyperaware of her socially inferior roots, while Sierva María, having been raised by her white family's slaves and neglected by her own parents, appears to cohabit naturally with the Afro-Colombian culture without regard for differences in skin tone. I look to Costa Rican director Hilda Hidalgo's 2009 filmic adaptation of *Del amor,* a Costa Rican-Colombian production, to study the ways in which imitation can inspire self-reflection and self-awareness for the people perceiving the person who is imitating another. In this case, Sierva María imitates the cultural identity of the Afro-Colombian

slaves— perhaps unconsciously and consciously, at times. Among her abilities as a mime, for example, per the novel is that "she could dance with more grace and fire than the Africans, sing in voices different from her own in the various languages of Africa, [and] agitate the birds and animals when she imitated their voices" (*Of Love* 10). In an effort to transform the girl's physical appearance so that she can resemble the Africans she imitates, members of her adopted community braid her hair into loops daily, while her *criada*, Dominga de Adviento, often directs them to cover Sierva María's face in black soot and adorn her in Santería necklaces. As a result, Sierva María not only imitates the cultural practices of the slaves but, through her apparel and masking of her white skin, she also mimics their physical appearance.

In the following pages, I approach Hidalgo's adaptation to examine the filmic portrayal of Sierva María's "ethnic faking," her nanny's influence over the success of this mimicry and finally, while consulting pertinent theories on the cinematic gaze, I address the film's emphasis on the way other women perceive this white child's cultural imitation of blacks. To that end, I aim to show that Hidalgo's use of the female characters' silent interactions, including their gazes at Sierva María, draw on the novel's inadequacies and create a space for new cultural dialogue about the perceptions and concerns of Caribbean women.

García Márquez contextualizes the plot of *Del amor y otros demonios* (1994) with an (apparently nonfictional) anecdote. First, he recalls a time when he was a young journalist in which his boss advised him to cover a local news story. According to Gabo, a historical convent was being sold, demolished, and replaced with a five-star hotel. In

the meantime, the workers on site were removing crypts containing three generations of archbishops and abbesses (*Of Love* 9). During his observation of a surprisingly "primitive" excavation of cadavers (due to the workers' imprudence with the unearthing of the sacred tombs), the galvanizing moment for the novel's plot comes into focus: the revelation of a coffin filled with thick, red hair from the head of an adolescent girl's disintegrated skeleton. Her identity is known only by the timeworn engraving on her tombstone: "Sierva María de Todos los Ángeles." This discovery sparks another memory within García Márquez's mind: a legend his grandmother used to tell him when he was a child. He explains: "When I was a boy my grandmother had told me the legend of a little twelve-year-old marquise with hair that trailed behind her like a bridal train, who had died of rabies caused by a dog bite and was venerated in the towns along the Caribbean coast for the many miracles she had performed (*Of Love* 4)." García Márquez, captivated by the details of his grandmother's legend, adapts and elaborates the story of the marquise to his own ends. His story details the life of Sierva María, the young white girl who seems peculiar to others because of the way she imitates the lifestyle of the family's slaves and cohabits with them. In effect, Sierva María's consistent mimicry of colonial Afro-Colombian cultures results in a blurring of the notions of racial and cultural identity. On the one hand, she is white and of European lineage, yet her faithful integration into the society of the slaves allows her to mask this history.

Faithful to his grandmother's version of the little girl's fate, García Márquez's version of the story opens with the moment that a dog, presumed to be rabid, bites Sierva María in a street market in Cartagena, Colombia, where the whole of the story takes

place. Nevertheless, it is clear that none of the characters really know if the dog actually had rabies, but suspicion leads them to conclude that it did. What is more, believing that rabies and demonic possession are one and the same, the Catholic clergy convinces Sierva María's father, the marqués, to leave her in the convent's care so her "demons" can be exorcised. It is here in the convent where love, the theme indicated by the title, develops between the priest in charge of her exorcism, Father Cayetano, and Sierva Maria. Of course, this pair would make an impossible couple according to Catholic social standards. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the priest's commitment to a life of celibacy, the child's beauty and innocence captivates him and as a result, he devotes many nights to visiting her in her cell. Perhaps Cayetano was destined to live the life of a hopeless romantic as, according to the novel, he believed he was a direct descendant of the famous poet of love poems, Garcilaso de la Vega, "whom he held in almost religious reverence" (*Of Love* 80).

Touching on topics like the oppressive force of the church, science, the abuse of authority, and the idea of all-consuming love expressed by male thinkers, *Del amor* at first glance seems to attempt a critique of male-centered institutions. García Márquez's efforts, however, are flawed in their lack of development. In fact, many critics have commented on the shortcomings of *Del amor* when compared to the richness of his more celebrated novels, including what Lon Pearson identifies as a lack of character development, inconsistency within the plot, various structural defects, and other signs of having rushed to finish the novel for a quick publication (182). By the same token, Edward Waters Hood suggests that *Del amor* is less complex or engrossing than many of

García Márquez's previous novels (np). John Bemrose, furthermore, argues that the novel lacks the suggestive power of good writing and finds that the few positive aspects of the novel do not make up for its rigid and suffocating quality (np). Indeed, the reader becomes lost in a tangle of fragmented themes, especially those dealing with masculine institutions' power over society's perceptions of gender, race, and identity.

Nevertheless, incomplete stories and unsatisfactory endings leave room for reinterpretation and adaptation. Fifteen years after the publication of the novel, for example, Hidalgo reworked Gabo's novel for the "big screen," making significant changes to the narrative structure of the novel.[2] In fact, it was Gabo himself that gave Hidalgo the opportunity to adapt *Del amor* after leading a screenwriting workshop in Cuba where she was a participant (Cortés np). With his permission, and perhaps with few or no restrictions, she reassembles and expands upon some of the fragmented, undeveloped themes of the novel, particularly in relation to gender and race.

Even though *Del amor* was Hidalgo's first feature-length film, it was not her first successful project. In fact, she had written and directed documentaries, short films, and TV series, and various prestigious film festivals have recognized her work. For instance,

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[2] The reviews of Hidalgo's film indicate that it was much more well-received than the original that inspired its creation. In *Eye For Film*, for example, Jennie Kermode comments that for its successful capturing of the novel's narrative through poetic interpretation, Hidalgo's adaptation "is art and folklore and scripture, a remarkable accomplishment" (np). In *Rotten Tomatoes* and *Variety*, Andrew Barker recognizes the film for being "one of the few screen adaptations worthy of the Colombian novelist's source material," and for the film's "impeccable" acting, "painterly" cinematography, and the "uncanny" sound design (np). By the same token, in *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, María Lourdes Cortés opines that *Del amor* is "the most ambitious film in Central American cinema" (np). For further commentary on the film's reception, see Alcocer and Osborn 213-229.

her short film, *La pasión de nuestra señora* (1998), won the prize for the best short at the Festival de Cine Latino San Francisco-Marin Estados Unidos in 2000. Additionally, for the category of "best documentary about art," her film *Polvo de estrellas* (2001) won the Círculo Precolombino de Oro at the International Film Festival of Bogotá in 2004. The recurring themes that connect her short films are desire, sensuality, and dreams, while her documentaries tend to engage with social issues, gender issues, and sustainable development. Hidalgo is currently working on a second feature film entitled *Estación violenta*, an intimate and poetic film that challenges the notion that old age is "the sunset of our lives" (Sánchez np). It portrays an elderly woman's attempt at learning to swim for the first time and aims to show that reaching old age is an opportunity to grow spiritually and intellectually. Sources in Spain and Costa Rica have awarded funds to the project.

Although her other works have been praised, *Del amor* has done best at the box office. It earned nearly $2.5 million and was considered for various awards. Among these honors was its inclusion in the 32nd Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in La Habana, the Moscow International Film Festival, and also the Shanghai International Film Festival, to name a few. Additionally, after the Costa Rican Center for Cinematic Production's (CCPC) National Counsel of Cinematography lauded its "high esthetic value and impeccable technical style (*Centro* nd)," *Del amor* was chosen to represent Costa Rica in the 25th Spanish Goya Awards ceremony, and later in the 83rd Oscar Awards ceremony as best foreign film. Even eight years after its release, the film remains internationally influential. Just this year, the Festival of Colombian

Cinema organized by the Colombian Embassy in Baku, Azerbaijan opened with *Of Love* (Ismayilova np).

Female Bonds and the Gaze as Window of Desire

Hidalgo's *Del amor* may have earned its popularity because of the ways it differs from the original novel and the creative liberties taken to reinterpret rather than replicate it. To begin with, slight manipulations in the sequencing of events alter how those familiar with the novel understand its original plot. This is especially evident in the way the film reinterprets the novel's beginning. In the novel, for example, the initial discovery of Sierva María's remains immediately places the focus on her death. Although the cause is at first left to the reader's imagination, the novel later reveals that the male-centered institutions of colonial Colombia (represented by the fatal exorcism ritual at the end) ultimately destroy the girl. Hidalgo's film, in contrast, emphasizes a symbolic voyage. In the opening scene, a black screen dissolves into a clearer image of a girl sitting in the front of a canoe with her back towards the camera. The two thick braids of famous red hair falling down her back give her away— it is Sierva María (played by Eliza Triana). The pilot of the canoe, however, is unknown, as the camera angle blocks the view of this person. The canoe floats through tangles of mangroves lining a waterway that flows quietly beneath overhanging trees. Despite the tropical plants that cast shade, the scene is somehow brightly lit. This type of cinematic technique is *high key* lighting, or the dominant lighting of the scene, creates the impression of sunlight (Schenk 122). In this case, the key light has been adjusted to the point of whitening many of the small details in

the background and the characters' skin. Yet, given the abundant sources of shade in the scene, the illuminated mangrove becomes impossible and surreal. Next, a brief sequence of reverse shots occurs between Sierva María, who finally turns to face the camera, and the other person who is rowing the canoe, Dominga de Adviento, played by the famous Colombian singer and actress, Leonor González Mina— better known to her fans as "La Negra Grande." Suggesting a close bond between the passengers, Sierva María addresses Dominga as "Do'," an endearing nickname that the novel never mentions. In fact, even though the film depicts the women together in the opening scene, in the novel Dominga is a blurry detail of the past or, as the narrator explains, "a formidable black woman," "tall and bony," with a "clairvoyant intelligence" and a rebellious bone because she practices both Catholicism and her Yoruba faith "at the same time, and at random" (*Of Love* 11). In other words, García Márquez's caricature of Dominga– that she coexisted with Sierva María before her death, had certain authority over the order of the house, and represents a hybridity of the cultures that influence Sierva María throughout the story— is more important than the female bond the two might have shared.

The novel ihighlights Dominga's defiant attitude. She "ruled with an iron fist" because she was the only one capable of mediating between the community of the house slaves and the masters (*Of Love* 9). Even so, her character is one-dimensional, only mentioned briefly at the beginning of the novel. One moment in which the reader gathers a vague sense of Dominga's defiant attitude and confidence occurs during a curt dialogue with Bernarda, Sierva María's mother who, on the whole, the novel portrays as a degradation of society. Not only does she despise her husband and daughter, she has

often been unfaithful and is deteriorating physically from years of abusing alcohol and drugs. Moreover, in gothic descriptions of Bernarda's appearance, she takes the shape of a walking corpse in the novel. Nevertheless, she ironically compares Dominga to a "corpse" when, according to the narrator, the "slave woman" accidentally walks in on Bernarda and her "handsome and bold" black lover as they make love on her bedroom floor. This later prompts a confrontation between the two women (*Of Love* 20-22). The novel describes the scene and Bernarda's brazen response to Dominga's unprecedented arrival: "'Don't just stand there like a corpse…Either get out or get down here with us'" (*Of Love* 22). Dominga reacts by exiting with a slam of the door. Bernarda feels as if she has received a "slap in the face." She later threatens Dominga's life if she should divulge what she witnessed. It is here where the novel gives us a glimpse of Dominga's defiance: "'Don't worry, white lady,' said the slave. 'You can forbid whatever you like, and I'll obey.' And she concluded: 'The trouble is, you can't forbid what I think'" (*Of Love* 23). García Márquez's text, then, makes it clear that Dominga is daring, combative, and will not be afraid, despite her socially disadvantaged position as "the slave." Meanwhile, the derogatory identifier, "the slave," contrasts with the force of Dominga's defiant remark.

However, translation becomes a factor in further assessing the strength of her reply. Dominga calls Bernarda "blanca" instead of "white lady" in the original Spanish version of the novel. Within Latin American societies, "blanca" is a common, usually non-pejorative term that can be heard among friends and in informal social situations. The use of "negro" or "negra" as terms of endearment for a black person would have a similar effect— it is commonplace in Latin American culture and usually inoffensive.

The English version, however, translates “blanca” to “white lady,” which seems more confrontational in an English-speaking context. At least in the English version, then, one can argue that by highlighting Bernarda’s whiteness with the descriptor, “white lady,” Dominga fearlessly condemns Bernarda for commodifying black bodies, that is, both her own for manual labor and the body of Bernarda’s lover, a free black who chooses to sell himself for income. By the same token, her response in Spanish, “blanca,” may seem only mildly cheeky. Nevertheless, in both versions, by declaring agency over her own mind and thoughts, Dominga asserts her inner freedom, despite how Bernarda may choose to use her body. Only here do we see this side of Dominga in the text, a side that has the makings of a strong female lead that never comes to fruition. Apart from this instance, the novel makes little mention of Dominga’s interactions with others.

The film, however, emphasizes Dominga’s presence in interesting ways. After Sierva María speaks to her, the screen cuts to a medium-shot of Dominga rowing the canoe. This shift gives the impression that Dominga will respond or at least return Sierva María’s gaze; however, with her eyes cast down, she remains quiet. Sierva María then asks her in a subtitled African dialect if she will die and states that she will die with her. All the while, Dominga never responds or even looks at Sierva María. One might expect a prominent singer like Leonor González Mina who is best known for her voice to have earned at least one speaking part in Hidalgo’s film. The character’s silence, however, does not mean she plays a minor role in the film or in the young girl’s life. Rather, the scene emphasizes Dominga’s role as spiritual guide in a couple of ways. Her silence highlights the importance of her actions, specifically, that she paddles the canoe and thus

guides the voyage forward for the two women. Furthermore, given that the location and the destination of this generic stream is unknown, we do not know how far the women have progressed in their symbolic journey, perhaps away from machismo and toward gender equality, or maybe toward cultural fusions and acceptance of the "Other." We know only that they are on their way. In this regard, Dominga assumes the role of the leader through the waterway of collective liminality between female agency and colonial times dominated by oppressive masculine institutions. In this way, if we can interpret the discovery of Sierva María's remains in the novel as the male-centered institutions' successful defeat of Sierva María's cultural differences (even if the narrator intended to do the opposite), then we may consider the scene from the film as a representation of white and black female resistance. Hidalgo's version, unlike the novel's, emphasizes a voyage that signals the importance of the female bond as well as a promise of life, agency, and equal inclusion for the women escaping oppressive forces of colonialism such as *machismo* and intolerance for cultural diversity.

Far from a utopian future in which women are united through *sameness*, however, the scene successfully underscores the value of a *difference* between races and cultural lifestyles that needs to be acknowledged and comprehended culturally as well as respected. The scene achieves this through the frequent cuts between the image of Sierva María's white face and Dominga's black face during the canoe scene. In this way, the focal point becomes their many differences, at least in appearance and their implied historical backgrounds due to these surface differences. Dominga is an older, very dark-skinned black woman with African origins and, as the slave of a white marquis, she

obviously comes from a different economic and social standpoint than the marquis's white child, Sierva María. Living in the same household under the same patriarchal figure, they are still treated differently and have different roles due to their skin color and lineage. In the context of Latin American feminism, María Luisa Femenías deconstructs the notion of sameness, or purity (*la pureza*):

> Paradoxically, the carrier of the label "purity" problematically self-constitutes him/herself differently from what he or she really is: an individual, pierced by a sex-gender, an ethnicity, a culture, a religion, a combination of beliefs, a desire, a body with a sex, etc. In that sense, they cheat themselves in establishing themselves as—in bad Sartrean faith— a privileged carrier of "purity," denying what that person really is: an "impure" being, "mixed," "born of a woman," just like everyone else. (17)[3]

While we might point out that some groups are united through their collective experience or suffering, as Femenías points out, a recognition of the uniqueness of the individuals within those groups is necessary due to the complex cultural nuances, some visible and some hidden within societies. The women portrayed in Hidalgo's film are united through what they share collectively— their female experience within a colonial society— despite what they do *not* share, their racial heritage and certain lived experiences.

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[3] Paradójicamente, el/a portador/a de la pureza se autoconstituye de modo conflictivo ante lo que realmente es: un individuo/a, atravesado por un sexo-género, una etnia, una cultura, una religión, un conjunto de creencias, un deseo, un cuerpo sexuado, etc. En ese sentido, se autoengaña instituyéndose – con mala fe sartreana – en portador/a privilegiado/a de "pureza," negando lo que efectivamente es: un ser "impuro," "mestizo," "nacido de mujer," tal y como todo/as nosotra/os.

Among the many social characteristics of colonialism that the canoe scene seems to reject is the notion of the master-slave power dynamic that was the norm in colonial Caribbean history and common in its literature. Through Dominga's authority as a *criada* raising a white child who would accept and mimic the culture of the slaves, she resists the white masters' power systems. Similar to the way we see her steer the canoe's direction in the first scene of the film, Dominga also guides the way Sierva María views other cultures, such as her own Afro-Caribbean one. Further emphasizing Dominga's influence over the child is the cinematic portrayal of Sierva María gazing attentively at Dominga throughout this opening sequence. Dominga, however, never looks back at Sierva María. We can relate this to Todd McGowan's analysis of the cinematic gaze as object and point of desire. In other words, Sierva María is the desiring subject because the camera emphasizes her gaze directed at Dominga while Dominga, who never looks back, is the object of her desire. This is not to say that Sierva María wants to be Dominga or that Dominga is indifferent towards the child; rather, the unreciprocated gaze emphasizes Dominga's position of matriarchal power over the cultural growth of Sierva María. In other words, the gaze here brings to life the notion that Sierva María looks to Dominga for guidance in life, as she symbolically guides the canoe and projects her confidence and control through her downcast gaze. In effect, if Sierva María, a child who is representative of the next generation and the future of the colonizers, treats slaves as equals, the hegemonic system of white domination could become extinct. Thus, Dominga's guidance is a form of resisting the continuation of these hegemonic systems. This theme continues throughout the film until at the end Sierva María rebels against her

Catholic captors by refusing to release her "demon," or her Africanness. That Sierva María never gives up her African culture underscores both her and Dominga's defiance against the white, often male-centered institutions of religion during colonial times.

By the same token, the film portrays Bernarda (played by the Colombian actress Margarita Rosa de Francisco) as a commentary on female bonds and feminine agency. Bernarda is portrayed as the nastiest character in the novel. In the film, too, Hidalgo captures many of Bernarda's undesirable characteristics; nevertheless, the cinematographic lens approaches her development more empathetically than the novel's one-dimensional descriptions. There, for example, when Bernarda finds out that a dog in the street market has bitten Sierva María, she thinks only briefly about the news. In fact, she quickly forgets about it while bathing for the sixth time that day in expensive soaps ("jabones ricos"), and only thinks of the incident again later when she hears the mastiffs barking and fears that they might have rabies (*Of Love* 12). The narrative, in this way, shows that Bernarda only remembers her daughter's injury when concerned about her own safety and not because she cares about Sierva María's health. When driven by this fear she finally wanders out to the courtyard slave barracks to look at the bite as her daughter sleeps, she concludes that "even a simple dog bite might damage the family's honor" and decides not to mention it to anyone (*Of Love* 14). Returning quickly to her room, she worries not for Sierva María, but for the family's reputation instead. Notwithstanding this apparent concern for the family's reputation, her selfish actions in the book highlight the opposite. We recall that Bernarda is completely indifferent towards

her child and husband and, having already soiled her own reputation through love affairs, cares very little about maintaining a good reputation.

In the film, however, the elements of gaze and silence generate a psychological explanation for Bernarda's hateful attitude. For example, when Bernarda examines Sierva María's bite in the film, she pauses as if fascinated with the sleeping image of her daughter. In fact, it is such a fascination that Hidalgo dedicates thirty-six seconds to its unfolding in which Bernarda first fixates on Sierva María's face, then approaches the child slowly, stretches her hand out towards her, and finally caresses the girl's hair, though barely making contact. Just before she reaches for her daughter, an eerie glowing sound begins in the background.[4] This seems to signal the occurrence of a significant realization within Bernarda. In this way, her fixed gaze suggests a fascination with her daughter, perhaps due to the extreme cultural differences between the two, even though they come from the same family. The gaze again manifests itself through the the gap between Bernarda's fascinated gaze and Sierva María's sleeping, unreciprocated gaze, which can symbolize the extreme cultural and social gaps that divide the two women. Sierva María, for example, does not belong to any of the institutional categories that females usually belonged to in colonial times— she is not a prostitute, nun, mother, wife, or typical child of the white elite. As such, she inherently removes herself from the demands placed upon females in colonial societies. Notwithstanding her white skin, Sierva María represents a cultural *mestizaje* and female agency because she lives and

[4] For an example of a similar effect, see "Eerie Glow SOUND Effect" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sy0_Pgrxz5w)

behaves according to her own will. The courtyard of the slaves which, according to the novel was like "another city within the city (*Of Love* 9)" because of its contrasting cultural ambiance, represents this space of freedom for Sierva María. Bernarda's response towards the girl which occurs in this space of freedom and difference, then, may signify her curiosity and desire to experience another way of living that diverges from the norms of colonial society.

Without doubt, Bernarda's decadence indicates that her social surroundings have both corrupted and defeated her. She does not fit the idealistic feminine image of her time: she is not confined to the house, not humble, reserved, beautiful, or committed completely and passionately to the happiness of a husband. Even though machismo and patriarchal institutions were indeed a major influence over how colonial society was structured in colonial Colombia, this is not to say that Bernarda feels victimized because she is a woman. Scholars like Kimberly Gauderman, for instance, argue that because of women's access to the court systems to retaliate against abusive men, most women in the Colonial Americas enjoyed semi-autonomous lifestyles. She does clarify however that these liberties were

> not due to enlightened notions of women's rights or equality between the sexes. Women were not equal to men, but neither were men equal among themselves. An individual's status was influenced by wealth, occupation, special privileges (fueros) granted to members of specific groups (church officials, the military, aristocrats, students, guilds, Indians), and family status, along with race and

> gender. Social practice and legal reasoning emphasized the rights of people in different categories and virtually ignored questions of equality. (8)

Gauderman is correct in recognizing that the oppressive social forces of colonial times affected both men and women according to their class. Nevertheless, people were not divided simply based on class differences, and even within these class differences notions of gender inferiority/superiority existed. We cannot overlook, for instance, the male-centered religious institutions and predominantly male thought within the government that helped construct these class systems. By way of example, Rachel Bailey Jones emphasizes the heavily gendered official language of governing policies in the colonial Americas and the European influence on gender roles. According to Jones, women of European descent in colonial Latin American were expected to maintain the "purity of the race through their roles as wives and mothers," "uplift colonial subjects through educational and domestic management and attend to the family environment of their men," and "provide a moralizing influence on their husbands" (Jones 46). In addition, since *criollo* men often left the Americas to study in Europe, this Eurocentric education would have heavily influenced the intellectual development of the colonies on the students' return. Nicole Germeten comments on the social hierarchies that colonial Cartagena inherited from Europe, especially given its central location to the Atlantic trade activities:

> as an important Spanish port city and the site of an Inquisition high court, a slave market, a leper colony, a military base, and a prison colony, Cartagena sat at the center of a web of colonial institutions that imposed order upon local residents by

> enforcing Catholicism, cultural and religious boundaries, and prevailing race and gender hierarchies. Embedded in these institutions were the Hispanic values of sexual honor and blood purity. (13)

Considering these traditional honor codes, even if condemning Bernarda's behavior was not the intended purpose of the novel, by emphasizing only her promiscuity, selfish nature, and sour attitude, the text focuses on her failure to fit the mold of the honorable woman that reached American colonies via Europe. As such, the novel seems to avoid addressing more fully the harsh and primitive expectations placed on women. Hidalgo's film does a better job at portraying Bernarda as a victim of the male-centered colonial society through the implementation of gaze in the film. Even though one could argue that the scene portraying Bernarda's fascination with her child is simply a reflection of her love for Sierva María, we can further interpret Bernarda's gaze as a symbol of her desire for another way of life due to the impossibility of becoming simply a "perfect woman." In this light, the "sinful" lifestyle that the book details is, in a way, pardoned, or at least better understood.

Not unlike Bernarda's mother's fascination with the cultural difference that her daughter embodies, a similar instance occurs in the convent where Sierva María is held during her "possession." In this particular scene, we observe Sierva María sleeping on her stomach. A nun carrying a tray of food enters her cell. She sees the sleeping girl, discards the tray on a table, and approaches her. She begins to caress the child's hair and, bringing a lock of it to her nose, smells it. As if in a trance, the nun gazes at Sierva María until she suddenly awakens. Startled, the nun seems to snap out of her spell and hurries out of the

cell. As with Bernarda, the nun here is fascinated by the child's peculiar differences and her ability to assume a different cultural identity than that of the white elite. Although entering a convent was one of the only safe and respectable ways to live for single women in colonial times, one still had to follow the strict rules of the church. During the scene, for example, the nun touches Sierva María's long hair, a feature that the convent in the story prohibits of women. Sierva María, however, is allowed to maintain hers until she is married.[5] It makes sense that a nun living in this sheltered atmosphere would fixate on another person's longer hair as representative of something the church took from her when she entered the convent. In other words, the small amount of liberty that nuns have as women not bound to matrimony is only possible because they have surrendered their femininity to the church, including freedom in appearance, like their hair and body shape that must be hidden under robes.

In contrast, Sierva María is dressed in only her white underwear in this scene, and she naps with her legs slightly parted. The camera seems to eroticize this position, as the frame slowly pans over every inch of the girl's body from her exposed legs to her wild hair. The viewer understands this as the nun's gaze directed at Sierva María. As such, it gives the impression that the nun's gaze, and not the camera, savors the girl's image through her own eyes. One can argue that the nun appears aroused by the sight of the scantily clad child. The scene recalls the homoerotic episodes between the prisoners in works like José Revueltas' *El apando* and Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* in

[5] "<<Hay que cortársela>>, dijo [la tornera]. <<Es una manda a la Santísima Virgen hasta el día que se case>>, dijo el marqués. La tornera se inclinó ante la razón" (84).

that Sierva María is a vulnerable prisoner, even though the nun can also be considered a prisoner of her social situation. Nevertheless, while arguably sexualized, this scene symbolizes the desperate attraction that the sheltered nun feels to the cultural difference that Sierva María represents. This type of cinema challenges tensions of desire by inflicting the tension of the cinematic gaze. Sierva María, with the cultural difference that she embodies through mimicry of the slaves' lifestyle, is the object of desire; yet, because she is asleep, she does not return the gaze that the nun projects upon her. In this way, although the nun desires Sierva María, the unreturned gaze represents the child's absence or unreciprocated desire and thus, she cannot be possessed. Consequently, the nun can only desire the object, or Sierva María, but cannot "satisfy" the object because the object does not desire the cultural lifestyle that the nun embodies. Thus, just as the sight of Sierva María captivates Bernarda, the nun too sees the cultural liberation that Sierva María represents and subconsciously desires this.

While the convent's strict rules about appearance and sexuality control the nun's life, these rules do not strip Sierva María of her femininity or the spiritual freedom she achieves through her imitation of Afro-Colombian cultures. We see this especially in a scene where masturbation is implied. An establishing shot of a window with bars that we understand to be the cell of the convent introduces the scene. Subsequently, the frame cuts to a close-up of Sierva María's face and neck. A white pillow that fills the rest of the frame in the background. A stark shadow covers the right side of Sierva María's face and bright light whitens the left side. It is morning or midday, an hour when most of the town is awake and in movement. The mood of the jail-like setting, in contrast, is one of

boredom and idleness. At first, Sierva María's face is expressionless, but soon appearing frustrated, she closes her eyes and begins to struggle with the shackles that restrain her wrists at the upper corners of the bed. After managing to free her left hand, she calmly flexes her wrist as if trying to rid it of stiffness from having it shackled for such a lengthy time. She sighs, rubs her eye, and then rests her hand on her neck near the bottom of the frame. Next, her hand slowly travels down to her chest and finally to her abdomen. Still in close-up, the camera follows the hand down the length of the body and stops at the abdomen. Although the camera has stopped moving at this point, the hand continues down out of view. Even so, we cannot simply assume that Sierva María is just scratching her leg or rubbing a sore knee. On the contrary, after her hand disappears towards the implied region of self-pleasure, her abdomen area shudders briefly, which we can understand as an effect of pleasure from masturbation. A close-up of Sierva María's face with eyes closed and a peaceful expression, or one of pleasure perhaps, follows.

Rather than merely a suggestive scene of a teenager's pleasure, the episode can suggest feminist ideals of self-love and resistance as described by Luce Irigaray. She suggests that "through self-touching and a love of self that is a genuine eros rather than mere narcissism, we are able to acknowledge the alterity within us and thereby genuinely connect with others in their difference from us" (Willett, Anderson and Meyers np). If self-pleasure is connected to self-discovery and in turn a spiritual recognition and acceptance of differences in others, then Sierva María's masturbation can symbolize her spiritual connection to all of the different women that seem captivated by her. This

connection to other women despite racial and lifestyle differences is a phenomenon that Femenías calls "identity negotiation":

> …the current means of communication favor "contamination," from which no ethnicity, group, or person leaves unharmed. Free to their own dynamics, human groups always produce interactions, generate solidarities and tensions, construct counter-identities; they cohabit ...That the most progressive sectors of women foster the debate on the multiplicity of options surrounding identity already implies the opening of the debate of "negotiated identities" and critical examination of the traits that "compose it"; a difficult task that without doubt benefits women greatly.[6] (19-20)

The women's silence and admiration of Sierva María in the film reflects this identity negotiation. In spite of tensions generated by differences in class, social status, age, or race, the women communicate and interact through observing Sierva María imitate the Afro-Colombian slaves. More specifically, they are united through the mere act of observing Sierva María, in that she lives less hindered by the oppressive forces of colonial society. In effect, the women that silently observe Sierva María also "negotiate" their own identities. They negotiate similarities and differences between themselves and learn about each other through the experience. Consequently, Sierva María is the

[6] "los medios actuales de comunicación favorecen la 'contaminación,' de la que ninguna etnia, grupo o persona sale indemne. Librados a su propia dinámica, los diversos grupos humanos siempre producen interacciones, generan solidaridades y tensiones, construyen contra-identidades; se simbiotizan...Que los sectores más progresistas de mujeres promuevan el debate ante la multiplicidad de opciones identitarias, supone ya abrir el juego a las 'identidades negociadas' y al examen crítico de los rasgos que la 'componen'; tarea de largo aliento que sin duda beneficia en grado sumo a las mujeres" (19-20).

reflection point for the triangle of women— the unhappily married Bernarda who, in the eyes of her husband, is a lowlife; the nuns who live according to the laws of the male-centered church; and finally, Sierva María, the point of the triangle that symbolizes the uniting differences.

Allow me now to draw a comparison. Isaak Dinesen's story, "The Blank Page" (1955) recounts a Portuguese legend in which a royal family would hang the newly married princesses' sheets on the castle walls in order to display, as if works of art, the blood stains of defloration. At the end, the narrator reveals that one of the sheets hanging in the hall of the building, which is today a convent, inspires much silent reflection from the women who pass it. This is because it has no stain but is solid white instead. The narrator concludes that "it is in front of this piece of pure white linen that the old princesses of Portugal – worldly wise, dutiful, long-suffering queens, wives and mothers – and their noble old playmates, bridesmaids and maids-of-honour have most often stood still. It is in front of the blank page that old and young nuns, with the Mother Abbess herself, sink into deepest thought" (np). In this way, Sierva María represents a "blank page" in that she embodies a story different from those of other women. She is an innovative "version" of life for them because her lifestyle is unfamiliar. Much like the silent gaze in Hidalgo's film, Dinesen's story represents the importance of female bond and self-reflection through the observation of differences among women. The storyteller in Dinesen's work gets it right when she suggests that silence "tells a finer tale than any of us." We can connect this notion to the telling role of silence and the gaze in *Del amor*.

Not unlike the women inspired by the blank sheet in the story, the blank spaces left in García Márquez's novel leave room for reinterpreting the legend of Sierva María. In turn, Hidalgo implements the technique of cinematic silence that inspires the formation of an image and represents its self-reflective powers through the women's interactions. Hidalgo's reworking, then, seems to complement the original as what Edwin Carvajal Córdoba calls a "commentary" in which the director consciously interprets the novel with a different intention from the original author (48). Of course, Córdoba oversimplifies the film by suggesting that there are only "two elements that form the movie from start to finish: Sierva María's love with Father Cayetano and the superstitious and exotic elements related to rabies and the marvelous or sublime that takes place in Caribbean Colombia" (51). While love, the exotic, and the marvelous are elements that visually fill many of the scenes, the concern for women's issues and cultural diversity is at the heart of the film. In the end, Hidalgo's adaptation provided more than a mere imitation of García Márquez's original novel, just as his novel provided more than a replica of his grandmother's legend. Within the layers of these reinterpretations, or what some might claim to be inferior imitations of a superior original, we discover deeper social commentary about the power of cultural imitation on various levels. Within works like *Cecilia Valdés* and *Del amor*, we are beginning to see that for the characters in question, the ability to imitate the cultural lifestyle or racial appearance of another social group is a matter of life or death. Cecilia must mimic the white elite in order to achieve personal satisfaction with her own identity and escalate her social status in colonial Cuba, though she loses the will to survive when this imitation fails. Alternatively, Sierva María's

imitation does not strive for a higher social status or greater privilege in colonial Cartagena. On the contrary, Sierva María must imitate the lifestyle of the slaves for psychological relief, an emotional escape from the crumbling colonial society that has corrupted her mother and clipped the wings of freedom of many of its inhabitants. Sierva María's cultural imitation, though intended to make her life more enjoyable, ultimately gets her killed as the white community misunderstands it as demonic possession. If imitation here is bein If imitation here is being used as a mechanism for survival, it is a flawed one that, if misused or misinterpreted, can result in sociocultural chaos and self-destruction.

CHAPTER THREE
A TIRED FANTASY: CARIBBEAN SEX TOURISM IN SHORT STORIES BY DANY LAFERRIÈRE AND LAURENT CANTET'S *VERS LE SUD*

In the previous chapters, we saw how racial and ethnic imitations become social survival mechanisms— a tool for class advancement in Cecilia and psychological escape from oppressive surroundings in Del amor y otros demonios. As the adaptations of these novels suggest, hegemonic colonial systems impacting neo- and post-colonial societies have shaped the development of these mechanisms. For cultural coping, this chapter, too, deals with cultural imitation that hinges on the Caribbean's colonial past and neocolonial present. Unlike Cecilia and Del amor, however, the works to be discussed, Haitian author Dany Laferrière's short stories, "Vers le sud" (Heading South), "Les garçons magiques" (The Magic Boys), and "Le bar de la plage" (The Bar by the Beach), and their cinematic adaptation, French film director Laurent Cantet's Vers le sud (2005), are set more recently: in the late 1970s. Moreover, their plots focus on the complicated theme of sex tourism, which I identify as another form of cultural imitation, this time geared toward financial survival. Although prostitutes in the Caribbean are often forced into sex work because of the insufficient salaries offered in other job sectors, their participation in sex tourism simultaneously propagates the longstanding image of the Caribbean as a paradise to be bought and sold and reifies sexualized and racialized stereotypes within this "paradise." I point out that Laferrière's stories paint a picture of sex tourism in Haiti that spotlights the country's historical dependence on foreign currency, other nations' refusal

to acknowledge Haiti as a culturally unique and independent country, and the lengths to which Haitian society must go in order to win the approval of other nations. Laferrière's stories, in effect, condemn Haiti's seemingly permanent state of indebtedness to foreign powers. By the same token, I argue that Cantet's filmic adaptation reveals a subtle rebellion against Laferrière's bleak worldview through its symbolic representation of cross-generational empathy, frustration, and responsibility within the Haitian community.

Selling Paradise

"Endless summer," reads a 1970s American Airlines travel poster in bright green letters. Under the title, a charming, painted image of a foreign place fills the page. A teal sky highlights the background while below, quaint dirt paths wind in and out of green rolling hills. In the foreground, a palm tree extends high over a village, which gives the impression that nearby, one can find a beach and a breathtaking view of a clear-blue sea. The village itself is scattered with the black locals who seem happy. In one area, for example, a group of people dances joyously to the rhythm of percussion instruments — a tall drum, maracas, a tambourine. To the left, a woman holding a banana waves hello. Meanwhile, other women walk with baskets of goods skillfully balanced on their heads. Further up a path, farm animals roam freely around simple but clean white huts with red roofs. Not far away, a man meanders about with his goats as another gifts a rooster to a friend who stands in front of a large, straw-roofed cabana. Simultaneously, two people prepare wooden tables in the cabana with baskets of food. From the looks of the travel poster, this place seems tranquil, fair-weathered, and friendly. Could it be paradise?

Actually, as the large red letters at the bottom of the poster indicate, this place is Haiti, or more specifically, an outsider's artistic representation of Haiti, intended for selling travel to the country in the 70s. Painted by Swiss artist Paul Degen, this portrait is, of course, far from a realistic image of Haiti in the 1970s.

To be sure, an advertisement of Haiti's civil unrest fueled by decades of dictatorship and military brutality during that time would have never sold to American Airlines, and much less to tourists seeking adventure, entertainment, or relaxation. During this time, Haiti was essentially run by the corrupt Tontons Makoutes, or dictator François Duvalier's (Papa Doc's) "network of hired thugs," in historian Laurent Dubois's words (324). The group was employed to instill fear and thereby ensure the loyalty of the Haitian masses. Known for its random acts of violence and crime, the group began as the *cagoulards* during the elections of 1958, was institutionalized as the Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale after Duvalier came to power and was dubbed the "Tontons Makoutes" by the Haitian people. Mafia-like in nature, the makoutes contributed to draining Haiti's economy by hoarding its resources for themselves and the few elites of the country. According to historian Robert Fatton Jr., Duvalier knew that poverty and scarce resources "could easily become a useful tool in enhancing his popularity… In fact, miniscule payoffs with promises of larger future gains for a chosen few became an attractive proposition for a destitute population" (107). Devastatingly, the makoutes maintained their presence and terror in Haiti for decades after Duvalier's death in 1971, even long after Baby Doc ordered the original leader of the makoutes, Luckner Cambronne, into exile (Dubois 358). To be sure, the makoutes' violence included sexual

violence which has been detailed by a plethora of Haitian writers, among them Marie Vieux-Chauvet's trilogy (in *Amour, Colère, Folie* [1968]) and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). The violence and oppression brought forth by the makoutes and the dictatorship serve as the backdrop for Laferrière's and Cantet's works. The Haitian tourism industry, nevertheless, manages to mask this lived reality and to keep it disguised as a Paradise for the white tourists akin to Degen's painting.

C. Michael Hall and Hazel Tucker explain that "the term paradise is often utilized in the promotion of postcolonial island states in a manner that reinforces Western ideas of a romantic other, in the same way that Eden has been applied to Africa" (Tourism 10). Indeed, with the help of Hollywood, the media, and the tourism industry's shaping of its image, the Caribbean seems an exotic escape for those looking to flee the often rigid and stressful lifestyles of the Western world. Even so, while these sources may be partially responsible for continually framing the Caribbean as "a signifier of sun, sand, and sea hedonistic holiday experiences" (Daye 19), Caribbean resorts, its local vendors, and businesses have solidified the myth of paradise for its visitors, for financial survival. Recognizing the profits to be made, all of the players in the transaction of tourism sell the region's simple pleasures, such as views of sun-kissed bodies on white beaches, promises of magical bioluminescent bay adventures, endless supplies of tropical drinks and street-market trinkets. Noting the Caribbean's willing participation in such transactions with tourists, St. Lucian historian Derek Walcott has said that "to sell itself, the Caribbean encourages the delights of mindlessness, of brilliant vacuity" (Antilles 14). Yet, as the Caribbean participates in the manufacturing of paradise, it recreates the colonial power

structures that the historical independence movements once fought to break. In fact, Caribbean travel advertisements even seem to encourage the visitor's return to colonial times through visiting its historical towns and paying to see traditional dance shows. Rudyard Alcocer considers this return to colonial times a sort of time travel: "In the present era of globalization and international travel (curtailed to some extent, perhaps, by epidemics, drug–related violence, and the U.S. War on Terror, among other factors), tourists have been lured by the prospects of symbolic time travel in conjunction to visits to cultural sites in the Americas and beyond" (*Time Travel* 196).

In an effort to recreate colonial experiences, then, the Caribbean must imitate the colonial atmosphere and power structures of the past in which the Caribbean lands look to the mainland for approval and the outsider from the mainland has financial power over the local. The very nature of the hospitality and tourism industries, additionally, places its workers into positions of servitude. Some have likened the power dynamic between the wealthy tourist and the hospitality provider in Caribbean tourism to slavery, given the region's history of slavery and the hotels' predominantly black staff. Angelique Nixon, for example, muses that

> Tourism (the process, the business, the regimes of representation) reinforces the destructive psychology of slavery; it continues to transform and refashion islands across the region to reflect colonial ideologies that have resulted in a very complex negotiation among Caribbean people and identities within the production of paradise. (Nixon 184)

Within these "regimes of representation," we can place the business of sex tourism and the power structures created within it.

A snorkeling tour boat filled with happy and adventurous tourists of all ages might seem an odd location for an 8" x 11" sign that reads "No al turismo sexual de menores: Proteja nuestros niños" (Say 'no' to sex tourism of minors: Protect our children). Signs such as these, however, are appearing more and more in recreational venues frequented by tourists in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Cartagena de Indias, among other regions in the Caribbean. Unfortunately, sex tourism of both adult and child sex workers has become somewhat of a "norm" for local societies and foreign visitors. While many Caribbean governments and organizations have tried to draw attention to the immorality and illegality of this, sex is readily available for purchase in various tourist regions of the Caribbean. Julia Davidson and Jacqueline Taylor affirm that sex tourism in the Caribbean "with the involvement not only of adult women, but also [of] men and youth as sex providers," began to draw attention by researchers in 1990 (57), although it has existed much longer. All things considered, over time, Caribbean destinations have become what Davidson and Taylor have called "sexual paradises," "Fantasy Islands," or sexual "Disneylands," for both men and women seeking this very specific "tourist attraction" that they cannot get in their homelands.

Of course, it would be difficult to trace the exact origin of sex tourism as we know it today. The gangly roots of Caribbean sex tourism, without doubt, wind deep into the colonial layers of its history, beginning with early notions of the Caribbean as the Other, both in reference to the region itself and to its inhabitants. For Europe, of course,

the Caribbean's perpetual sun and heat was shockingly different from seasons of Europe, and the people, with darker skin tones and different customs and languages than those of the Europeans, were definitely not excluded from this concept of otherness. Under those circumstances, economic and racial inequalities between outsiders and locals have propagated the selling of sex in paradise. Kamala Kempadoo points out that "territories that once served as sex havens for the colonial elite are today frequented by sex tourists, and several of the island economies now depend upon the region's racialized, sexualized image" (1). The sex tourist market consequently continues to flourish, attracting both male and female clients from all over the world. Davidson and Taylor have found that while men from the Western world can come to these destinations to pay for sex with women of all ages, "likewise, the European, North American, or Australian woman visiting sex tourist destinations in India, Indonesia, Latin America, or the Caribbean will be faced by opportunities either to enter into explicit cash-for-sex exchanges, one-night stands or quasi-romantic sexual relationships with local or migrant men and boys" (84). For some, these age-old power structures recreated between the wealthy tourist and the Third World prostitute have become "just the way things are," as Mimi Sheller suggests: "global economic inequalities, gender inequalities and racial order underlying such transactions are thus 'naturalised', as having a 'lover for a week' becomes part of the promise of the 'all-inclusive' experience (for women tourists as much as for men)" (33). Because the Caribbean has not been able to rid itself of its sexualized image, its people have profited from this image by selling it.

Laferrière's works insinuate that through the Caribbean tourism industry's need to focus on the visitor's entertainment and pleasure— both physically and emotionally— its societies succumb to a form of social enslavement. In this way, his writings reflect his concerns for the foreigner's treatment of Haitians within the country and of Haitian immigrants who venture outside the country. Born in Port-au-Prince in 1956, he studied and worked as a journalist within Haiti during the Duvalier regimes and later experienced life as a Haitian immigrant in Montreal, Canada, where he relocated in 1976 after Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc) ordered the murder of his closest friend. While there, he worked factory jobs, wrote about the people he observed, and finished his highly controversial novel, *Comment faire l'amour avec un Nègre sans fatigue* (*How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired*) (1985), which details a black Haitian immigrant's sexual experiences with white women in Montreal. Soon adapted to film by Canadian director Jacques W. Benoit and reviewed in *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Sun-Times*, Laferrière's steamy novel definitely made a splash. Nevertheless, the racy subject matter of *Comment faire* was only the beginning of many more taboo topics to be recorded by Laferrière. *La chair du maître* (1997), the collection of stories that include the inspiration for Cantet's film, is an example. Indeed, those familiar with Laferrière's writings know his themes of choice: tourism, class difference, and power structures in Haiti and with respect to Haitian immigrants. He focuses often, furthermore, on aggressive, sexually charged, white women who seek the pleasures of the black male body. Because of the attention *Comment faire* got from the press, Laferrière soon became a popular guest for TV and radio interviews, and even acquired a job as a weather

announcer for a startup news station in Montreal. Besides having been recognized as Montreal's first black news personality (Bessette 11), he has also written and directed films, such as his comedy, *Comment conquérir l'Amérique dans une nuit* (2004), about Haitian immigrants trying to achieve their dreams (Ramond np). In the same year, furthermore, he collaborated with Canadian film director John L'Ecuyer on a cinematic adaptation of his own novel about a boy growing up during the violent Duvalier regime entitled, *Le goût des jeunes filles* (2004).[7]

Cantet's own film projects showcase subject matter similar to that of Laferrière's. For example, before adapting the stories for *Vers le sud*, he directed *L'Emploi du temps*, a film portraying an unemployed man's feelings of idleness and shame. This film received the Don Quixote award at the Venice Film Festival in 2001. In addition, *Ressources humaines*, his film about workplace injustices, earned the French César in 2001. His film, *Entre les murs*, which captures a young schoolteacher's daily struggles to reach his unruly adolescent students, won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2008. A seasoned and lauded director, he graduated from the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques (IDHEC) in France and acquired work early in his career at Sérénade Studios. When it went out of business, he went on to work with the prestigious Haut et Court Productions in Paris. It was there at Haut et Court where he produced award-winning films that focus on themes of shame, Oedipal relationships, experience of spatial unevenness, and utopias versus the individual. Cantet was, no doubt, fascinated by "Les garçons magiques," "Le

[7] Despite his obvious recurring themes and character types, when it comes to Laferrière's writing style, he generally prefers to avoid categorization and simply writes for people who want to read good books—not for the critics or academics (Bessette 17).

bar de la plage," and "Vers le sud's" themes of employment and class inequality.[8] In order of their appearance in the collection, the first of the stories, "Les garçons," details the economic hardships of Mauléon Mauléus, a Haitian who has worked his whole life in "the hell that is New York" (*Heading* 111) to open his own hotel in Haiti. Despite having reached his dream, this country's dire financial situation has been forcing its local businesses to close or sell. Thus, feeling the effects of Haiti's economic strife, Mauléon must now choose: he can sell the hotel to "Old Sam," a North American who is known on the island for buying the locals' failed businesses, or he can turn to "the magic boys"— the young male prostitutes that sell themselves to tourists— to generate more income for the hotel. If he accepts Sam's offer to help the business, Mauléon will lose the hotel altogether. Sam has made clear, after all, that he is "not in the habit of taking on partners" (Heading 114) and is thus unwilling to share the resort and its profits with Mauléon. Determined to save his life's work and maintain ownership of it, Mauléon gambles on the local "magic."

The focus shifts in "Le bar de la plage" from Mauléon's internal conflict to a more intimate view of the prostitutes— Gogo, Chico, and Mario— at the hotel's beach cantina. In this scene, they joke about their bedroom experiences that they have had with some of the quirky, older clients in the hotel. For example, they describe one of the sex-crazed ladies as "a real hard nut to crack" (Heading 118), meaning that she is nearly

[8] Although Cantet seems to include loosely various elements from other stories in *La chair du maître*, such as the overall tone of political fear that overshadows most of the stories as well as certain character types, his work is most clearly taken from Laferrière's On the one hand, "Les garçons" and "Le bar," provide the background setting for the film and the sociopolitical context while "Vers" provides the film's title and its characters.

impossible to satisfy sexually. By the same token, they deem another "the marathoner of sex" (Heading 120) while comparing a different woman to a crocodile who has "a tough old hide on her" (Heading 122), because of her aged skin and high stamina in bed. Although they make light of their tragic social reality as prostitutes, their playful dialogue does not amuse the hotel waiter, Albert, who seems to take on the role of a stern father figure in the story. On the contrary, he suggests bluntly to the boys: "You could go down to the Arts and Crafts Institute and learn how to do a real job, like carpentry or mechanics" (Heading 121). Unconvinced, the boys muse that their way of making money is at least "better than being in jail" (Heading 118). In this way, *Washington Post* staff writer Stephen Hunter jokes that the subject matter in *Vers* is really not too different from the focus on employment and the realm of the "office" depicted in Cantet's previous films since, in his words, "it's just that for Legba, the workplace is between the thighs of Ellen, Brenda and Sue" (Hunter np).

Unlike the other two stories, which are narrated in third person omniscient voice, "Vers le sud" is divided into the personal testimonies of Albert and three white female tourists: Sue, Ellen, and Brenda. The implied interviewer is a young detective from a "self-regulating" department in Port-au-Prince called the Criminal Investigation Services (Heading 134). Markedly, the investigator's identity remains vague and his presence is easy to forget, as this person never actually speaks for himself and is only acknowledged briefly through the monologues of the women and Albert. All that the reader can gather, consequently, is that he is investigating the recent murder of fifteen-year-old Legba, the most sought-after of the adolescent prostitutes at the resort by the female tourists.

Meanwhile, behind these interview-style accounts, the women reveal their motives for returning time and again to Port-au-Prince: they come seeking an escape from their troublesome personal lives abroad, and they find their refuge in the comfort and pleasure that the male prostitutes bring them. For example, Brenda, a former Baptist (now turned Methodist, because of her husband) from Savannah, Georgia, is unhappily married to a man who in the past twenty-five years "hasn't touched her more than a grand total of eight times" (Heading 125). Eventually, she reveals erotic details about her sexual encounters with Legba.

Meanwhile, Ellen's testimony reveals her hate for the "stuck-up little bitches" that she teaches as a contemporary literature professor at Vassar College in New York. In her opinion, all they care to learn is "how to go about making the best of what the good Lord gave them to work with" so that they can "trap husbands" (Heading 125-126). In addition to hating her students, Ellen loathes her own country, the United States, and other tourists who travel to the Caribbean for vacation, although she herself is a tourist. Like Brenda, Ellen worships Legba, whom she considers her "black sun" and her "Prince of Light" (Heading 136-139), and is addicted to sex that she happily pays for. Sue, by contrast, is a Canadian who describes herself as a woman who has "tried every diet known to science" and still looks like "a blues singer from Harlem" (Heading 126). Since, according to Sue, North American men do not like curvy women, she comes to Haiti where the local men appreciate her full-figured body type. Different from Brenda and Ellen's tastes, Sue prefers a prostitute called Neptune.

Alongside the feminine voices, we also hear from Albert, who informs us that his family fought bitterly against US insurgents during the 1915 occupation and hated whites because of it. We find out that Albert, too, has little patience for the white tourists that frequent the hotel because they are, in his opinion, no more than "lost women, animals lusting after blood and sperm" (Heading 134). He concludes that Legba, the "Prince of Storms," no doubt, is at fault for the white women's return and their crazed sex addictions.

Still, there comes a time when critics begin to question what business a white Frenchman such as Cantet has with adapting a black Haitian's stories that condemn the rich, white Western woman's power over the poor black Haitian man. As O'Shaugnessy tells it (99), after visiting his parents in Haiti where they were doing charity work, Cantet noticed the plethora of humanitarian workers from the U.S. and Europe in the country and felt an overwhelming sense of being somewhere he did not belong. According to his interview with Peter Fraser, Cantet found himself questioning his presence there: "Was it moral to be there without doing anything to justify your presence? Then after a few days in Port-au-Prince I had the idea of trying to write a film about this tourist status: what it means to be there with money in your pocket, with white skin, all that it reminds people of" (np). His interest in this topic and his desire for a more authentic view of Haitian culture led him to peruse some of the local literature in the airport bookstore where he came across Laferrière's book for the first time. "So I built the story on the novel but also on the feeling I had when I was there," he concluded (Cantet in Fraser np). Of course, Cantet was aware before starting the film of his own problematic position to his topic of

choice, according to an interview with Peter Fraser. Of the interview and Cantet's relation to the subject matter, Fraser muses that it was clearly as much a personal exploration as it was a film that "without doubt has something to say about a wide range of politically sensitive issues" (np). Still, Cantet argues that despite his status as white male, he can relate to his female subjects: "I think that men and women share a lot of things, especially the fundamental existential questions that this film is dealing with" (Fraser np). Aware of his compromised position, he insists that his intentions in creating all of the characters are good and non-exploitative in an interview with Rania Richardson on the set of Vers le sud: "I always try not to judge my characters, not to judge their situation, just give them space to exist and show themselves in all their complexity, like in life" (np). Critics agreed. Stephen Hunter, for instance, concludes that "In its way, 'Heading South' is a piercing indictment, though it makes its point without much screaming, hectoring or preening. It's quietly terrific in that it does not focus on or exploit the horrors of the third world as some films do" (np). Stephen Holden, likewise, calls Cantet's film "sophisticated" in that it does not demonize the white tourist women "whose relationships with their young lovers are more tender and nourishing than overtly crass." In addition, he calls the film "great" for the way it "recognizes and respects the complexity of its memorable, fully realized characters" (np). Even though Laferriére and Cantet did not formally collaborate on the screenplay adaptation of Laferrière's stories, the two did meet and Lafarriére asked of Cantet to "be careful not to make of the boys poor victims" because for Laferriére, the relationship between the young boys and the

older women was “something far more complex being played out” and “reciprocal” (Bickerton np).

Still, Cantet’s seemingly “problematic position” to the subject matter of the film is not necessarily assuaged by his inclusion of Haitian voices. In most of his films, Cantet works with both amateur actors who have actually experienced the roles they play and stars. In his casting choice for Vers le sud this tendency shows— it boasts established actors like Charlotte Rampling (as Ellen), Karen Young (Brenda), and Louise Portal (Sue). Newer talent, on the other hand, represents Haiti. This includes Ménothy Cesar (Legba), Lys Ambrois (Albert), Marie-Laurence Hérard (woman at airport), Anotte Saint-Ford (the colonel’s mistress), and Jackenson Pierre Olmo Diaz (Eddy). While these actors are credited at the end of the film and they are searchable in film databases, not much information is available about them, including their birth country. Despite the amount of press the film received, the actors who played Haitians were rarely mentioned. Haitian involvement behind the scenes of Vers is slim, in other words, and most of the film’s crew is French: Cantet himself, cinematographer Pierre Milon, editor Stéphanie Léger, and screenplay co-writer Robin Campillo (the latter is French-Moroccan). At least on the surface, the film seems to be a creation by Westerners.

Legba: Prince of Desire

How is it that Legba, a fifteen-year-old Haitian prostitute who has no speaking part and is presumably dead during the narration of Laferrièrre’s stories, can be at once the “Prince of Storms,” with negative connotations that insinuate he is someone who brings trouble,

and the “Prince of Light,” which suggests something more positive, like someone who brings happiness? These contrasting labels are nothing new for the character, actually. Among the many judgments passed on this nearly absent character in “Vers,” he is also likened to “a lost dog,” according to Brenda, “a nice young man,” according to her husband, “a radiant flower,” according to Ellen, and a “little gigolo,” according to Sue. In Cantet’s film, Legba still carries the burden of judgments by those who surround him, but his character development, and especially his visibility, contribute to the way the film seems to give Haiti a more positive prognosis— a hope for social change. To begin with, the viewer actually gets to see and hear Legba as he interacts with his social surroundings in Cantet’s Vers, unlike the rumor-based information we gather about Legba in Laferrière’s “Vers.” It the story Legba never speaks for himself and instead becomes familiar to the reader only through the testimonies of others. Even in his absence, he has somehow become the main reason for Albert’s and the tourists’ interviews, the subject of their testimonies. Each of their monologues indicates he is the central object of desire for all who behold him. In this way, the stories present Legba as nothing more than a commodity to be sold in order to generate income for the hotel, to be bought, possessed, and enjoyed sexually by the tourists, to be blamed for the city’s social corruption by locals like Albert, to be hated for this, and finally, to be thrown away and murdered later. At the same time, in “Les garçons” and “Le bar,” his presence is merely assumed because all three stories take place in the same city, at the same resort, and deal with themes of prostitution, class difference, and tourism. In other words, while we read about Mauléon in the first story, or Albert’s interactions with Chico, Gogo, and Mario in the second

story, we can presume that although Legba is never mentioned, he is somewhere behind the scenes. Given the limited development of his character, then, it becomes clear that Legba's identity according to anyone other than those who have consumed him is insignificant.

That all of the women want to possess Legba is nevertheless telling of his role as a commodity in the stories; however, further highlighting this notion is that in Laferrière's version, the men want him as well. Brenda is obsessed with Legba in "Vers," but it is her husband, the Methodist from Georgia, who first encourages her to pursue the boy. One day, after having invited Legba to dine with them several nights in a row, both Brenda and her husband extend an invitation to Legba to accompany them to an "isolated spot" on the beach that Brenda's husband has chosen. That the husband selects a place away from public view and social judgment indicates his role in facilitating Brenda's ensuing seduction of Legba. While there, Brenda admits to having admired Legba's "delicately muscled" body as he basks on the beach, although she does so conspicuously in hopes that her husband will not notice. Alas, her husband catches on, but with an encouraging wink, he tells Brenda that "he didn't have any objections to me giving in to my obvious inclinations" (Heading 130). In fact, he whispers, "I want you to," when she pretends to be offended by his insinuation.

With her husband as the instigator, then, Brenda liberates herself in part from blame for her encounter with the minor, and even more so through the self-pardoning language that she uses while describing the progression of the scene. Referring to her husband, she claims that "he made me look at Legba's young, almost naked body," and

finally "he took my hand and guided it towards Legba's torso" (131, italics mine). In effect, Brenda makes it a point to remind her interviewer that if it were not for her husband's aggressive actions, perhaps she would have behaved differently. According to Kempadoo, this phenomenon of older women coming to the Caribbean for what they often excuse as the less stigmatized "romance tourism" with young, black men is just as common as the men that come to the Caribbean seeking "sex tourism" with female prostitutes. Kempadoo notes, however, that whether these female clients pay their "hustler" right out with money, gifts, meals, or other commodities, in the end

> women simply become equal to their male counterparts in the consumption of Caribbean sexuality. Their position in the global economy, as citizens of wealthy nations who can afford to travel and pay for leisure time and activities in some exotic part of the world, is reinforced rather than disrupted. The definition by the women of these relationships as primarily "friendships" or "romance" serves to keep alive the myth that women are interested in sex only when it is attached to notions of love and intimacy, confirming hegemonic notions of gender difference, while it absolves women from the global North of any responsibility for global inequalities. (129)

Brenda similarly finds ways to excuse herself from the inequalities of age and race in her relationship with Legba. Furthermore, as the highly pornographic scene in "Vers" unfolds, her husband, in Brenda's words, merely lies next to them "taking it all in. His eyes were riveted on the long, black sword that was splitting me in half" (132). The husband never joins in, as it were, and it was only "the first time he'd ever acted like

that" (131), meaning that was the first time he had shown interest in a cuckoldry fetish, according to Brenda. Then again, perhaps it is the enchanting atmosphere of paradise represented by the young, exotic Legba, that has inspired her religious husband's strange behavior. In this way, Brenda's husband has aggressively taken action in seeing to it that he, too, achieves his vacation fantasy, albeit a voyeuristic one, in paradise.

The film's portrayal of the same testimony is significantly different. To begin with, in the film we learn Brenda's husband's name, a detail that the short story does not offer. At first glance, one might associate his name, Mark, with the fact that he is a Methodist: Mark was one of Jesus Christ's apostles and one of the books of the New Testament according to Christian belief. While this notion paired with his voyeuristic actions in the short story could indicate Brenda's husband's hypocrisy towards his affirmed Christian values, Mark does not actually take part in the meeting with Legba in Cantet's film. In fact, while the husband instigates the sexual encounter with Legba in the short story, Cantet's film eliminates the stories' sexually deviant insinuations. On the one hand, similar to the short stories, Brenda does maintain that her husband invites Legba to join them for various meals. This, however, is merely an act of charity inspired by the pity he takes on the boy. "He's a nice young fellow," he deduces, according to Brenda, but after this part of her testimony in the film, there is no additional mention of her husband. Instead, while the camera focuses on Brenda alone on her bed, she timidly divulges, "One day I suggested he come swimming with me. He, took me to a secluded beach…" It is Brenda, then, who instigates the relationship and Legba who makes her fantasy come true by choosing the secluded spot. Brenda continues: "We were both lying

in our bathing suits on a big rock basking in the sun…I edged my hand over and placed it on his chest. Legba opened his eyes and immediately closed them again. That encouraged me, and I moved my hand down his body." Brenda concludes, "I threw myself on him." Even though she affirms in the film that Legba was "completely motionless" during sex and only opened his eyes once before immediately shutting them again, he appears more of a participant in the film version of Brenda's testimony than in that of the short story. If Brenda's words are true, the unspoken consent that she reads from Legba's eye movements and the notion that he took her to the secluded beach could indeed imply that he actively participated in setting up their rendezvous and even wanted the meeting to take place.

In the short story, by contrast, Brenda's testimony brings to the forefront Legba's role as commodity for both men and women in Haiti. For example, despite the fact that Brenda's choice of words in the short story indicate that his "sword was splitting her," as previously mentioned, Legba's "sword" is not exactly doing all of the action, and especially not willingly. More accurately, Brenda uses Legba's passivity during the encounter as an affirmation of his consent since, for Brenda, his lack of movement or protest made it seem "as though he was making me a gift of his body" (Heading 131). She cannot turn down Legba's generous offering, and she consumes it to the fullest, beginning with the fellatio that she initiates— "…I gently spread Legba's legs apart and knelt between them…" (Heading 132)— and the sexual intercourse that she controls by climbing on top of Legba to pleasure herself – "I impaled myself on his rod" (Heading 132). She does the "impaling" to herself, in other words, while using Legba's body to do

so. Even after her advances, Brenda admits, “still he [Legba] didn’t move” (Heading 132), similar to her testimony in the film. However, the film omits Brenda’s description of her dominance over the motionless body and gives Legba partial responsibility for the encounter by choosing the secluded beach. In addition, the way we see him interacting with his clients in the film gives us a better view of his agency. He appears willing to be with his clients, while in the stories, the language used makes it seem that he has no choice. In this way, the short stories’ version underlines the notion that Legba is currency a commodity.

The film suggests that it is Legba’s choice to hustle so that he can make a living in tough social surroundings. The sexual transaction through this lens is on mutual grounds in that both groups, the women and the prostitutes receive something from the transaction. More specifically, the women receive pleasure while Legba receives money or gifts. Cantet stated in an interview that he never meant to exploit either group, the white women or the prostitutes, because these groups are both oppressed:

> Here I think the women are oppressed because they live in a country where being a woman over forty means that you are not desirable anymore, that you don’t exist, that you have to conform yourself to a model in which you don’t recognise yourself. So they arrive like one oppressed group in front of another one, which are the young Haitians…if the two groups are oppressed people I don’t think that they exploit each other. I think that they help each other more than exploit each other. (Fraser np)

For Cantet, then, the transaction is fair. In his version, both groups are trying to survive in oppressive situations, and thereby benefit from one another.

The short stories also emphasize the commodification of Legba by the Haitians themselves. In addition to the tourist men and women wanting to indulge in Legba, for example, even Albert becomes mesmerized by Legba and cannot refrain from his impulse to possess the boy. In "Vers" he explains that after discovering the half-naked Legba on the beach one morning curled up "like a sleeping angel," he feels strangely compelled to stroke the boy's hair. Somehow intuiting the risk of losing himself in vice like the tourists have, Albert tells himself, "'Careful… beware of the sweetness of this skin (140),'" but to no avail. He admits, "And I… kissed him. I kissed Legba. It was the first time I'd ever kissed a man. I kissed him. Everywhere…I should have got up and run away, but it was too late. I was already caught up in the fiery ring of desire" (140). In other words, Albert, a Haitian who hates the behavior of the white tourists and the way they contribute to corruption in his country, ends up giving in to the same temptation as they do. This episode can symbolize the Caribbean's inability to escape an abusive tourism industry and its need to maintain transactions with foreign powers in order to survive economically. On the one hand, Albert recognizes the need to put a stop to sex tourism on the island, but if Legba represents monetary value for Haiti, then Albert's kissing this valuable currency reveals his own weakness and inability to escape from Haiti's dependency, despite what he knows is right.[9] Albert's kissing Legba, then, can represent

[9] Historically, Haiti has depended on maintaining good business relations with outside empires and has on multiple occasions based its political and financial decisions on these foreign presences. For example, even after the first Haitians fought for the right to their

Haiti's historical predicament of needing the outsider's approval and financial support, but also an awareness that the outsider's influence can be harmful for the country, which is here represented by Legba.

In contrast, Cantet "straightens" the intimate episode between Legba and Albert by omitting it completely. Accordingly, the stern and cynical Albert never wavers from his patriarchal role, nor does he appear to have homosexual tendencies at any point in the film. Ha is a level-headed, thoughtful, and honest Haitian who is concerned for the wellbeing of his city and for younger Haitians. In fact, portrays Albert as a benign influential figure who is concerned for the future of Haiti already in the opening scene. First, we see a close-up focus on a hand that appears to belong to a black man writing out a name on a small chalkboard. As the hand moves across the board, the words

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lands and freedom from enslavement, many of Haiti's leaders and much of its society felt compelled to continue the fight to earn recognition of its independent nationhood from other nations. Alas, the rest of the world continued to ignore Haiti's existence as a country while still expecting to trade with the newly independent country. Out of economic desperation, Hatians could not refuse, as the country depended almost completely on the taxation of exports for financial survival (Dubois 117). Later, authoritarian ruler Jean-Pierre Boyer, would agree to pay a 150-million-franc indemnity to France in 1825 to assuage former French landowners for the loss of Haitian slaves and lands in exchange for recognition of Haiti's independence. The Vatican, too, continually condemned the way Haitians were practicing Catholicism in the 1820s, a condemnation that Boyer entertained with negotiations and an invitation for Catholic missions to enter the country to better instruct Haitian priests on proper Catholic dogma (Dubois 144). Furthermore, in 1863, Haitian president Fabre Geffrard banned vodou within the country because it was considered primitive and uncivilized by European countries and the United States (Dubois 159). Vodou was targeted again after the US occupation in 1918 (Dubois 272). Another devastating move that was influenced by the U.S. Agency for International Development was the mass murder of Haiti's population of its native black pigs in 1983 as part a campaign to prevent the spread of swine flu (Dubois 352). The lost livestock was subsequently replaced by the larger, white breed of North American pig, but it was poorly adapted to the climate of Haiti, only ate expensive, imported feed, and "were effectively useless" (Dubois 352).

“BRENDA CUR…” appear. Before the person can continue writing out Brenda’s full name, however, a feminine hand belonging to an unknown black woman enters the frame and rests on that of the scribe, as if to halt his writing. Next, the camera pans up slowly to reveal a middle-aged Haitian woman who calmly asks in French to speak with the man. We cannot see his face at this point, but we can tell by the way his shoulder is visible in the right side of the frame that he is dressed in a suit. Subsequently, the camera cuts to a headshot of the man. It is Albert, and he is waiting for someone at an airport. With a serious and hardened gaze, Albert replies patiently to the stranger that he doesn’t have much time, but the lady begins to tell him anyway the tragic story of the unexpected, meaningless arrest of her husband that has left her penniless and unable to afford her fifteen-year-old daughter’s tuition. After carefully outlining some of her daughter’s virtues— she is beautiful, sweet, and wants to become a nurse— the woman offers Albert her daughter as a gift because “unfortunately, being beautiful and poor in this country, she doesn’t stand a chance” (Vers). She then concludes vaguely that “they won’t think twice about killing me to grab her.” Of course, “they” are the makoutes. It is no wonder, then, that the lady in the film is concerned for her daughter’s destiny. Desperate, she only needs to look at Albert to deduce that he has a respectable job, unlike the makoutes or the desperate prostitutes. In effect, she would rather voluntarily gift her daughter to someone like him and ensure that the child is protected from a violent kidnapping or exploitation by the makoutes. In the end, the idea that the lady chooses Albert to receive her daughter is telling of his character as someone who is caring and good natured.

By the same token, Albert's response to the woman's request— "I'm sorry, I can't do that, Madame"— may at first seem to contradict her assumption that he is kindly. Even so, Albert's refusal should not be misinterpreted as a lack of empathy; rather, it can be understood as a demonstration of responsibility and concern for Haiti's progress. Besides the fact that Albert alone could not possibly care for all of the young, needy Haitians, for any entity to do so could be crippling. Indeed, Dubois's says of the ever-present NGOs and foreign aid agencies that are stationed in Haiti that they are like the U.S. occupation in that "the setup leaves most individuals within Haiti almost completely disempowered" (366) because of the unpredictable and shifting nature of the providing sources. He explains that

> At times, they [the Haitians] gain assistance from foreign organizations for projects that are truly valuable for their communities. When taken as a whole, however, it is clear that the current aid schemes are simply not working to address the larger issues: poverty, ecological devastation, insufficient educational opportunities for the youth who make up the majority of the population, a dire lack of water, food, and health care. Hope for real change is difficult to summon. (Dubois 367)

Albert's refusal to shield a few of Haiti's children suggests that he recognizes the counterproductive nature of temporarily "saving" members of a society since to do so would not actually equip the country with the skills to survive on its own. Haiti's issue, in other words, is not about saving individuals, it is about reshaping the social and political structures of the entire nation. For Albert, solutions must be formed within Haiti by

Haitians and cannot be won with handouts, and this is reflected in his response to the woman in the airport. It is true that the lady in the airport is trying to save her daughter, but Albert cannot save her. In this way, the scene implies that Haiti has some tough lessons to learn in order to spark the change that society needs.

Then again, Albert demonstrates the difficulty of simply rejecting the notion of handouts when it comes to following the hotel's "house rules" of not serving the prostitutes at the restaurant on the premises. Curiously, a rule like this could imply that the resort community is aware of the detrimental nature of the prostitutes' profession to the formation of Haitian society. Certainly, it would be utopian to consider that prohibiting the prostitutes to eat there was some kind of a community effort to avoid enabling the boys' hustling for survival. After all, a steady food and guaranteed clientele base may keep these young men in business and as a result discourage them from transitioning to a job other than sex work. Nevertheless, the scene where Brenda invites Legba to eat with her at the hotel and Albert's reaction suggest that the rule is in place because of the sex-working class that the prostitutes represent. The scene highlights the sex workers' importance to the hotel as merely a business transaction that is expected to stay on the beach where the business takes place.

The sequence begins with a view of Ellen and Sue sitting on the hotel patio at dark. Meanwhile, as we see the guests fraternizing within the white-tablecloth restaurant setting, we can hear the clinking of forks against china plates and the low hum of conversation. Next, the camera moves toward the pair of women and stops at a medium shot of Brenda, who gazes down at her plate. Suddenly, something causes Brenda to lift

her gaze. A reverse shot shows the boardwalk that, darkened by the shade of thick palms, connects the restaurant to the beach and Legba. Casually dressed in a tank top and board shorts, he clashes with the fancy, well-lit atmosphere of the patio area. In addition, as if aware of the social class lines that divide the two spaces, Legba does move closer than the board walk, some distance from the restaurant. He scans the area, perhaps looking for a familiar face to offer him something to eat. Brenda then serves as the bridge between the symbolic darkness of Legba's poverty and the brilliance of the tourists' wealth as she rushes toward him, grabs his face with concern, mutters something to him, takes his hand, and finally walks him over to the area where she and Sue are seated. Meanwhile, Ellen, who is also dining on the patio with a separate group, shoots Brenda a judgmental look as if to scorn her inability to follow the "house rules."

At first, Albert tells Brenda in French: "Sorry, Madame, I can't serve him" because "those are the house rules." He reveals the true nature of those policies, however, after Brenda and Sue try to reason with Albert that Legba eats with them every day on the beach and should therefore be allowed as Brenda's guest on the patio. Albert concludes that "On the beach, it's no problem. You do what you want. But this is the restaurant." It is true that the hotel does seem to loosen the restrictions for serving the prostitutes on the beach since earlier in the film Ellen orders Legba a club sandwich there. Moreover, the waitress serves it to him. The house rules, then, reveal a double standard in which the beach is a wild space where the boys are encouraged to sell themselves because it brings in the tourists. In this way, although Cantet claims in an interview that "the only place they [Legba and his friends] can feel like a man is in the hotel" because there they can

enjoy, with the help of the rich tourists, the "little things that make life a bit sweeter, like a Coca-Cola on the beach, a club sandwich…and sometimes money" (Raymond np), it would be more accurate to say that the only place where they can feel this security and protection is on the beach just outside of the hotel. The resort, as we observe in the restaurant scene, is reserved for the wealthy visitors while the prostitutes are to remain part of the wealthy visitors' entertainment alone. Even though the tourists bring their business to the hotel because of these young men, their value is nothing more than financial.

Cantet's film suggests that Albert sees Legba as a confused teenager trying to survive in a disadvantaged society. Because he feels sorry for Legba and recognizes that the tourists are Legba's only way of getting food, Albert finally suggests that "perhaps there is some chicken left" in the kitchen that Legba can have. This episode in the film, then, highlights Haiti's conundrum of demanding a social change by refusing to entertain the foreigner's desires and its obligation to do so in order to survive. Likewise, Albert cares about the boy's survival and so breaks the house rules and allows Legba to eat. Even though feeding the problem is not necessarily solving the problem, Albert sees Legba as more than a problem. That is, Legba is young, and the youth of Haiti represent its future. Albert's willingness to feed Legba, as such, may represent his awareness that older generations must first nourish and strengthen the younger generations through example and teaching if a change is to occur.

The book, too, suggests Albert's reluctance to serve Legba on the patio, but it does not capture Albert's empathy as the film does. In reference to their frequent meals

with Legba on the patio, Laferrière's Brenda explains that "Albert— that's the maitre d' at the hotel— he wasn't all that pleased" (Heading 128). Even more, Albert seems to finally allow Legba to eat on the patio not because of Brenda's pleading as we saw in the film, but due to her husband's financial power and his white power within the predominantly black Haiti, as his response suggests. Brenda explains: "My husband told him that if we're paying for a room we can invite anyone we want to our table. And my husband added in a lower voice, so only Albert could hear him, that he wasn't going to let any nigger stop him from doing what he wanted" (Heading 128). In the end, she excuses her husband's language, reasoning that he isn't racist, but only talks that way because "in our town, that's how everyone talks about black people" (Heading 128).

Cantet's version of Albert's testimony, though, is probably the most striking example of his disapproval of the tourists and the prostitution taking place within the country. Albert seems reluctant to speak with his interviewer in *Vers*, the film, especially in comparison to Ellen, Brenda, and Sue during their own individual testimonies in which they face the camera and talk to their interrogator directly. Similar to each of the testimonies of the tourists, the film introduces Albert's testimony with a subtitle that identifies the speaker as "Albert." We can hear his voice in voice off, but we do not see his mouth moving. Instead, he appears to ignore the camera while hard at work in the hotel kitchen. In effect, it is as if we can hear his inner thoughts. Unlike the women who willingly answer in direct address to the interrogator's camera, then, Albert's voice off can represent his rejection of outside interrogation and insurrection. In contrast, in the short story, Albert's bitterness over the US occupation and the behavior of the tourists is

obvious, but he still appears at least willing to speak to his interrogator. He speaks to the interviewer directly in the book, and in fact reveals very personal, potentially embarrassing information, such as his kissing Legba's body "everywhere" on the beach.

Cantet's Albert, however, makes up only part of the film's statement about cross-generational empathy and the desire to shape younger generations to free themselves from the trap of pleasing the outsider. Legba, too, is an important part of this statement, despite the fact that he is a prostitute. In the film, this is best represented through the addition of Eddy—a small boy of about six or seven who is absent from Laferrière's stories. Just as Albert takes on a fatherly role at times, Legba, too, takes on a big brother role when it comes to this child. He hangs around Legba and the other teenage prostitutes often. At one point, Brenda, Sue, Ellen, and the group of young male sex workers sit together on the beach smoking marijuana. When Eddy realizes that because he is too young no one will give him a hit of the joint, he resorts to entertaining himself with the radio: He turns it on, gets up, and starts to slowly dance away from the group to a Caribbean rhythm. As he dances alone on the beach, Brenda gets up to join him. Consequently, the two end up hand-in-hand, and finally in a close embrace, with the boy's hands around Brenda's hips as they sway to the music. During the dance, the camera periodically cuts back to the group, revealing some of their reactions. Both the white tourists and most of the young men clap and cheer the boy on, but Legba becomes serious and is clearly bothered by what he sees. Ellen, on the other hand, sitting with her back against Legba's chest, appears amused. Without warning, Legba gets up from his spot, leaving Ellen surprised and concerned at his sudden movement, and approaches the

two dancers. Forcefully, he grabs the little boy's hand and says, "Stop that at once." The boy replies, "You're not my dad." Legba tells the boy that he "looks dumb." The boy looks at Brenda and then at Legba and concludes, "that's not for you to say," implying that Legba is guilty of the same behavior with the tourist.

Be that as it may, Legba's reaction suggests that he wants the little boy to enjoy his childhood and innocence, and perhaps to have a different future than his own as a sex worker. In the meantime, Brenda has been witnessing – in shock – the argument between the two and tries to reason with Legba that "we were just having fun." Legba, nevertheless, coldly turns away from Brenda in silence and follows the boy to the water, where he immediately softens the argument by throwing the boy over his shoulder and dunking him in the waves. Subsequently, the scene cuts to the beach where two of the white women can be seen running toward the water to join in on the fun as Brenda stands looking regretful in the center of the frame. One of the women is Ellen, who jeers, "cradle snatcher" as she runs past Brenda. Shamefully, Brenda mutters, "I don't know what I was thinking— that was a child." Obviously, from her response, Sue however, feels differently: "Oh Brenda, there's nothing to worry about. Here, everything is different!" For some, then, seeing the white tourists pursuing very young Haitians has been normalized. Even so, Legba's reaction reveals a recognition of this problem on behalf of the Haitians and a desire for change.

Indeed, these visual representations of the prostitutes interacting with their surroundings and citizens from different generations humanize the way the written stories portray Legba and the other prostitutes. We see this again between Legba and Eddy when

the film seems to temporarily break away from the tourism business at the beach resort and takes us to a view of the inner city. In this scene, Legba and a large group of friends are playing soccer as other cheering friends, both young men and women, including little Eddy, fill the benches on the sidelines. To be sure, Legba seems happiest in this moment as he enthusiastically participates in the game and jokes with his friends. At one moment, for example, after scoring, he turns to one of the young female spectators and jokes, "You see? I scored that one for you!" No doubt, the joviality of the scene makes one forget momentarily about his double life as a prostitute. At the same time, the camera makes frequent cuts to Eddy, who at first enjoys watching the game, but then becomes distracted by something he sees. Soon, the camera reveals what captivates him. Actually, Eddy is watching another little boy sell drinks out of a cooler when suddenly, two men approach the young vendor, take one of his drinks, and pop it open without hesitation. Expecting to be paid for his merchandise, the little boy says, "Excuse me sir, that will be 10 gourds," which prompts the men to begin bullying the child. One of them asks threateningly, "Do you know who I am?" to which the other responds, "He is the lead cop." In other words, they are makoutes. In fact, they throw the child's cooler over, causing the majority of the glass bottles to break. After a shot of the two men high fiving and congratulating one another on their authoritative actions, the small vendor, probably realizing the danger in arguing with these men, begins to silently clean up the mess that the "cops" have created. In the meantime, small Eddy has become enraged by what he sees from his position on the bench. As such, he gets up and begins to yell, "What did they do to you?" Once again, however, Legba steps in to protect Eddy, who is probably too young to understand that

his basic understanding of respect and human rights does not apply to the makoutes in this atmosphere of the late 70s. Despite Legba's silencing of Eddy's protest, the little boy's reaction suggests a natural inclination toward spotlighting the injustices of the makoutes. By all means, clearly, these injustices are something that even an uneducated child can detect. Moreover, the scene again emphasizes the cross-generational empathy and sense of responsibility between characters like Legba and his friends, as well as the two young boys.

In sum, Cantet's version clearly places greater emphasis on cross-generational empathy and frustration through its influential figures, like Albert, Legba, and Eddy. This, of course, can explain why Albert does not "give into the sweetness of Legba's skin" in the filmic version, and why Legba cares about the young boy. Of the absence of Albert's homoerotic episode in the film, O'Shaugnessy suggests that "Cantet is clearly more interested in the untenability of Albert's position than in the discovery of a repressed sexuality" and "the unequal relationship between the young Haitian men and the northern women" (O'Shaugnessy 102). If O'Shaugnessy means that Cantet is concerned with showing the conundrum of being stuck between the desire to avoid and refuse foreign influence over local economy and also the dependency on that foreign influence for survival, then I agree. Still, the question of why Cantet "straightens" the other exploratory sexual details in the stories, such as the husband's voyeurism, remains. After all, it seems that Cantet emphasizes heterosexuality, especially by adding a girl (who is perhaps a girlfriend) to Legba's story which is a significant twist to Laferrière's stories that disregard the idea of romance and emphasize sexual pleasure as an

emotionally-unattached commodity and disregards any notion of romance. In the film's brief introduction of the girlfriend, we see Legba walking alone in the street as a car pulls up beside him and stops. Legba then opens the back door of the car where we see a young lady's legs, and then her face as she slowly leans forward to better see Legba. Recognizing the girl, he gets in the car, sits down, and demands, "What is all of this? Where are we going?" It is a secret meeting that the girl arranged, as she claims, "Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you, but it was the only way to see you." Secretly was the only way indeed, as we learn through her dialogue that recently, she has become the mistress of a man called Colonel Beauvais, who spotted her while she was at a friend's wake. Although he was there with his wife and kids and "looked so serious," according to the girl, the next day, Beauvais's chauffeur, Frank, who is driving the car in this very scene, came to get her. "I had no choice," she says to Legba, recalling the airport scene at the beginning of the film, and the woman's concern for the fate of her own daughter. "When those people want something," Legba's girlfriend says, "they get it." Here we learn the fate of the girl's sister as well. She is a live-in maid that has to sleep with her boss and his son. In effect, the conversation between Legba and his girlfriend reveals that these social injustices and class inequalities affect both men and women in Haiti, unlike the focus only on the male prostitutes in Laferrière's stories. Furthermore, while there is a clear difference between Legba's life as a hustler at the beach and the girlfriend's seemingly more luxurious life as a colonel's mistress with a personal chauffeur, jewelry, and nice clothing, the nature of their jobs is the same. They are both forced into a situation of selling themselves for survival.

A promise of New Life?

So, if Laferrière's stories' exploratory sexual details underscore the notion of intercourse purely for pleasure and in turn, of pleasure as currency, then we may consider abstractly the lack of sexual deviance in the film paired with its depictions of Legba caring for younger Haitians as a symbol for new social and intellectual birth within the country, one that denounces class injustices. The short stories, in other words, emphasize Legba's role as a sexual commodity for all people, no matter their gender or race. If we consider the common assumption that the basic biological purpose of sex is for procreation, we can say that the exploratory sex and commodification of sex whose purpose is purely pleasure-seeking in Laferrière's version represents the antithesis of procreation. If procreation represents new life, and new life in turn symbolizes progression and a race's persistence, then we can further muse that this alternative lustful sex represented in the stories symbolizes Haiti's lack of social growth in that it remains stunted by its commitment to foreign influence and income. Hence, Laferrière's stories' worldview suggests that Haiti is tragically stuck in this punishment of pleasing the Other instead of focusing on nourishing its own societies' cultures.

Strikingly, the three adaptations we have discussed thus far, Cecilia, Del amor, and Vers, suggest that the Caribbean still has a long way to go in order to "own" itself, socially and culturally. In Cecilia Valdés, Del amor, and their film adaptations, Caribbean society cannot fully overcome European control over the establishment of Caribbean thought and cultural identity. As mentioned, Cecilia imitates whiteness because colonial Cuban society regards whiteness as more powerful and beautiful than those with darker

skin pigments. At the same time, this notion of white superiority exists in the Caribbean because European colonizers carried and ingrained it within the social structuring of the colonies. Accordingly, Cecilia attempts to abscond her "impure" lineage and allows only her European roots to show publicly. Still, Cecilia is a product of diverse origins, cultural influences, and lived experiences, much like how we view the Caribbean region culturally and historically today— as a region that comprises cultural and ethnic hybridity. Thus, it can be said that Cecilia's rejection of her mestizaje or "impure" roots represents, in turn, a rejection of Caribeanness. Meanwhile, if Cecilia rejects Caribbeanness, then one can argue that Sierva María's natural integration into the Afro-Colombian lifestyle of her nanny and the other house slaves represents the beginnings of the evolution of a Caribbean identity— one that represents an accepted fusion of its historical origins. Influenced again by European social standards, however, white colonial Colombian society sees Sierva María's hybrid identity as an illness that must be isolated and eliminated before society – as has been the case historically, albeit slowly – learns to accept and normalize this type of lifestyle. Caribbean mentalities are trying to adapt to the racially and socially diverse region, but a looming European presence psychologically restricts this adaptation.

Similarly, *Vers* demonstrates the notion that the Caribbean must always answer to an outsider for approval, like Europe or the United States, but it does so through its commitment to the tourism industry, and especially sex tourism. "Tourists never die," says Albert to Ellen at the end of the film. He means that although the country is dangerous for the locals due to social unrest, the country recognizes the money that

tourists bring to the country and would thus never eliminate that source. Even if all this means, per Laferrière's diagnosis, the demise of Haiti's future, Cantet's film brings some hope to the written stories' pessimism through its portrayal of Haitian generations concerned for one another and the daily trials of the Haitians, including the sex workers, as they try to cope with their oppressive social surroundings.

CHAPTER FOUR
NO LAUGHING MATTER: A COMICAL PORTRAYAL OF SERIOUS HISTORY IN *TRÓPICO DE SANGRE*

In the first three chapters, we saw how visual adaptations of original works of fiction and their characters' appearance, actions, and attitudes translate a society's evolving perceptions of race, gender, and cultural exploitation within a Caribbean context. Those chapters deal with fictional characters. In the present chapter, in contrast, I look at the actor's interpretations of well-known and well-documented historical figures. Some historical events, such as a revolutionary victory, are most often remembered by a society positively, while other, such as the beginning of an oppressive dictatorship, are often remembered collectively in a negative light. Likewise, the historical figures that shaped these moments are remembered as either good or bad figures of history— as heroes or villains. Among the latter count Dominican dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, who has been represented in many historical fictions an omnipotent, malevolent leader with the power to manipulate and murder tens of thousands of Dominican and Haitian citizens. Indeed, the general collective memory and discourse formed around Trujillo's 30-year reign of terror is such that it has given rise to a plethora of adaptations in both Spanish and English. Even the free public information forum, Wikipedia, lists a host of them on its page about Rafael Trujillo, under the "Trujillo in media" section: nine books, seven films, and four documentaries. Among these is Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa's novel, *La fiesta del chivo* (2000), which recounts various moments leading up to— not to mention the consequences of— the Trujillo assassination through interlaced stories.

Another is Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) in which, like a *fukú* (the Dominican word for curse), the memories and lasting social consequences of the Trujillo regime haunt a Dominican-American teenager, Oscar de León, who lives in New Jersey.

The original Trujillo-era work to be discussed in this chapter, however, is Dominican-American author Julia Alvarez's novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994). It has inspired at least three adaptations of its own: Spanish director Mariano Barroso's Showtime drama, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (2001), Chilean director Cecilia Domeyko's documentary, *Code Name: Butterflies* (2009), and Dominican director Juan Delancer's *Trópico de sangre* (2010)[10]. Alvarez's novel fictionalizes the history of the Mirabal sisters, four activists who plotted against Trujillo's regime and who were, upon Trujillo's orders, assassinated for their subversive activity on November 25, 1960. This day was later commemorated as the Día Internacional de la Eliminación de la Violencia contra la Mujer in 1999 by the United Nations General Assembly. Similar to other authors' representations of Trujillo, Alvarez reifies the dictator's supervillain image. Notwithstanding, I explore the ways in which its Spanish-language film adaptation, *Trópico de sangre*, challenges this view, particularly through the film's portrayal of *El jefe*.

[10]*La fiesta del chivo* has generated one film adaptation, by director Luis Llosa, Vargas Llosa's cousin. *Oscar Wao* has yet to generate any.

Authors of Historical Fiction

Featuring interwoven female voices and viewpoints, Alvarez's *In the time of the Butterflies* tells the stories of Dedé, Minerva, Patria, and María Teresa (Mate) Mirabal. At first, Alvarez's involvement with the Mirabal sisters was to be nothing more than a small-scale project when. In 1986, a woman's press invited her to write a brief biography of the heroine of her choice that was to be included in a booklet for a Latina heritage event. She had always been fascinated by the story of the four activist sisters, perhaps because there were so many similarities between the Mirabal family and her own. Alvarez, too, has three sisters and spent the first ten years of her life, as well as subsequent summers, in the Dominican Republic. Her own father had a dangerous run-in with Trujillo, as well. In fact, he was once involved in a plot to overthrow the dictator, but the scheme was discovered and the Alvarez's had to flee the Dominican Republic before the regime could link Mr. Alvarez to the other conspirators (Sirias). When Alvarez agreed to take part in the project, she began visiting Dominican bookstores and libraries and eventually met Noris, Patria Mirabal's surviving daughter. Noris showed her where the girls used to live, letters from their time in prison, and artifacts— including her mother's blood-stained clothing from the day of the attack and even Mate's braid, which was still covered in bits of grass and dirt from her struggle against her attacker. Later, Noris introduced Alvarez to Minou, Minerva's daughter, and finally to Marcelo Bermúdez, one of Minou's deceased father's friends. In 1992, Alvarez reached out to Dedé, which led to the meeting that "opened up the story," according to Alvarez (Alvarez 335). *In the Time* became Alvarez's second novel and earned much critical praise. It was named a Notable Book by The

American Literary Association and was chosen by the Book of the Month Club (Sirias 7). It was nominated, furthermore, as a finalist for the National Book Critics' Award in fiction and finally, it was deemed one of the Best Books for Young Adults by both the Young Adult Library Services Association and American Library Association (Sirias 7).

While Alvarez has dedicated most of her professional life to writing and teaching in the United States, Delancer has spent the majority of his life in the Dominican Republic. He is a film director, diplomat, and he has served as the general director of the Dominican Republic's public television network. In addition, according to *Trópico*'s credits, Delancer is a songwriter; he wrote the lyrics for two of the film's original scores: "Cada mañana," the song for *Trópico*'s credits, and "La ofrenda de mi amor," the serenade that Manolo (Sergio Carlo) sings to Minerva when he proposes to her. As was the case with Alvarez, the history of the Trujillo regime has always fascinated Delancer. In fact, he recently published his third edition of *Junio 1958: desembarco de la gloria*, in which he analyzes a failed anti-trujillista movement. Intrigued by the romantic and tragic elements of the movement– most of the men involved knew they would not make it out of the operation alive— Delancer asserts that he writes reports on Dominican histories "so that one doesn't forget, one appreciates, and above all, so that one recognizes" (*Entrevista Cada Día*). Aside from his recent book project, Delancer has claimed that he is working on a second film about Evangelina Rodríguez— the first female doctor in the country, who was, in the director's words, "una extraordinaria mujer dominicana" who

died in 1947, "acorralada por el prejuicio, la discriminación y el aislamiento social" (Lechner)[11].

First intended to be a *telepelícula* (*Impacto* 14), upon its release, *Trópico* was included in The Maya Indie Film Series (from August 27 through September 15 in 2010), an eight-city film tour that makes up part of Hispanic Heritage celebrations (*La Prensa* 8). Given his previous work and inspirations, it comes as no surprise that for Delancer, the Mirabal history seemed a perfect mixture of tragedy, political thriller, and romance (Lechner np). Yet, his film version of the Mirabal story suggests that he is more interested in the tragedies and romantic elements of the regime's inner workings and its effects on society rather than in those surrounding the Mirabal family alone. On the one hand, the central image of a serious, revolutionary-looking Minerva Mirabal wearing a Che cap on the DVD cover leads us to believe that the film is going to be about a story about Minerva Mirabal, or the Mirabal sisters at the very least. Furthermore, *Trópico*'s opening scene focuses on the 21st-century Dedé Mirabal (played by the actual Dedé Mirabal) setting a table in the house that is now a museum to honor her sisters. Yet, as a voiceover of Dedé leads us into a flashback, we begin to see that this is not a story about the Mirabal sisters. On the contrary, while the film does present some of the novel's highlights, by comparison, it offers only a vague caricature of the girls' lives, beginning with their teenage years and ending with their murders a few years later. Delancer's version neglects character-building details from the novel, such as Dedé's *machista*

[11] "an extraordinary Dominican woman who died cornered by prejudice, discrimination, and social isolation."

husband's crushing of her desire to join her sisters in their revolutionary cause (Alvarez 177), or Mate's practice of *espiritismo* that she learned from the family's Haitian *criadas*, Tono and Fela (Alvarez 34). It also overlooks Patria's early plans of becoming a nun and her later struggle with her faith in God (Alvarez 55), as well as Minerva's discovery of her father's affair and that his secret second family is living down the street from the Mirabals (Alvarez 85). In this way, the Mirabals on-screen become very simply—much too simply, unfortunately— an honest, middle-class family with apparently low dysfunction and low drama. And crucially, the film fails to show how each of the sisters gradually became involved (or uninvolved, in Dedé's case) in the fight against the Trujillo regime— moments that provoke chills and spark curiosity in the reader of Alvarez's novel.

A Dominican Villain from Page to Screen

While Delancer's film may fall short when it comes to a complex portrayal of the Mirabals, I am most interested in the difference between the novel's and the film's fictionalization of Trujillo. Therefore, I have chosen to work with Delancer's adaptation instead of Domeyko's documentary, *Code Name*, which uses interviews and archival footage to tell the history. I am also uninterested in Barroso's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, because the actors there lack dynamism and complexity and have no place for further discussion within this study. Though the budget for Barroso's English-language adaptation was reportedly ten-times more than *Trópico*'s and boasted Hollywood actors such as Salma Hayek as Minerva Mirabal and singer Marc Anthony as Lio, their performances are one-dimensional. They were, in brief, telenovela-like, over-

exaggerated, and unrealistically melodramatic[12]. Edward James Olmos's blasé interpretation of Trujillo, furthermore, does not yield what I am looking for in this chapter[13].

In the novel, Trujillo's mysterious supervillain persona is reified. As the Mirabal sisters relay the stories they have heard about murders and other instances of abuse of power, the reader gets the sense that Trujillo is the conniving, corrupt engine behind

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[12] Film critic Alex von Tunzelmann gives *In the Time* a "C" for entertainment – a gentleman's "C," no doubt— and a "B-" for historical accuracy. After criticizing Olmos's weak performance as Trujillo, various historical errors in the plot, and even Marc Anthony's vampire-like teeth and boring representation of Lio, he concludes: "Historically, it's a respectable version of Minerva Mirabal's life. Cinematically, it doesn't quite live up to the passion of the novel by Julia Alvarez on which it is based" (von Tunzelmann np). Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez, on the other hand, at least finds some use for Barroso's work, as she focuses on the educational value of teaching the novel and film side by side: "although the film diminishes her [Alvarez's] strong focus on gender, it emphasizes the element of race (taking some of the ideas from Alvarez's first novel) and opens the subject to racial concerns...it leaves out several key points on the Spanish caste and patriarchal system but can serve as a good follow-up to these aspects in Alvarez's novel" (108).

[13] *Trópico*'s collaborators were also aware of Barroso's film's shortcomings and wanted to recreate the Mirabal story through "our own vision," i.e. a Dominican vision, according to Delancer (Lechner). Noting the number of Mexican actors in Barroso's version of the Dominican history, *Trópico*'s Minerva, played by the action film star known best for her roles in *The Fast and the Furious* and *Avatar*, Michelle Rodríguez, commented that it needed some Dominican flare (Parera np). Although Rodriguez was born in Texas, her parents are both from the Hispanic Caribbean– her mother is Dominican, and her father is Puerto Rican (Parera np). She was chosen on purpose, because her Dominican background made her a better fit to play Minerva, and of course, "her name helped [them] to place the film within certain markets" and gave it "more visibility" (Lechner np). It does have non-Dominican contributors, however, like producer and French businessman Joan Giacinti, the founder of Sofratesa Group in Santo Domingo, which is in charge of designing, installing, and maintaining airports, aeronautic systems, subways, and telecommunications systems, but also, produces films and media in France and Latin America. Moreover, Giacinti is one of the founders of Aerodom, "a concessionaire chosen by the Dominican government to develop, operate and manage airports in the Dominican Republic" (*Plus* np). In its actors and crew, however, the film is largely a Dominican project.

everything. An early example of this is when Minerva's schoolmate at the Inmaculada Concepción School, Sinita, tells her "the secret of Trujillo"— the "sneaky way" that he became president, and that he had all of the men in her family murdered for protesting his election (Alvarez 17). Now living in fear for her own safety, these murders must remain a "secret" because, as Sinita has learned firsthand, "people who opened their big mouths didn't live very long" (Alvarez 18). Thus, the novel shows that from a young age, fear of Trujillo and the consequences of disagreeing with his regime's actions is instilled within the Dominican people. Rumors make Trujillo seem invincible. Per gossip, "security has introduced a double as a protective measure to confuse any would-be assassins" (Alvarez 95). If "would-be assassins" are discovered, furthermore, the dictator's wrath is apparently far-reaching and essentially inescapable. Confirming this is the "horror story" that Mate relays about Galíndez, a Dominican professor who fled to New York when Trujillo found out that he was writing a book against his regime. Despite Galíndez's escape, she explains, "next thing you know, he's walking home one night, and he disappears. No one has seen or heard from him since" (Alvarez 136). In effect, the whole campus assumes that, like something of a magic act, Trujillo made Galíndez "disappear," even though victim and perpetrator were a sea and a continent apart.

To be sure, these are only a few examples of the rumors that compose the dictator's invincible supervillain image in the novel. Aside from risking being targeted for opposing Trujillo's political actions, moreover, the Mirabals learn that they could potentially fall victim to Trujillo simply for appealing to his sexual appetite, as did Minerva's childhood schoolmate, Lina Lovatón. As Minerva tells it in the novel, Trujillo

spotted Lina from a balcony while she was playing soccer with the other children in the schoolyard. He began to visit her, showered her with compliments and gifts, and finally lured her away (Alvarez 18). Now, rumor has it, she is confined to a life of solitude in an isolated mansion as one of Trujillo's many girlfriends. In addition to his pedophiliac grooming of little girls, though, Minerva claims to have heard that even if the women he desires refuse him, he will have them by force— by drugging and raping them (Alvarez 95). Indeed, his self-presumed ownership of the country's young women has become a normalized fact of his regime— so much so that instead of stopping him, people gossip about how such an old man can possibly conquer all of those innocent girls. The answer, no doubt, can only be that he has some kind of witchcraft on his side— perhaps a "pega palo," according to speculation, "a special brew his brujo cooks up to keep him sexually potent" (Alvarez 95). Hence, through the verbal sharing of experiences and rumors among Dominican civilians, Trujillo takes on the shape of a divine, super-macho being that keeps himself strong by drinking magical potions and can evade, outsmart, and eliminate his enemies, no matter their whereabouts.

While Alvarez's novel gives most of the credit to Trujillo for the regime's wrongdoings, Delancer's film, by contrast, highlights the violent and manipulative acts carried out by various members of the regime, but never by Trujillo himself. At one point, for example, we witness a naked prisoner being electrocuted in an electric chair by the director of the *La 40* prison, Johnny Abbes (Victor Checo). The victim's head falls limp and blood pours from his mouth. One cannot forget, furthermore, the scene of the Mirabal murders in which the girls are dragged screaming into a cane field and brutally

beaten to death by Trujillo's thugs. If this were not enough, while the assassins are driving away with the bodies stacked in the back seat, we hear a sickly blood-filled cough— one of the girls is miraculously still alive. Realizing this, one of the thugs gets out of the car, opens the back door, and bludgeons whoever it may be. We know this not because we can see it, but because we hear the cracking of bones and the splashing of blood as the hits rain down. In the end, we see the men push the car full of bodies off a cliff. In contrast, Alvarez's novel completely avoids the descriptions of violent happenings and even of the women's murders and instead describes peoples' reactions to news of the horrific events.

Still, the film's depictions of the murders carried out by Trujillo's men are –in some ways— a relief compared to the daily torture that they inflict upon the living. One example is the scene in which the Servicio de Inteligencia Militar agents (the SIM) slowly pull off a suspected traitor's fingernails with a metal tool. In addition, at one point Abbes rips the clothes off one of Minerva's friends and shocks her in her genital region with an electric prod until she loses consciousness. On another occasion, when a group of naked and dirty prisoners receive their food for the day, the jailer delivers it at the same time that their waste bucket is emptied. Excruciatingly, once the excrement and urine are emptied from the bucket, it is then refilled with the food— a mysterious, raw-looking meat, perhaps something from the sea, in a strange broth. Nevertheless, the desperate and hungry prisoners pray over the bucket's contents and begin to serve themselves. In this way, replete with hard-to-watch scenes depicting torture, murder, and imprisonment in

deplorable conditions, the film is far more violent than the novel. Yet, as we see no signs of the dictator during these moments, Trujillo keeps his hands clean.

Indeed, the extreme violence represented in Delancer's film contrasts shockingly with Dominican actor Juan Fernández de Alarcón's representation of the man who is presumably responsible for all of it. Only for a brief moment— in one of his first scenes inside the Partido Dominicano— does the film's Trujillo seem to fit the supervillain-dictator persona that Alvarez's novel emphasizes. As the scene opens, the camera frames a white, circular interior of a government-like meeting hall. It is lined with columns and adorned by a giant portrait of Trujillo on the back wall. A butler dressed in white stands next to an unoccupied chair. This chair, reserved for someone important, no doubt, is positioned at the opposite side of a semicircle of chairs, in front of which stand professional-looking men in suits. The setting instills thoughts of regality, elegance, respect, and justice. Subsequently, the camera shifts, revealing an older man with graying hair finishing a beverage— it is Trujillo, who is standing behind the chair. He then places the container on the butler's tray, wipes his mouth with a napkin, and shoves it indifferently toward the butler. As the camera begins to zoom in and pan a low-angle medium shot, it seems as if Trujillo is towering over everyone. With a serious expression, his gaze fixed on the men that stand before him, he comes to the front of his chair and, while beginning to sit down, slowly raises one of his arms, and without saying a word, extends a commanding finger. As if that finger were a magic wand, the men begin to sit down one by one and share what they are doing to promote the celebration of the dictator's now 19th year of rule.

However, the scene then demonstrates that Trujillo's larger-than-life, commanding figure is merely an optical illusion. To begin with, it would be difficult not to notice that there is something peculiar about Trujillo's skin tone— his is an unnaturally light, almost corpse-like complexion. With the hint of some hidden color beneath the whiteness, this skin looks rubbery like a Halloween mask. When we finally hear him speak, his voice is high-pitched and shaky— a jarring contrast with his show of arrogance and power. To illustrate this, when a military official approaches Trujillo's chair to quietly inform him that a group of rebels has been defeated, with expressive hands flailing about, Trujillo explodes in his bizarre, whiny voice: "¡Diga! ¡Diga eso en *alto* pa' que to' el mundo te e'cucha![14]" Aside from his laughable high-pitched voice, however, after the official announces the information and the camera zooms out from its low angle, we get a clearer view of Trujillo's actual stature. Although the initial angle made him appear gigantic at first, through the frame's subsequent long-shot of the entire group, we now see that Trujillo is actually quite petite. In fact, too short for his chair, he sits at its edge so that his feet, which are elevated by roughly three-inch high-heel boots, can touch the ground. Slouching to reach the floor, furthermore, his gray suit now appears baggy. At the same time, we can see that the other men are much larger; their postures are supported by the backs of their chairs while their feet rest flat on the ground. Nevertheless, as if he believes that he is much taller than he actually is, Trujillo keeps his chin raised, his eyes half open, and his gaze downcast. Others, nevertheless, follow this small, feeble man's every order, which we witness throughout the scene. As their meeting

[14] Say it! Say that loudly so that everyone hears you!

adjourns, *El jefe* stands up, and the others follow. "Señores," he begins slowly while straightening the sleeves of his suit. Shaking a finger in the air, he concludes in his ridiculous, drawn-out tones, "¡*Eso*, me gusta! ¡Hay que ce-le-brar-lo![15]"

Although the cinematic depiction of Trujillo's unnatural skin tone, height complex, and hokey personality may seem like flaws in either Fernández's attempt at a dictator role or Delancer's casting choice, the actor's interpretation of Trujillo does match some of the details that are briefly mentioned in Alvarez's novel. For example, while the text's representation of Trujillo's skin color is not emphasized throughout the novel, the narrative does mention rumors about "his skin whiteners and creams" (Alvarez 96). Moreover, when Minerva slaps the dictator at the Discovery Day dance, her hand "come[s] down on the astonished, made-up face" (Alvarez 100). True to the image of Trujillo's high-heel boots in the Partido Dominicano scene of the film, furthermore, per town gossip in the novel, Trujillo also wears "elevator shoes" to make himself look taller (Alvarez 95). And the novel mentions his stature again when Minerva and Sinita go to perform their school's award-winning Discovery Day skit at the presidential palace. Minerva notes that Trujillo's actual height contrasts with the mandatory portrait of *El jefe* that towers over the hallways in Dominican homes: "In his big gold armchair, he looked much smaller than I had imagined him, looming as he was from some wall or other" (Alvarez 27). Additionally, like the half-slit eyes and downcast gaze that Trujillo maintains in the film, upon seeing the dictator in-the-flesh, at one moment Patria calls attention to his seemingly-unamused, "half-lidded eyes," and is surprised by the fact that,

[15] That, I like! It must be ce-le-brated!

compared to how he looks in pictures and propaganda, in person he appears "stocky," "overdressed," and "vain," as well as "greedy" and "unredeemed" (Alvarez 224).

Actor Fernández is doing more than just accounting for these minor characteristics, however, as he embellishes and emphasizes these traits to a point that surpasses strangeness and becomes comical, despite the film's serious subject matter. For example, more than Trujillo's unusually white appearance that we notice at the beginning of the film, we actually witness him putting on makeup at one moment, something that never occurs in the novel. We are taken to a shot of Trujillo and his Secretary of State, Manuel de Moya (played by Elias Caamaño Perez), or "Pimpo," the nickname he earns from tracking down young ladies according to the dictator's tastes and "pimping" them out, as Minerva explains in the novel: "'Secretary of State,' people say, winking one eye. Everyone knows his real job is rounding up girls for El jefe to try out" (94). In the film, Trujillo and Moya sit next to a small coffee table and talk about which adolescent girl Trujillo will possibly conquer next. Meanwhile, Moya holds up a small golden mirror for *El jefe*, who pats his face delicately with a powderpuff full of a white, chalky substance. To those who know Trujillo's background, this pokes fun at the notion that, although he hated Haitians and ordered the massacre of tens of thousands of them in 1937, Trujillo was actually part Haitian.[16] In this way, Fernández makes visible the invisible—

[16] The Instituto Dominicano de Genealogía, Inc. maps Trujillo's Haitian roots, starting with his grandmother: "Luisa Erciná Chevallier era hija natural de Justin Alexis Victor Turenne Carrié Blaise (n. 6 de noviembre de 1827) y Eleonore Juliette (Diyeta) Chevallier Moreau viuda Saladín (1810-12 de octubre de 1905). Alexis o Alejo Turenne Carrié Blaise, bisabuelo materno de Trujillo, fue ministro del gobierno haitiano de Nissage-Saget (1869-1874) y antes lo fue del gobierno provisional integrado por Nissage-Saget, Victorin Chevallier (pariente de Diyeta) y Sylvain Salnave (n. 1867); también fue

Trujillo's prejudices and fear of being recognized as Haitian. But the scene of Trujillo putting on makeup, an act that most would associate with the beauty rituals of women, also challenges the notion that he is a hyper-macho superpower and even suggests femininity. Ironically, the film introduces the scene with an establishing shot of the Palacio Nacional, the enormous, white building that Trujillo commissioned in the 1940s to conduct his male-centered government. Yet, if the 34-meter-high phallic cupola that tops the structure symbolizes the macho power of the Dominican government in the mid-twentieth century, then the following scene suggests that this is only a disguise to mask Trujillo's feminine side. That the film would suggest the feminization of such a traditionally macho space and profession is not entirely surprising to some scholars, like Maja Horn, who suggests that the U.S. occupation of 1916-1924 had de-masculinizing effects on the Dominican Republic since Dominican men were prohibited from controlling their own country (27). We may consider, too, that the laughable sight of Trujillo powdering his nose with the help of a friend represents a greater identity conflict— that of a politician who is permanently afflicted by his country's victimized past and so must prove himself hyper-masculine in the public eye. Behind closed doors,

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miembro del Consejo de Secretarios que gobernó Haití en 1874. Alejo Turenne Carrié había casado con Julie Herzilie Decayette, natural de Puerto Príncipe, Haití" (Guerra Sánchez np). Translation: Luisa Erciná Chevallier was the natural daughter of Justin Alexis Victor Turenne Carrié Blaise (born the 6th of November, 1827) and Eleonore Juliette (Diyeta) Chevallier Moreau widow Saladín (1810-12 of October, 1905). Alexis or Alejo Turenne Carrié Blaise, maternal great-grandfather of Trujillo, was Secretary of the Haitian Government of Nissage-Saget (1869-1874) and before of the provisional government intergrated by Nissage-Saget, Victorin Chevallier (relative of de Diyeta) and Sylvain Salnave (born 1867); he was also a member of the Consejo de Secretarios that governed Haiti in 1874. Alejo Turenne Carrié had married Julie Herzilie Decayette from Puerto Príncipe, Haiti.

however, as we see in the film, his femininity is unveiled. Without doubt, his application of makeup clashes with the content of the conversation the two men are having, the building in which this is taking place, and also with the men's dress; they are wearing suits, apparel traditionally associated with masculinity and power, while applying products traditionally worn by women. Adding to the ridiculous nature of the scene is the naughty half-smile that sweeps across the powdery face of the now giddy Trujillo after Moya tells him that the desirable Minerva Mirabal of Salcedo will be attending Trujillo's upcoming party. Fernández's visual spin on the novel's Trujillo's concerns with his vanity becomes a spectacle, showing us the layered-on mask that others quietly gossiped about behind Trujillo's back.

The film continues to make fun of Trujillo's façade of masculinity and virility and his awkward personality after Minerva rejects him at the dance. Inside Trujillo's chauffeured car, we witness the dictator and Moya chatting about a beautiful "morena" who was present at the party. When Moya tells him the identity of the girl, Trujillo orders: "invítela a beber *un* café."[17] He holds up one finger as he specifies *one* coffee. More than emphasizing a limited number of coffees to be offered to his "guest," these strange hand gestures are the norm for Fernández's Trujillo, as we saw with his expressive mannerisms in the Partido Dominicano scene. Alvarez's version makes no mention of the dictator's hand movements, but the actor's addition of this characteristic continues throughout the film and adds to the notion that Trujillo is, in general, an awkward being. We see more of this in the next sequence, which opens with a view of a

[17] Invite her to have *one* coffee.

general's uniform folded neatly on a chair to the right of the frame, and a female figure dressed in a nightgown entering the left side. We cannot see her face as we witness her taking a glass of liquor off the dresser, but the previous conversation inside Trujillo's car suggests that the "morena" must have accepted his invitation, and that this woman must be her. What we are witnessing, however, is definitely not the typical "café" scene. As the camera pans up-left, it reveals the face of the very young woman. She delivers the glass of liquor to Trujillo, who is stripped down to his underwear and sitting on the edge of a bed. The girl then gives the dictator a sip from the glass, sets the drink on the nightstand, and begins to remove her white negligee— a color symbolic of her youth and innocence, perhaps. As the scene concludes, she affirms she is offering of her body to this captivated, elderly voyeur: "Para Usted, *Jefe*."

Of course, the fact that an older man would abuse his power to obtain a young woman, likely a minor, elicits disgust from most viewers. Nevertheless, the unforgiving view of Trujillo's appearance in his skivvies and his odd mannerisms add comical elements to the scene. From the side view provided, for example, Trujillo's gut appears enormous as it protrudes over his scrawny legs. His gauche hand movements are again noticeable as he strokes the girl's bare flesh. Instead of closing in around the girl's arm with bent fingers, he instead bends his wrist and moves his stiff fingers down the length of her arm. He does this as if his hands themselves were tools for poking and prodding rather than appendages capable of caressing and holding. As a result, the scene jeers at the idea that Trujillo is a hyper-macho sex machine. The film emphasizes, instead, his ungainly appearance, age, and flabby body.

It is similarly hard to take Trujillo's joker-like voice seriously. This characteristic is completely invented by Fernández. He makes Trujillo's childish tantrums come alive with his theatrical representation of the dictator's voice. We witness this when Minerva goes to plead for her husband's release from prison. When she arrives at the palace, Trujillo is scribbling away at a document on his desk, apparently too busy to look up from his work, while Minerva waits in a chair at the opposite end of the enormous office. She taps impatiently on the arm of the chair until Trujillo, having had enough, looks up at her, clearly unamused. Trujillo already knows what Minerva wants. He interrupts her mid-request and whines: "Ustedes creen que están presos [los maridos] porque me tiraron flores?"[18] Trujillo's response signals that, like a spoiled child, he responds best to flattery, compliments, gifts, an adoration, or, in his metaphorical terms, flowers being thrown in his honor. Anyone who demonstrates anything other than adoration is clearly "not throwing him flowers" and is thus subject to his whims and vendettas which, in a dictator's world, can have destructive consequences. He gets up from his chair and wanders over to where Minerva is sitting. With one hand on his hip, the other resting on Minerva's chair, and a sour-looking facial expression, he a pouting child as he declares: "Yo hice este país de arriba y abajo." This is why, he claims, he will not let a bunch of "desgraciados"[19] destroy the many great things he has done for the Dominican Republic. To remind her of his generosity, he orders one of his officers to send Minerva home with

[18] Do you all think that they [the husbands] are imprisoned for throwing me flowers?
[19] I built this country from the ground up...ingrates.

a list of all the contributions he has personally made to the betterment of the country. In this way, Trujillo's voice is not threatening or formidable but funny and entertaining.

Rather than Portraying Trujillo as a dangerous villain, Fernández makes him a clown— one that seems an unlikely omnipotent dictator. Commenting on the actor's efforts to get into character, Delancer mused that

> ...en esta película se lució. Se preparó, engordó, estudió. Hablamos largas horas sobre Trujillo, sobre cómo veía a un personaje tan polémico y rico en matices. Una mezcla de cínico, payaso, estadista y megalómano. Un hombre que creía haber hecho a su país. Por eso insistía en que se lo llamara 'benefactor y padre de la patria nueva. Presidente de la república, generalísimo y doctor'. No era doctor en nada, pero bueno.[20] (Lechner)

Since the damage done by the Trujillo regime and the tens of thousands of disappeared Dominicans caused by it are no laughing matter, it is Fernández's interpretation of this composite of contradictory personalities, and especially the "payaso" behind the cynical, megalomaniac statesman, that interests me most. Why would a Dominican actor who knows what the effects of Trujillo's oppressive regime had on the country make light of such an evil figure in Dominican history?

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[20] "...in this film he shined. He prepared, he got fat, he studied. We spoke long hours about Trujillo, about how he saw such a polemical figure, rich in nuances. A mixture of cynic, clown, statesman, and megalomaniac. A man that believed that he made his country. That's why he insisted that I call him 'Benefactor and Father of the New Homeland. President of the Republic, Supreme Commander, and Doctor.' He wasn't a doctor in anything, but oh well.

In part, the answer lies within Fernández's acting style— his jeering mockery is both satirical and parodic. Michael Tueth distinguishes between these terms, which, despite their similarities, are separate concepts. He tells us that parody "has deep roots in human history and the human psyche," relies on "some innate instinct for imitation," and is manifested in literary, artistic, theatrical, and even musical works that broadly mimic another work of art or another artist's characteristic style and hold the originals up for ridicule, which is usually affectionate but may sometimes prove hostile" (Tueth 105). When I refer to Fernández's "making fun" of Trujillo, I do consider his performances a type of imitation related to history and the human psyche, albeit, an embellished imitation. Yet, it is Fernández who is engaged in the jocular mimicry of a well-known person, and not the film's making fun of some concept, style, or author. On the contrary, as we saw with the excruciating scenes of torture and violence, the film treats its subject matter very seriously. This mixture of performance modes— the serious and parodic— add to the strangeness of certain moments in the film involving the Trujillo character. Meanwhile, Fernández's making fun of Trujillo's quirks draws from what Tueth calls a "more aggressive" Juvenalian satire. The poet Juvenal, Tueth explains, "employed scorn, ridicule, and a sense of outrage in a serious attempt to improve the behavior of his fellow Roman citizens and put an end to their stupidity or immorality" while targeting specific members of the upper classes of Roman society and their vices, such as marital infidelity, sexual misconduct, greed, social climbing, political plotting, hypocrisy, and their entitlement (91). Trujillo was indeed a member of the upper class and indulged in of all of these vices. Like the jesting, yet, hostile spirit of satire, Fernández's mocking of *El jefe*

spotlights the dictator's flaws and vices which, instead of further mystifying him as an all-powerful, super-macho entity, conquers this image by visually altering and weakening it. At the same time, I believe that Fernández's interpretation is not specifically aimed at provoking laughter, although it does on occasion. It is not, for example, satirical in the way that Alec Baldwin does Donald Trump on *SNL*, or in the way that Queco Novell does Mariano Rajoy on the Spanish comedy show, *Polònia*, or even in the way that the entire cast does the Cuban customs officials in the web series, *La aduana de Cuba* on the Miami-based *América TeVé*, in which the satirical interpretations of well-known public figures are clearly manifested that way on purpose, and with the intention of getting the audience to laugh at that figure. There is something far more chilling about Fernández's interpretation of Trujillo and says interesting things about political manipulation of the masses and power hierarchies. The laughter that Fernández's portrayal of Trujillo inspires, more specifically, is not one of hilarity and enjoyment, but one of awkward discomfort in perceiving his immoral disposition and incredulity at how such a character could come to run a country. After all, Trujillo was a violent bigot, among other undesirable attributes, but then again, the world is full of these kinds of tyrants.

While Fernández's performance seems distantly and perhaps only inadvertently related to satire and parody, like these two forms of expression, his entertaining emphasis of Trujillo's imperfections has didactic properties. Not unlike a mirror, Fernández's mimicry of Trujillo becomes an unflattering glimpse into social structures past and present, in a way that teaches the viewer about his or her own weaknesses and subconscious biases surrounding Trujillo's historical and social context. For example,

Fernández calls attention to the persisting racism towards Haitians and those with dark black skin within the Dominican Republic. Ernesto Sagás points out that in the Dominican Republic, "an estimated three-fourths of the population is classified as mulatto (the offspring of whites and blacks), and the color of black and white minorities is more a matter of convenience for classification purposes than a reflection of their racial 'purity'" (Sagás 323). Fernández is well-informed about stereotypes and the country's racist tendencies and knows that much of Dominican society does not recognize this racism as a social ill. It becomes instead, a hegemonic, institutionalized force that persists "just because." Whether or not these notions affect Fernández's own racial self-identification, the notion of lighter complexion as superior exists in Dominican society and reflects even in how people choose to register themselves on legal documents. Sagás explains: "Dominican ID cards identify the country's citizens using a panoply of racial euphemisms that go to great lengths to avoid using the racially charged term negro (black). Dominicans of all shades are described in ID cards using shades of indio (light, dark) or similar terms (e.g., moreno), while reserving negro mostly for Haitians" (331-332).

Fernández's corny portrayal of Trujillo also challenges the idea that people idealize political figures that do not merit adoration. The novel, too, addresses the notion that Trujillo was often held in as high a regard as God. All households were required to have a portrait of the Benefactor, recalling the way that many Christian families hang a picture of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, or the symbol of a cross on a wall to watch over or bless the house. Minerva describes her family's Trujillo portrait which ironically "hung

next to a picture of Our Lord Jesus with a whole flock of the cutest lambs" (Alvarez 17). This juxtaposition of Jesus— the son of God, per Christian belief— and the dictator, in effect, reflects the way society was groomed to consider Trujillo– as powerful and worthy of fear and respect like God. Similar to the relationship between the followers and the leaders of some religious doctrines, accordingly, those who were loyal adorers of the dictator could expect to be rewarded with his gratitude and mercy, while his wrath and justice awaited the traitors.

The image of Trujillo as divine is first seen in the film when Trujillo arrives at Antonio de la Maza's house. He is dressed completely in white— a color that can represent purity, holiness, or divinity. He strolls toward the front walkway which is bordered by a short, white gate. The fact that the house technically belongs to someone else and not Trujillo, furthermore, reminds us that Trujillo presumed himself the owner of everything, even if his name was not on the deed. Of course, as a man whose privilege transcends borders and common courtesies, when Trujillo does enter Antonio's house, he does not bother to knock or announce himself. Trujillo has just previously ordered Antonio's brother, Octavio, to be killed. Octavio had been ordered to pilot a flight to the US to capture Galíndez, the professor that Mate mentioned in the novel. Although we never witness this mission in the film, we learn that it was not carried out discretely enough and as such, aroused suspicion from the White House. We assume that Trujillo has ordered Octavio's murder because of this mishap since later, we see two men dumping his corpse on his family's doorstep. The surviving brother, Antonio, works for Trujillo, which is why Trujillo visits him. Notwithstanding, Trujillo visits Antonio. His

will having been done, the dictator arrogantly assumes that Antonio will accept and not question the murder.

While the sequence underscores Trujillo's symbolic role as a God through his white wardrobe and his air of entitlement, it at once makes the dictator look older and more delicate than ever. This is the first time in the film that he walks with a cane, for instance: a symbol of advanced age. Underlining a new sort of disorientation in the all-powerful dictator, he slowly wanders toward the gate in front of Antonio's house and stops momentarily in front of it, as if sizing up an obstacle before him. He then extends an arm and, although the gate looks flimsy, he pushes it open with much effort. Leaving one of his thugs and an officer at the car, Trujillo, alone, then meanders up the pathway to the front door. His leaving behind two key representatives of those ensuring the success of his regime symbolizes his vulnerability and impotence. Once inside, he stands before Antonio, wobbling unsteadily. He reaches for Antonio's arms as if in embrace or as if seeking support to stand. A hesitant Antonio returns the gesture by obligation; even so, their connection seems the only thing keeping the dictator on his feet. This supportive embrace, as such, represents the key executers of Trujillo's dirty work— those who keep his machine of dominance functioning. Trujillo is only as strong as his supporters. That he looks weaker than before represents his dwindling number of supporters, with Antonio as the latest to abandon him. Ultimately, it is Antonio who leads the assassination plot that annihilates Trujillo.

Historical Figures of Imitation

If Fernández's performance of Trujillo fails to make us forget that he is only an actor pretending to be *El jefe*, we can attribute this to the notion that Trujillo was somewhat of a natural actor engaged in theatrics himself, both politically and culturally. In this way, his whitening makeup and elegant suits are a kind of actor's mask to attract the support of many Dominicans and powerful foreign, predominantly white nations. On the impact of U.S. gendered and racialized imperialism surrounding the political context of the Trujillo era, Maja Horn affirms that "it was greatly in the interest of Dominicans, in their many-decade negotiations and dealings with the United States and its racist ideology, to signal their "worth" by downplaying their own blackness and emphasizing their racial difference from their Haitian neighbors" (24). Even so, more than his and even society's "racial acting," Lauren Derby, sees Trujillo's public womanizing and hyper-machismo as another act, or as part of a "state spectacle," as she puts it, for maintaining his powerful status and earning the respect of important political figures:

> Feminine imagery functioned as a foil for the dictator's multiple masculine identities; each female relationship revealed a different facet of his power. One could say that the display of women, particularly those of high social status, was a means of accumulation in Trujillo's drive for symbolic capital, although one that had to be constantly renewed. Trujillo drew upon a traditional genre of masculinity in which his self-aggrandizement was based on the sheer number of women he could lay claim to— women who highlighted his prowess as lover, father, husband, as well as defender of his female liaisons and extended family.

> His macho stature grew especially through the acquisition of women of superior social status... And whereas his insatiable sexual cupidity incited ignominy, it also brought him respect and was a key element in his legitimacy as a caudillo-turned-statesman. (1113)

I agree with Derby that together, his consumption of women's bodies and domination of the regime's enemies formed the base for his power, "the near mythological fear he inspired," and also his charisma. An act on the stage of politics, Trujillo's convincing execution of a hyper-macho role, in effect, kept him in power for thirty years.

The novel, too, suggests that Trujillo was an actor, and draws attention to Trujillo's deceiving costume of a qualified leader as Minerva muses: "This regime is seductive. How else would a whole nation fall prey to this little man? …I see now how easily it happens. You give in on little things, and soon you're serving in his government, marching in his parades, sleeping in his bed" (Alvarez 96). Even before this, moreover, upon seeing Trujillo at her school's Discovery Day performance as a child, Minerva notes that the dictator looks like a costumed character in a theatrical production: "He was wearing a fancy white uniform with gold fringe epaulets and a breast of medals like an actor playing a part" (Alvarez 27). Likewise, when Patria goes to the presidential palace to pick up her imprisoned family members, she comments that "we were part of a stage show" (Alvarez 224), because all the people there, prisoners and advocates, had to fake happiness in front of the American journalists. When they interview those coming to pick up loved ones, none of them can express the truth of the regime's terror; not in the presence of *El jefe*, the starring actor in his own show.

To manifest and highlight the nuances of this particular political actor, it would take someone like Fernández for a number of reasons, beginning with his physical appearance and, in a chameleon-like way, his ability to flexibly manipulate his look. In order to capture Trujillo's inhuman skin tone, for example, the role required an actor with a dark complexion that would be difficult to hide with white makeup. Indeed, Fernández has darker skin that, by United States standards, may be considered black or colored at the very least. In addition, while working in France as a model before his acting career began, he soon learned that his slender physique, darker complexion, and defined facial angles, or his "cara cortada," were features desired by the European film industry in the early 70s and, as such, gave him "enormous liberty" as an actor (Solano). As these were physical characteristics that other male actors from the region could not offer, Fernández recognized that it was because he looked "medio raro," or peculiar, that he was called to do his first films in Italy with Federico Fellini in *Roma* (1972) and *Salomè* (1972).

Not surprisingly, he acquired exoticized roles as Moroccan princes or Arabian villains; the actor has commented that these kinds of roles were the destiny of the "prototipo del latino" in Italy during that time, much in the way that Latina women were sexualized in Hollywood (Manuel). In spite of this, he agreed to play the parts of even the "crudest" and "roughest" roles so that he could "begin to acquire power in the industry" (Solano, translation mine). This unique physique, furthermore, landed him other eclectic roles such as: an indigenous Peruvian tribe leader in *Fire on the Amazon* (1993), a Russian gypsy transvestite in *In Hell* (2003), and a deranged serial killer in the more recent *The Collector* (2009), as well as various other villainous roles. Aside from his

Trujillo part in *Trópico*, for example, he was Fulgencia Batista in *The Lost City* (2005), a part that required him to gain more than 20 pounds, fewer than the 38 he had to put on for the Trujillo role which, for the typically slender and figure-conscious actor, "fue horrendo" (Manuel). Overall, he has starred in 60 films, working alongside prominent actors like: Paul Hogan and Linda Kozlowski (in *Crocodile Dundee II* [1988]); Jeff Daniels and John Goodman (in *Arachnophobia* [1990]); Sandra Bullock (in *Fire on the Amazon*); Kurt Russell, Halle Berry, and John Leguizamo (in *Executive Decision* [1996]); Jean-Claude Van Damme and Lawrence Taylor (in *In Hell*); Vin Diesel (in *A Man Apart* [2003] and *Los Bandoleros* [2009]), among a plethora of others.

Aside from his physical appearance, Fernández's flamboyant, sassy, and arrogant personality translated well in the embellished Trujillo role. To begin with, he often appears in interviews and awards shows wearing an unusual wardrobe. As an illustration, during an interview with the crude talk show host, Manny Solano, he arrived in an olive-green, trench coat vest, buttoned to the neck and adorning a long-sleeved, black, collared blouse, lined with gold stitching. Recalling a currently stylish women's high-low fashion, which refers to the dress length that is short in the front and long in the back, Fernández's military-style overcoat was uniquely long in the front and short in the back. Solano derided the outfit as "un flow de *Matrix*," which was followed by the laughter of the beautiful model co-host. Appearing somewhat offended and unamused, Fernández corrected Solano's Spanish pronunciation of the Hollywood film reference, and clarified that the successful, "más a vant garde" Dominican fashion designer, José Durán,

designed his apparel, which, according to him, is extremely popular in places like Germany and Japan.

Indeed, Fernández is quick to defend himself, denounce disrespect, and assert his opinions. In the same interview, for example, when he commented on the way Hollywood objectified Dominican actress María Montez in the 40s, host Solano interrupted him with the claim that María Montez was a Hollywood prostitute. Waving his finger in disapproval, Fernández responds, charged with annoyance and attitude:

> No, no, no, no, no. Esas son palabras de *Usted*. Porque [entonces] tú me estás llamando a mí prostituto también. Diríamos entonces, que yo hice cuantas películas haciendo criminales, coño, yo lo que tenía que trabajar y comer, y hacer mi nombre. ¿Qué carajo te pasa a ti?[21]

As he defends Montez's professional moves, he continues to defend the roles that he has chosen to play, asserting that: "Yo soy un artista. Y es lo que allí tengo una libertad de entrar a hacer todo lo que me interesa a mí. El artista tiene el poder de hacer lo que le apetece. Se llama actuación, Papá[22]" (Solano). At one point, he even tells the host to "cállese," or "shut up," because of his rude demeanor. After various interruptions from the boisterous Solano and several forward questions, like those about Fernández's sexuality, the actor concludes his visit bluntly: "...entonces llámame otra vez cuando tú

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[21] No, no, no, no, no. Those are *your* words. Because [then] you are calling me a prostitute as well. That's what we would say, then, since I played the criminal in so many films, fucking hell, when I had to do what I had to do to get work and to be able to eat, and make a name for myself. What the fuck is wrong with you?

[22] I am an artist. And that's why I have the freedom to do whatever roles interest me. The artist has the ability to do whatever he feels like doing. It's called acting, Papá.

no quieras presentar las vainas que tú presentas, y no más que quieras escuchar conmigo, y te voy a dar un poco de educación... no agrio, no, Papá. Que digo la reali-da-da-dad. *Reality*.[23]"

In sum, Fernández does not like to be interrupted, and would rather dedicate his time to interviews and shows that make him the center of attention, perhaps recalling the vanity and pride of Trujillo. During a brief interview with the actor at a Dominican awards show for his role in *Mediterranean Blue*, when the camera strays from its focus on Fernández, he disapproves of the shift and chides the cameraman while pointing to himself: "Que pongan la cámara, que miran pa' aca, aquí, allí está el dinero, Papá[24]" (*Entrevista*). In another interview, he boasts that the "superestrella de Hollywood" Sandra Bullock was "secundaria a Juan Fernandez" in *Fire on the Amazon* (Manuel). Furthermore, he claims that he agreed to play the Trujillo role in *Trópico* because movie star Michelle Rodriguez told him that he was the only person elegant enough and skilled enough to play a believable Trujillo (Manuel). With his ample experience and success as an actor, it is clear that Fernández sees himself as somewhat of a gift to the Dominican film industry. Despite his fame and the high wages that he now earns in Hollywood films, on various occasions Fernández chooses to return to the low-budget Dominican film industry because he believes that his participation as an actor can help Dominican directors acquire a voice in the industry. This fact alone may seem like a humanitarian

[23] ...then call me when you aren't going to present whatever it is that you present, and you want to listen, and I'll educate you… No, that's not bitterness, Papá. That's reali-ty-ty-ty. Reality.
[24] Move the camera, look over here, here, here is where the money is, Papá.

cause on the actor's part, but Fernández's own words reflects the high esteem he has for himself and the value he places upon his presence:

> Yo he trabajado aquí [in the Dominican Republic] en peliculas sin dinero. ¿Por qué? Porque me interesaba ayudar a los directores porque creía que ellos necesitaban una voz...Si yo vengo aquí como estrella yo exigo que me paguen, diríamos $20,000 [for an entire movie], que no es nada porque $20,000 me pagaban a mí [in Hollywood] en '86 por varios días de trabajo[25] (News HD).

Even so, for these small-scale film projects to prove worthy of the actor's essentially pro-bono contributions, Fernández explains that the subject matter must be interesting, educational, and capable of teaching viewers about the rich myths, legends, and important historical events that surround Dominican culture (News HD), which I believe does prove to be a respectable demand that redeems Fernández from some of his blatant (and entertaining) arrogance. Aside from his work with Delancer's *Trópico*, for example, he participated in Josh Crook's drama film *La soga* (2009), which confronted drug-related crime in the Dominican Republic; Francis "Indio" Disla Ferreira's horror movie *El hoyo del diablo* (2012) about a present-day revenge of the 1937-Haitian Massacre victims' souls; and also, *El gallo* (2013), a film that Fernández wrote, produced, and directed about a man (played by de Alarcón) who is deported from the US for a crime that he did not commit and returns to his native land, the Dominican Republic, looking

[25] I have worked in films here for free. Why? Because I was interested in helping the directors because I believed that they needed voice... If I come here [to the Dominican Republic] as a moviestar, I expect that they pay me, let's say, diríamos $20,000 [for an entire movie], which is nothing, because they used to pay me $20,000 [in Hollywood] in '86 for a few days of work.

for love and acceptance. In a recent interview with *News HD*, however, a very disheartened Fernández said farewell to the Dominican film industry because he feels that the only topics that interest directors currently are those of vulgarity, "porquería y mala educación." Expressing his general disappointment in the decline of the country, he condemned the pollution and society's lack of respect for the environment, poverty, kids running amuck in the streets, women dressing like prostitutes, stray animals, pretentious administrators failing to run the country, among other grievances. At the time, he talked of other plans: a series through his agency in L.A., another film in Italy, and a series in Italy on the Borgia family.

Fernández's colorful personality and versatility on the set as a professional actor gives him power over the way society chooses to remember Trujillo. From his accurate yet banally embellished portrayal of this historical actor-dictator's memorable peculiarities and his evident physical and mental preparation for the part, Alarcón is clearly a skilled imitator and reinterpreter. Meanwhile, the accidental satirical element that arises from this (at times unbelievably) realistic interpretation of the dictator deconstructs the supervillain archetype, makes it capable of evoking laughter, humanizes it, and thus makes it mortal. Typical of Fernández's approach to any role, the actor himself argued that one must study the character to be interpreted and do the role in a way that does not create a caricature (Manuel). As Gehring suggests of parody, furthermore, "one must be thoroughly versed in the subject under attack" to create effective parody (Gehring 3), the same should be said of Fernández's embellished, mocking performance. The author of the satire must know his or her target in order to

portray their flaws in an emphasized way and enlighten the spectator through laughter. By the very nature of the written narrative, of course, the reader can only gather a sense of a character's physical appearance from textual description. In other words, the plot development is the focus of Alvarez's novel, not the character descriptions, and so a brief description of each of the dictator's peculiarities will do. Film, on the other hand, is a visual experience. As such, the actor's decision of how a text's character descriptions and development should be represented visually is as weighty as the plot development, if not more.

If Delancer's film is supposed to be about the Mirabal family, then, it absolutely falls short of its goal. Yet, it does place the Mirabals among a number of other significant characters within a more panoramic view of the Trujillo era. If the viewer of Delancer's film can accept this possibility— if they can overcome the common tendency toward a mystified adoration of historical heroes, then Delancer's film promises an intriguing view of the complex inner-workings of dictatorship and the rise and fall of Trujillo himself. That is to say that as Alvarez was able to give voice to the Mirabal sisters according to how she felt they should be interpreted and perceived by the reader, Delancer's cast gets to mimic and interpret to their own ends these historical behind-the-scenes figures of the regime, beginning with Trujillo. On the whole, Fernández's Trujillo reminds the viewer that this kind of character— the political actor— is still very present within the governments of the Americas today. Their ability to rise to power is often just as shocking as both the real and fictional Trujillo's; even so, the bizarre way that officials

are elected and become popular are not frequently reckoned with until they are interpreted by the film actor.

CHAPTER FIVE
VISUALIZING CULTURAL NEGOTIATION IN *HAMILTON* THE MUSICAL

There is one more facet of adaptations of Caribbean works that I would like the reader to consider— that the tendencies of cultural adaptation and mutation similar to those discussed herein have been involved in a cultural oceanic dispersal, or island hopping. Akin to the migration of certain Caribbean species, like the green iguanas that survived hurricanes and "rafted" hundreds of miles on hurricane debris, establishing themselves in new territories (Censky, Ellen J., et al), the sociocultural adaptation and mutation that characterizes the adapted narrative of the Caribbean is and has been migrating— not only from one Caribbean region to another, as we can argue about the films that we have already discussed— but to the U.S. In this way, I propose that the U.S. is becoming the last great adaptation involving the Caribbean— not through some aesthetic semblance to a tourist paradise, but culturally speaking, through instances of cultural movement, transformation, adaptation, and mutation.

To approach such a theory, in this chapter, I first situate New York City within a modern-day Caribbean context that reveals many of the same processes of cultural adaptation and mutation, or resistance, to colonial social structures that we have seen in previous works. While doing this, I shift my focus to a historical figure who I believe has become a repeating adaptation, similar to Cuba's Cecilia Valdés or the Dominican Republic's Trujillo. Unlike Cecilia, the character in question for this chapter is nonfictional and, unlike Trujillo, this person has been portrayed as both a hero and a

villain. I am referring to Alexander Hamilton, a man whose legacy as one of the United States' founding fathers often overshadows his Caribbean origins.[26] After all, once in the U.S., he established himself as a prominent "essayist, artillery captain, wartime adjutant to Washington, battlefield hero, congressman, abolitionist, Bank of New York founder, state assemblyman, member of the Constitutional Convention and New York Ratifying Convention, orator, lawyer, polemicist, educator, patron saint of the *New-York Evening Post*, foreign policy theorist, and major general in the army" (Chernow 5)— plenty of titles to distract future generations from discovering the life he had before his acclaim. More than this, however, for the public to know of his "squalid Caribbean boyhood" was the last thing Hamilton wanted for a number of reasons, as it was a haunting source of personal "shame and misery" throughout his entire life (Chernow 5).[27] Accordingly, in

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[26] Hamilton's story begins on the British West Indian island of Nevis in 1755, and then, from approximately age 11 to 18, it continues on St. Croix. It was not until 1772, after working for several years as an apprentice for a trading broker and dabbling in journalism and poetry that he wrote for the local paper, that his former bosses and mentors organized a fund to send Hamilton to North America for a college education.

[27] The source of shame may have been more the squalor than the Caribbeanness of his childhood, as the Caribbean colonies were of great importance to the British. But Nevis's social climate was a churlish one, to be sure, being reserved for the "castaways" of society— prostitutes, slaves, and money-hungry Europeans looking to capitalize on the booming sugar industry— according to Chernow's description. It was "colonized with vagabonds, criminals, and other riffraff swept from the London streets to work as indentured servants or overseers," "a beautiful but godless spot," and "a tropical hellhole of dissipated whites and fractious slaves" (Chernow 8). His shame also has to do with who his parents were, including the many ghastly experiences he lived because of their unsavory identities. His mother, Rachel Faucette, was rumored to be a whore, while his father, James Hamilton, eventually abandoned Alexander and his brother shortly before a disease took Rachel's life, leaving the two boys orphaned. Just as unfortunate as being without parents, moreover, Hamilton and his brother had to carry the shameful burden of illegitimacy, as both Rachel and James were already married to former, now extinguished flames when they met and thus never legitimized their union through matrimony. Emphasizing Hamilton's psychological battle with this fact throughout the novel,

this chapter, I am interested in the symbolic visual representations of Hamilton's social coping mechanisms and especially the methods of "faking it to make it," or hiding his family origins, cultural heritage, and class status in order to both adapt to his New York surroundings and gain credibility within its developing government. As such, I turn to the one of the most recent artistic accounts of Hamilton's life, Nuyorican Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical hit, *Hamilton* (2015), an adaptation of biographer Ron Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton* (2004).[28] On the one hand, I argue that the visible fusion of different artistic styles of dance and other self-expression in two of the show's numbers, "Yorktown: The World Turned Upside Down" and "The World Was Wide Enough," reflects the historical identity struggles that come with trying to fit in to succeed in a setting where all odds are against certain sociocultural types who cannot rid themselves of the "stain" of their own heritage, despite all their best efforts.

New York To the Caribbean Sea: Approximately 1,500-Miles Close

Unlike the other authors we have discussed thus far, most of whom are from the Caribbean, both Chernow and Miranda are New-York natives. Born in 1949, the author of the influential biography on Hamilton, Chernow, grew up in Forest Hills, Queens, an "overwhelmingly Jewish middle-class area" (Schleier np)[29]. Seemingly destined for some kind of future in writing, he was a voracious reader who loved fantasy fiction about

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Chernow introduces the reader with the idea that "he never outgrew the stigma of his illegitimacy" (5).

[28] If not distinguished by "musical" or "biography," I will refer to the musical as *Hamilton* and the biography as *Alexander Hamilton*.

[29] Chernow self-identifies strongly as Jewish, though he does not practice (Schleier).

medieval times and pirates, and grew to admire, as he matured, authors like Dr. Samuel Johnson, Mark Twain, and Jane Austen (*The New York Times*). To his readers, Chernow is known as a biographer. Not surprisingly, he is a reader of biographies as well, and has found inspiration in the works of biographers Stefan Zweig, Isabel Wilkerson, Horace Porter, Philip Roth, and John Lahr. Chernow's own works take a historian's approach to writing about his subject matter, as he visits the archives of relevant historical sites abroad and locally to complete his projects with accuracy. His educational background is not in History, however, but English, with a B.A. in English from Yale and an M.Phil. in English from Pembroke College of Cambridge University. Indeed, the English major behind Chernow's biographies shows as, recalling the spirit of Eliza's line in the song "Burn" of the musical *Hamilton*, "[He builds] palaces out of paragraphs/[He builds] cathedrals" (McCarter 238) through his skilled creative and lengthy descriptions that make up the 800-page *Alexander Hamilton*. When asked about the lengthiness of his biographies, Chernow admitted that he is a slow reader and jested: "I always sympathize with people who complain about the length of my books. It would take me a year to get through one of them" (*The New York Times*). As such, he dedicated his most recent bibliography on Ulysses S. Grant entitled *Grant* (2017), to his "loyal readers, who have soldiered on through [his] lengthy sagas" (*The New York Times*).

Perhaps Chernow identified in this way with Hamilton, who was also known for "writing day and night, like he was running out of time," as sung in the musical in reference to the fifty-one essays that Hamilton contributed to the eighty-five-essay Federalist Papers (McCarter 137). Chernow's unhurried, descriptive, and investigative

style of writing has proven successful, of course, earning him a number of honors for his biographies on a variety of politicians and businessmen. *Alexander Hamilton*, which he began writing in 1998 and did not publish until 2004, for example, was nominated for National Book Critics Circle Awards and won the George Washington Book Prize in the same year it was published. His book on the J.P. Morgan empire, *The House of Morgan: An American Banking Dynasty and the Rise of Modern Finance* (1990), furthermore, received the National Book Award for Nonfiction, while *Warburgs: The Twentieth-Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family* (1994), earned the George S. Eccles Prize for Excellence in Economic Writing. Like *Alexander Hamilton*, his biography, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (1998) was also nominated for National Book Critics Circle Awards. Even more impressive however, is that Chernow won the Pulitzer Prize for *Washington: A Life* (2010), a biography that also received the American History Book Prize. Most recently, his fascination with the historical and present-day race relations in the South have inspired him to write *Grant* (2017). According to the author, because of its elements of drama and pathos— "the story of a defeated man, ground down by failure, who then soars into the firmament"— this has been his favorite biography to date (*The New York Times*). If drama, pathos, histories of the fallen redeeming themselves, and those of the nameless finding fame inspire Chernow in his writing process, then his interest in Hamilton's story was a given. In an interview, he explained that he had to find out why "a brilliant but penniless immigrant who went on to help forge everything from the Federalist Papers to the U.S. Coast Guard, was regarded as 'a third-rate founder'" (Winn np). His approach? Write a book about it.

Playwright Lin-Manuel Miranda, too, was born in New York City, but unlike Chernow, he was raised in a predominantly Latino neighborhood in upper Manhattan called Inwood, near Washington Heights (Hofler np). His parents, both Puerto Rican, established the family there because it "was the closest they came to giving the kids the feeling of a close-knit Puerto Rican town," according to his father, Luis (Brecher et. al)[30]. Similar to Chernow, Miranda seemed destined for a future in what interested him as a child; for Miranda it was theater and music. In his early years, he was a fan of hip hop and R&B music, a taste that stuck with him even after the influential moment of seeing his first Broadway musical, "Les Miserables," at age seven, and also during his teenage years as he participated in musical theater at his high school (Wittmer np). Indeed, these interests along with the strong value he has for his Latino heritage have shaped his most popular stage productions as well as his side projects.[31] One of these is *In the Heights,* a musical that, behind its award-winning hip hop and Latin-rhythm-infused score, follows the daily struggles and victories of various Latino characters living in Washington Heights. In fact, Miranda began writing *In the Heights* during his sophomore year in college at Wesleyan University in 1999, and when it was finished, it was performed by the student theater company there (in April 2000) (Wittmer np). Subsequently, it ran in Connecticut (in 2005), made it to Broadway in 2008 when Miranda was only 28 years old, and eventually was honored with four Tony Awards (Hofler).

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[30] Luis came to New York City at age 19. Now a politician, he has worked as the Director of Hispanic Affairs for Mayor Ed Koch, for example (Brecher et. al np). Lin's mother, Luz, is a clinical psychologist.

[31] Miranda provided Spanish translations for the 2009 Broadway revival of *West Side Story*, for example (Hofler np).

But how did Chernow and Miranda cross paths? It happened years after the publication of Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton*, when Miranda began reading it while on vacation. He immediately identified with Hamilton's story, explaining to his father during an interview, "When I realized he came from the Caribbean I said 'I know this guy— he's you, he's the taxistas (taxi drivers) that became congresspeople, he's a version of the story we know'" (Brecher et. al np). More than his cultural identification with the work, he noticed a lyrical element in Chernow's writing and began dreaming of ways to convert it into a hip-hop musical. Soon, he presented the idea to Chernow himself. Alas, Chernow was doubtful of the potential success behind the idea of converting his lengthy biography into a two-hour musical stage production, let alone a hip-hop stage production (Winn np). Nevertheless, when Miranda sang him the lines of the famous first song, "Alexander Hamilton," during their encounter, Chernow's doubts were put to rest. He said: "It was the most extraordinary thing...Lin had compressed the first 40 pages of my book into four minutes. I was completely bowled over, but it was also a little embarrassing. Either I write really long, I thought, or he writes really tight" (Winn np). Impressed by the language of the rap lyrics, Chernow went on to comment that he "could see it was a blend of formal and rather elegant 18th century English with 21st century slang and colloquialism" (Winn np). Having convinced Chernow of the show's potential, Miranda bought the rights and hired Chernow as his historical consultant to fact-check the script. Even so, the musical was not supposed to be a historical archive, but a musical for entertainment purposes. It seems that Miranda knew that, for he wanted to be accurate, but allowed himself to alter the order of historical

events, facts, words and phrases of archives, and even abbreviate important moments for the sake of the spectacle and certain rules of the musical structure (Winn np).

With all of the media attention *Hamilton* got from its early beginnings at the small-venue Public Theater, to its presence at the White House's Poetry Slam during the Obama administration, and its current home on Broadway at the Richard Rodgers Theater, the masses, to be sure, felt its arrival. Aside from the recognition and awards it won as an off-Broadway production, during *Hamilton*'s time on Broadway, it has earned a number of several major honors in a variety of categories, such as Tony, Grammy, Drama League, Fred and Adele Astaire, NAACP Image, Dramatists Guild of America, Broadway.com Audience, Kids' Choice, and Billboard Music Awards. The show has been praised for uplifting cultural diversity and awareness through an innovative and trendy new musical style. Years after its initial debut in 2015, today the show has several travelling tours to select cities within the U.S., as well as other long-term locations like Chicago and London.[32]

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[32] Since tickets still go for hundreds of dollars as of February 2018, most of the population cannot afford to see it even today. Indeed, the *Hamilton* crew was generating a hypocritical image of itself. It was an ethnically diverse troupe profoundly invested in messages about cultural awareness, acceptance, and fighting for equal treatment, backed by its historical subject— a discriminated, poor immigrant who becomes something out of nothing. Ironically, only the elite, wealthy members of our present-day society can afford to hear this message. Furthermore, there were and still are no legal recordings of the production for purchase, save for the soundtrack and libretto with photos of some of the performance's scenes. Perhaps in an effort to assuage this image among its fans, however, the show has been involved in local acts of charity. For example, Miranda made available matinee tickets that would allow 20,000 students per year from Title 1 high schools to attend the show for free. He was excited about his charitable act, as he declared in an interview: "These kids are going to grow up in a world in which Hamilton existed...It tells them, 'Even if the people who founded it don't look like you, it's your country. We get to tell this story, too, and we get to tell it our way'" (Gale). In addition,

Despite the fact that Chernow and Miranda are not from the Caribbean in a geographical sense, I see New York City as a recently formed island that is, culturally and demographically speaking, becoming an extension of the Caribbean, beginning with its historically fundamental role in housing international diaspora among waves of migration, and especially the Caribbean diaspora. For example, these waves of immigration to New York City have formed many of its Caribbean neighborhoods and are identified accordingly as Puerto Rican neighborhoods, Dominican neighborhoods, Cuban neighborhoods, and so on. Edwin Lamboy, for example, distinguishes between some of the patterns of Caribbean settlement: "Cubans have settled in cities across the Hudson River such as West New York, Hoboken, and Jersey City; Dominicans are concentrated in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan; and Puerto Ricans in the well-known community of El Barrio" (3). To summarize some of this migration activity, Tammy Brown and Nancy Foner look at census records to trace the ever-growing influx of Caribbean migrants to New York City. Brown points out that the first wave of Caribbean immigration to New York occurred between 1880 and the 1920s, with 36,000 Caribbean immigrants living in New York City by 1932 (24). This number does not include Puerto Ricans since as U.S. citizens, they are not considered immigrants upon moving to the U.S. Thus, the number of Caribbean persons living in New York City in

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just last year Miranda created a scholarship program at his alma matter, the Wesleyan University Hamilton Prize, which will honor "the incoming student (beginning in the class of 2021) who has submitted a creative written work—whether fiction, poetry, lyrics, play, script, nonfiction or other expression—judged to best reflect originality, artistry and dynamism" (Arnott). Miranda will serve as one of the honorary chairs of the judging committee (Rubenstein).

1932 is actually larger. Much later, in 1990, Foner explains that Dominicans and Jamaicans made up the top three immigration groups and that "one out of every three immigrant New Yorkers was Caribbean born, with Dominicans heading the list" (11-12). As for Puerto Rican migration, Foner explains that it began in large waves after World War II, peaked in 1940s and 1950s, and the Puerto Rican population according to the 1990 consensus was "one of New York City's largest ethnic groups, accounting for 12 percent of the population" (12-13). With migratory groups come the customs of their places of origin, and through this phenomenon, new cultures are formed. The Caribbean itself exemplifies this, after centuries of migrations— often forced— to the region from other countries. Similar to the Caribbean's number of diverse cultures as well as cultures that have been created through what Fernando Ortiz calls "transculturation," New York City is developing its own complex cultural layers, which are represented on many artistic and intellectual levels. Many of these layers, in effect, comprise an abundance of Caribbean elements. As such, in spite of the roughly 1,500 miles that separate New York City and the Caribbean Sea, I situate Chernow and Miranda within this society.

Dance as Cultural Commentary

I begin with "Yorktown: The World Turned Upside Down" in Act I because, on the one hand, it is the culmination of all of Act I's conflicts, themes, and rhythmic styles from previous numbers, and thus provides a unique perspective on all of Act I. On the other hand, I am interested in its profound invocation of hip hop culture, the lifestyle that refers to graffiti writing (visual art), b-boying (dance), DJing (music), and MCing (poetry) (de

Cuir 53).[33] As an ideology, hip hop is symbolic of the psychological and social battles surrounding the immigrant's predicament of being an outsider who must strive to fit in[34]. More than just a music genre, it manifested in the South Bronx as African-American and Afro-Caribbean youths' response to the local media's and government's negative portrayal and marginalization of the primarily black and Hispanic neighborhoods of

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[33] While my primary focus is the visual aspect, the dance moves, stage lighting, and costuming are often in dialogue with the lyrics of the songs and can enhance their meaning in a present-day context. In this way, I see certain spoken lines as part of the stage set in which what is uttered or proclaimed in the background alters the way the audience sees the visual representation of the show, and vice versa. It would prove unproductive, then, to speak of the visual without frequent mention of the lyrics behind the music and performance; thus, I will do so when applicable. Simultaneously, both the visual characteristics and the sung or rapped word communicate with the various musical rhythms and beats and must also be taken into consideration when analyzing the visual styles of the musical. There is no graffiti in the set, furthermore; however, I consider the setup of the stage, as well as the costumes, as the visually artistic aspect. Graffiti can, however, also refer to the act of writing, and thus we can consider the overall writing process of the rap lyrics that we hear and even the notion that Hamilton was famous for his writing, as contributors to the graffiti hip hop element in the performance.

[34] Burr's repetitious musical riff that the musical employs in four different moments throughout the musical to narrate Hamilton's background, changes in the plot, and the sociopolitical atmosphere of the moment reminds us of this predicament to the very end. In the opening song, "Alexander Hamilton," Burr begins with the line "How does a bastard, orphan, son/of a whore and a/Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten/Spot in the Caribbean by providence, impover-/ished, in squalor,/Grow up to be a hero and a scholar?" (McCarter 16). Of course, since the politician-narrator Burr is the character who eventually comes to loathe and kill Hamilton in the final duel scene, the lyrical variations in each version of the song reflect his ever-growing animosity towards Hamilton. We detect this, for example, in the language shift of "What'd I miss" of Act II, when Burr raps: "How does the bastard orphan,/ Immigrant decorated war vet/ Unite the colonies through more debt?/ Fight the other Founding Fathers 'til he has/to forfeit? Have it all, lose it all,/You ready for more yet?" (McCarter 152). For Burr, Hamilton is not "a bastard," as he was in the beginning, rather, he is now "*the* bastard." In effect, Burr is venting to the audience as he ironically implores us if we are "ready for more yet." Later, in "Your Obedient Servant," this change in feelings towards Hamilton is more evident, as he grumbles: "How does Hamilton,/An arrogant,/Immigrant, orphan/whoreson/Somehow endorse/Thomas Jefferson, his enemy/A man he's despised since the beginning,/Just to keep me from winning?" (McCarter 266). Burr's resentment is full-grown.

1970s-New York City, according to hip hop scholar Tricia Rose (2). Jorge Duany notes, in addition, the early influence and contributions of Puerto Ricans to the formation of the "hip hop zone," affirming that hip hop was and still is "a critical site" for New York Puerto Ricans to "negotiate the boundaries of Puerto Ricanness, Latinoness, and blackness through rhymes that privilege the English language and primarily African American linguistic practices" (Duany 162). Black and Latino hip hoppers, then, were united by their collective feelings of being forced into social outsider status. Hip hop, in turn, became an artistic outlet, a coping mechanism, and a way to release the frustrations of being mistreated and misrepresented in a land that treated them as foreigners. As Rose aptly comments, hip hop became a way for "people with roots in other postcolonial contexts" who "were facing social isolation, economic fragility, truncated communication media, and shrinking social service organizations" to "reshape their cultural identities and expressions in a hostile, technologically sophisticated, multiethnic, urban terrain" (Rose 33-34).

To contextualize "Yorktown," at this point in the musical, Hamilton is already in North America and has established the relationships that are most significant to the plot. By way of example, he has met his closest friends, Hercules Mulligan, a tailor who is also spy for the American army, John Laurens, a fellow soldier, and Lafayette, a Frenchman who sends for French troops to help in the fight against the Tories. Furthermore, Hamilton knows the story's antihero lawyer and politician, Aaron Burr, who eventually becomes his foe. Hamilton has, in addition, become George Washington's "right hand man," as the musical describes him in "Right Hand Man" and

"Guns and Ships"— an unspoken but obvious point of jealousy for Burr and political enemies, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Washington's role as a father figure and mentor to Hamilton is fully developed by this time in the show, and Hamilton has already studied at King's College, become a lawyer, and married his now pregnant wife, Eliza Hamilton. In the midst of the whirlwind of the musical's portrayal of Hamilton's early life, there are also frequent comical interludes by King George, who sings messages to the rebellious Americans as the Tory presence closes in on the characters. We have arrived, thus, at the final battle for independence, which begins with Lafayette and Hamilton celebrating (and high-fiving to) the fact that Hamilton is now "in command where you belong...Immigrants:/We get the job done[35]" (McCarter 121). Indeed, Hamilton has finally achieved one of his greatest aspirations of becoming a general instead of simply Washington's scribe and secretary, and he must now lead his troop of soldiers to victory against the king's last attempt at suppressing his colonies' wayward subjects.

The military-like moves of the backup dancers' hip hop dance style during this performance put visual force to the idea of revolution and the show's overarching, pump-up catchphrase of perseverance, "I am not throwin' away my shot." When Hamilton

[35] "We get the job done" is sung in unison by both Hamilton and Lafayette, highlighting the fact that two of the men who played key roles in the U.S.'s independence efforts and victory, among a plethora of others, were born in foreign lands. In the present-day wake of U.S. migration and immigration debates surrounding Temporary Protection Status, the Dreamer's Act, and a visa lottery versus strictly merit-based immigration laws, it encapsulates a new meaning that the audience of today recognizes— that many of those currently affected by the tensions are some of the most productive scholars, inventors, scientists, and humanitarians of our society.

begins rapping the line, the backup ensemble, composed of fifteen dancers, both male and female, begins to scissor-walk or lunge forward, out of the shadows of side stage into a semi-circle formation, stepping toward Hamilton with each repetition of the phrase. Clothed in blue and red army uniforms, these dancing soldiers double as backup singers, harmonizing with Hamilton's rapping. Resembling a military role call or drill practice, their movements are synchronized, disciplined, and stylish throughout, akin to the choreographed dances of early 2000s hip hop music videos, like the sharp and aggressive moves of Missy Elliot's backup dancers in "Work It" (2002), "Gossip Folks" (2003), and "Lose control" (2005). In a similar style, as they surround Hamilton, the dancers duck down, triggered in a wave movement one by one, snap back up, push forward, and spin simultaneously as their coattails whirl around them, movements that can artistically simulate the foreign migrant's task of having to dodge cultural roadblocks like intolerance, misunderstanding, and marginalization. The moves, then, become a part of Hamilton's battle cry. Subsequently, Washington steps in, shakes Hamilton's hand, and they salute each other. The backup dancers, meanwhile, remain in semi-circle formation, now at attention, mimicking a marching salute as they step and tap in place.

The marching, saluting, and disciplined timing of movements, in turn, remind us of the newcomer's desire to fit in to the local formation and do things according to the new society in order to be successful. In their study on the psychological effects of immigration, Cynthia García Coll and Katherine Magnuson, pinpoint some of the common stressors related to the immigrant's journey through acculturation, which they see as a lifelong, continual process of cultural adaptation. Among these, to paraphrase, is

the loss of the homeland and objects and loved ones within it, the need to adopt new patterns of interaction and coping that can conflict with the lifestyle in the homeland, and finally, the more contemporaneous fear of being deported (111). At the same time, Coll and Magnuson see the process of learning to navigate between the cultures of the homeland and those of the new setting as a potentially growth-enhancing experience that can "increase an individual's repertoire of coping skills, facilitate the acquisition of new or different skills, and broaden opportunities as well as worldviews" (115). Marching in unison in an organized dance formation, then, can represent these attempts at social belonging and the need to find order within the new society for acceptance and emotional stability. The dancers' movements, in this way, represent the collective push and pull of cultural negotiation that the immigrant, both historically and presently, has to face in order to be accepted by local society while trying to maintain a personal sense of cultural identity.

More than simply representing the struggles that come with immigration, the dancers generate a universally-encompassing message of cultural identity negotiation. We can see this as Washington leaves center stage, and the ensemble gathers behind Hamilton in a closely united formation. With the group still backing Hamilton in an eight-ball-rack formation, their movements slow down to match the pace and volume of quiet inner thought. The rhythm, too, becomes softer, and Hamilton's lyrics become less of a collective encouragement message and become instead, a serious, yet upbeat, expression of his internal conflicts:

> I imagine death so much it feels/more like a memory./This is where it gets me:/on my feet,/The enemy ahead of me./If this is the end of me, at least I have a friend/with me./Weapon in my hand, a command, and my men with me./Then I remember my Eliza's expecting me.../Not only that, my Eliza's expecting. (McCarter 121)

Indeed, the underlying roots of Hamilton's worries, the fear of the unknown and the need for collective support and understanding, are universal and thus belong to many of those observing the show. Therefore, as Hamilton and the dancers stare fixedly out into the crowd during this expression of his inner-monologue, it results in a subconsciously interactive experience for the audience in which they now see themselves in the characters on stage and can hear their own worries in Hamilton's rapped speech. The mirror-like effect, in turn, humanizes and familiarizes Hamilton's predicament of being an illegitimate immigrant in a way that forces the audience into empathy. In this way, the dancers' choreography juxtaposed with Hamilton's words adapt to become the message of any person that has had to prove themselves to reach personal success and acceptance within society. As a result, the show's dancers contribute to its inclusive messages about identity in a way that cannot be represented via the biography's task of informing the reader. Sarie Mairs Slee identifies three types of messages regarding identity that the backup dance ensemble of a performance can communicate (155). To summarize, one of the possible messages is "I am amazing," in which the dancers' movements emphasize the ideal persona of the main star and enforce that identity as central (155). Next, Slee denotes the second message as "I am just like you," in which the dancers express a

collective identity and shared hierarchy between the main stars and the dancers, and the third as "You are as amazing as I am," an expression that represents the importance of the collective identity of the dancers and the stars but accentuates and celebrates diversity in movement (155). As we can see from the unified movements and collaborations as well as the involvement of the audience through gaze in "Yorktown," "You are as amazing as I am," is the primary attitude embodied by the dancers.

The aggression in the following transition, lyrically, musically, and in the dance style, contribute further to the performance's identity discourses surrounding the conundrum of trying to overcome outsider status. Initiating the scene, Hamilton snaps back into to the desperation of reality with a greater impulse to act as he declares, "We gotta go, gotta get the job done,/Gotta start a new nation, gotta meet my son!" (McCarter 121). The dancers subsequently break from their place behind Hamilton and, still facing the audience, form a straight line across the stage on either side of him. The pace and strength of the music picks up, incorporating the fast-strumming and palm-muting style of a heavy-metal electric guitar. This booming harmony, with its heavy-metal electric guitars set to orchestral strings seems to draw influence from songs like Metallica's "No Leaf Clover," a jarring contrast with the hip-hop lyrics and flow of the movements. Nevertheless, this juxtaposition of cultural art forms, heavy metal and hip hop, appropriately embodies the spirit of a yearning for liberation, a violent revolutionary battle, mass casualties on both sides, and finally, victory for the underdog army. After all, both hip hop and heavy metal go against traditional musical styles that are typically considered as more cultured by an educated audience. By the same token, Hercules

Mulligan's subsequent confrontational and confident rap message brings us back to the hip-hop feel of the performance. He haughtily presents himself:

> A tailor spyin' on the British/government!/I take their measurements, information/and then I smuggle it!...See, that's what happens when you up/against the ruffians./We in the shit now, somebody's gotta shovel it! /Hercules Mulligan, I need no introduction,/When you knock me down I get the/fuck back up again! (McCarter 122)

Mulligan's choice of words— spyin', smuggle, ruffians— as well as his disregard for syntactic formalities that one would typically find in traditional theatrical productions– "we in the shit," "gotta shovel it," "get the fuck back up"— instills thoughts of defiance and matches the rebellious spirit of revolution and the musical styles.

Likewise, the dancers' movements become more violent as they showcase threatening hand gestures like air-punches and cocking and shooting invisible rifles. Resembling a street fight, even their facial expressions become confrontational as they lunge toward the audience with scowling faces. Meanwhile, dancers on the balcony behind the set, including Washington, thrust swords into the air with the beat of the music. Kimberly Monteyne identifies this battle-like dance style as "uprock," the combative aspect of hip hop's breakdance culture that includes confrontational gestures and martial-arts-style dance moves, which often have mocking or insulting effects (Monteyne 174). This aggressive expression, to be sure, symbolizes the determination and desperation that those oppressed to the point of revolutionary response feel, not only in Hamilton's and the rebels' situation historically, but for people fighting their own

personal battles in present-day U.S. society. Whether the enemy is the opposing army, the government and its bureaucratic systems, the privileged ones of elite society, a loathed member from the other street gang, or another common enemy of those in the disadvantageous zones of the streets, the uprock style allows them to legally mock their enemies and symbolically serve justice on their own terms.

The acrobatic nature of the other breakdance styles during this number can reflect a collective effort to rebel against colonial structures that still exist in our society. For example, the dancers move from uprock into typical breakdance styles, in which they place both hands on the floor and move one leg in a circular motion under their bodies without letting their hands interrupt the motion by maneuvering their support. These moves require flexibility, stability, and strength, in order for the dancer to execute them without injury. Monteyne talks about the historical significance of breakdance within hip hop culture. It was rebellious, in part, due to the notion that performing such moves was thought to be extremely dangerous and was "pathologized" by doctors due to the "disproportionate amount of concern about its dangers," and was thus, discouraged by the educated figures of society (165). In this historical context of breakdancing as dangerous rather than an impressive, respected form of self-expression, we can look at the inclusion of acrobatic breakdance moves in "Yorktown" as risky and rebellious. Only those brave enough to attempt the movements can potentially be successful at them, symbolizing the American army's great risk of attempting to fight a world superpower. Still, there is no guarantee of success for those who try. Meanwhile, breakdance also represents the marginalized figure's hopes of being recognized for his or her contributions to society

rather than for cultural difference. In other words, the awe inspired by the successful completion of the difficult and often dangerous breakdance moves takes the focus off of the dancer's identity and highlights instead the impressive movement of the dancer. The break dancer is admired for his or her skill, and not for surface qualities, like race, gender, sexuality, or beauty. In this way, I agree with Monteyne who suggests that breakdancing can become "a threshold activity where bodies can transgress boundaries of race and gender" (208).

Since the erasing of borders is a common theme in hip hop (Cuir 61), it is not surprising that *Hamilton* embraces other cultural art forms outside of hip hop culture. Just as its inclusivity in racial and musical representation contributed to its mass appeal and rise to fame, moreover, the dance styles in *Hamilton* are equally diverse and contribute to the show's identity discourses. For example, the choreography draws from a variety of mainstream dance traditions such as jazz, ballet, tap, and even interpretive dance forms. We see this especially in the climactic song of Act II, "The World Was Wide Enough." To contextualize the plot, many of Hamilton's personal victories and struggles have led up to this moment, including the Reynolds affair in which Maria Reynolds seduces the lonely and overworked Hamilton, while her husband blackmails him into paying for his adulterous act. To make matters worse, when Hamilton fears that his political enemies, Madison and Jefferson, may reveal his secret shame, Hamilton decides to write out every detail of the affair in an effort to prove that he had not purchased Maria's services with government funds. In effect, Hamilton's darkest secrets have been revealed and judgment has been passed by those who have read the Reynolds Papers and heard the rumors.

Furthermore, Hamilton's son, Philip, has died in a duel with his schoolmate, George, who "disparaged [Hamilton's] honor in front of a crowd" (McCarter 245). When Philip had approached his father for advice, moreover, Hamilton encouraged him to attend the duel but to aim his gun into the sky as a sign of truce. Nonetheless, this gesture proved to be a nonstarter during the duel, and George shot to kill. Out of their shared grief for the loss of Philip, Eliza and Hamilton eventually reconcile their differences from the Reynolds affair. Finally, as far as political matters, Hamilton refuses to endorse Burr for the presidency and has chosen instead to endorse his former enemy, Jefferson, which brings us to the final duel between Burr and Hamilton played out in "The World Was Wide Enough."

In this performance, the visual mood maintains its hip-hop spirit, but the interpretive dancers become the action and the stage decor. For starters, the stage recalls the street-wise setting of the 1996 music video for Bone Thugs N Harmony's "Crossroads" in that, like the silent and somber undertaker from the video that comes to steal human lives unexpectedly, Burr and Hamilton are dressed in all black trench-coat-like cloaks, as if prepared to take a life. The backdrop is darkness and an empty stage. They stand facing one another on opposite sides of a revolving, illuminated circle on the floor of the stage with their guns drawn. After Burr shoots his gun at Hamilton, we hear a gunshot and the sound of something moving at a high velocity –a bullet, no doubt. Suddenly, a single dancer jumps out from side stage in a new, smaller circle of light in front of Burr's gun, interrupting the path of the bullet. She has not come to block Burr's shot from hitting Hamilton, rather, she becomes the visual representation of the bullet

itself through modern interpretive dance style. Although this term has been redefined throughout history by dance scholars and choreographers, modern dance is generally understood as being a theatrical interpretive dance style that began in the U.S. in the early 20th century as a protest against traditional ballet and has maintained a major presence in theater. According to *Britannica Academic*, modern dance "often incorporates balletic movement; and though it may also refer to any number of additional dance elements (those of folk dancing or ethnic, religious, or social dancing, for example), it may also examine one simple aspect of movement" (np). It can serve as a way of interpretive storytelling and is replete with provocative symbolism. Once the audience becomes comfortable with a symbol, the dancer often reiterates and then distorts it, according to Selma Jeanne Cohen: "the modern dance choreographer is always concerned with the unacceptable symbol, the one that startles us into awareness. The pressure may be subtle or it may be obvious, but it is always there" (15). She defines modern dance and its culture abstractly as

> a point of view, an attitude toward the function of art in the contemporary world. As that world changes, the modern dance will change, for the symbols will again — as they become acceptable — lose their power to evoke the hidden realities. They will again have to be recharged, revitalized; even demolished and re-created anew in order to serve their function. Unless this happens, the modern dance is not modern — it is dead. The modern dance is an art of iconoclasts. (Cohen 16)

Inhabiting "a space between the new the not-yet-known," according to Claudia Gitelman, the modern dancer is "courageous," "self-fashioning," and represents "the individuality that is the domain of modernism and its sequel, postmodernism" (1).[36]

The dancer in "The World" embodies this ideology and emphasizes her own specific symbolic aspect of movement, which here is the frozen pose, or the bullet represented by the dancer's fingers. With her fingers held in a pinched position and highlighted by a brighter stage light in front of the barrel of Burr's gun, this bullet is apparently frozen in midair. In this scene, furthermore, "there is no beat, no melody," as Hamilton eventually notes in his subsequent monologue (McCarter 273), and thus, contrasting with the rest of the music and rhythm-filled scenes in *Hamilton*, adds to the notion of time halted.

The anonymous dancer who plays the silent role of the bullet— a seemingly minor character— is fundamental for the flow of events in that she controls time and becomes a symbol for its trajectory. In fact, the focus on her stop and go movements allows for Hamilton's final chance to humanize himself and regain the respect of the audience in the wake of his affair and his son's failed duel against George. He does this through the monologue that takes place after the bullet dancer appears and pauses his destiny. To illustrate the scene, during this moment, the circular floor lighting has turned purple and, through its shadows fracturing the colored space, now resembles an iris.

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[36] Gitelman explains her use of "Modernism" in this context. It "refers broadly to that movement within the arts that took hold in the late nineteenth century. Abstraction replaced representation and individualism replaced obeisance to a united worldview, whether religious or secular...not as an end in itself but as a means of directing the viewer's eye to where it should be: the formal aspects of a work" (1).

Here, the iris-like image matches the mood and action, as it can abstractly represent the inner eye of self-reflection. Hamilton, in effect, begins with his own: "I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory." As he utters the echoed phrase, "What if this bullet is my legacy?," the sound of the bullet nearing returns briefly, interpreted visually again by the dancer's hand moving a few feet farther across the diameter of the circle that separates Burr and Hamilton. When it pauses for the second time, the light of the iris-like shape changes to blue. Various pairs of dancers then come out of the shadows whirling in circles with their hands clasped, putting a visual representation to Hamilton's spinning thoughts. During this time, he reflects on his ability to "rise up" and "leave [his fingerprints]" despite the notion that he is, in his own words, an "orphan immigrant" and America is still a "great unfinished symphony" (McCarter 273). His preoccupation with death together with the "Crossroads"-style wardrobe recalls the dark contemplations that were commonplace in late 90s and early 2000s hip hop music lyrics. In his 2005 song, "I'm supposed to die tonight," New York City native rapper 50 Cent, for example, muses "It's elementary, life is but a dream/You know row, row ya' boat, your blood forms a stream...Sometimes I sit and look at life from a different angle/Don't know if I'm God's child or I'm Satan's angel." Not unlike Hamilton and Burr at this point in the musical, 50 Cent is also headed to a different version of the traditional duel set in modern-day New York City because of feelings of being disrespected by others in his community. Furthermore, while 50 contemplates his legacy— whether he will be remembered as God's child or Satan's angel, Hamilton, ponders his: "If I throw away my shot, is this how you'll remember me?... Legacy, what is a legacy? It's planting seeds in a garden you

never get to see." The effects of these lyrics in both hip hop music and the musical are humanizing, and force the listener to see beyond the rumors, stereotypes, and appearances. For the audience, in turn, Hamilton's words briefly overshadow his mistakes and remind us that Hamilton has had to overcome many personal hurdles. Even with no music, the rest of the ensemble represents these social and psychological tensions through their push and pull movements in the background as they push forward toward Hamilton in a lunge and leap in the air, clapping their hands in unison as he says "rise up." In other words, they visually represent his life's work of "rising up" from illegitimacy, poverty, and being an outsider. Next, his lyrics become faster and he utters the line, "running out of time and my time's up." Matching both the pace of his spoken thoughts and notion of urgency to reach one's goals, the ensemble comes together quickly and, while facing forward, march like soldiers, and then unite in a pile, embracing.

The role of the bullet dancer, however, is not finished. While her lack of movement permits Hamilton time to explain himself through his monologue, her return to movement reminds us that the passage of time and fate cannot be avoided. We see this especially as she remains separated from the other interpretive dancers who are constantly moving. To illustrate this, when Hamilton begins seeing visions of lost loved ones— Washington, Philip, Laurens, his mother— the dancer stands in the middle of the huddled ensemble. Highlighted by a white circle of light, the ensemble lifts the bullet dancer in the air and, in modern dance style, flips her on one side in a balletic pose with legs elongated and toes pointed. Simultaneously, she stretches her arms out in a "V"

formation, with her still pinched fingers lifted high away from the other dancers, who seem to be reaching for that hand. Despite the notion that the ensemble is disturbing her balance and seemingly attempting to interrupt the bullet's trajectory, she maintains her pinched fingers at a distance, away from herself and the other dancers. Without doubt, this bullet cannot be stopped, just as Hamilton's fate cannot be stopped. After Hamilton sees Eliza step into the now fuchsia-colored circle and says, "my love take your time. I'll see you on the other side," the dancers begin falling backward to the ground. At the same time, the dancer who represents the bullet finishes her trajectory, the stage light turns the circular iris formation red, and the lights go out, confirming Hamilton's death. He has run out of time, but not without evoking tears from the audience. It is because of the dancer's stop-and-go movements that the audience has time to feel sorry for Hamilton, thus resulting in the emotional impact of the scene.

The World *Is* Wide Enough

In many ways, the adaptation of original texts is like hip hop culture's concept of the remix. The adaptation, in effect, is a remix of its original. Similar to the way artists who remix music borrow desired sounds from an original piece and fuse it with other original sounds to create a preferred version, the author of the adaptation reinterprets an original story to fit his or her tastes as well as the needs of the reader or viewer. Whereas we might consider the hip hop remix as a form of rebellion and resistance to traditional performance structures, we can do the same for certain adapted works. Adapting, like remixing, in this way, can be seen as a form of cultural negotiation, adaptation, and

mutation. As music evolves through remixes, so do the dances performed by its consumers, which is reflected in the dancers' movements in "Yorktown" and "The World." Each reinterpretation of a dance is a reflection of the historical context surrounding its origins. Together the combination of the un-European, nontraditional dance styles, music, and lyrics contribute to a new Caribbean dialogue, a rhythmic one that negotiates what aspects to resist and change, and adapts its identity for survival, approval, and acceptance by the audience. Antonio Benítez-Rojo speaks of centuries-old "rhythms common to the entire Caribbean, rhythms that follow a kind of polyrhythmic and polymetric percussion very different from European percussive forms, and which are impossible to write down using conventional notation" (76). For Benítez-Rojo, they give "pan-Caribbean cultures a way of being, a style that is repeated through time and space in all its differences and variants" (80). Perhaps these are the very rhythms that we see driving the footwork and flow of the dancers in *Hamilton*, a musical that reflects in many ways a continuation of these metaphorical Caribbean beats that can now be heard and seen from New York.

CONCLUSION

We are nearing the end of our journey through some of the Caribbean's most revealing adaptations. Each chapter has dealt with different social percepts as portrayed by texts from different Caribbean regions— racial identity in *Cecilia*, race and gender in *Del amor y otros demonios*, exploitation and financial dependence in *Vers le sud*, the political actor's craft in *Trópico*, and the immigrant outsider's plight of fitting in. Yet, aside from the fact that these adaptations share the same stage—the Caribbean— and underline social concerns that often connect and intertwine from one adapted work to the next, together they reveal systems of cultural adaptation and mutation. As the characters of both the original and adapted texts have shown through their personalities and lifestyles, they adapt to the colonial order that surrounds them; that is, in order to survive, they give in to the social structures of the colonizer by propagating many of their rules of race, gender, and hierarchy, by not refusing to follow some of these rules. At the same time, the visual reworkings of the original written texts have revealed various mutations, or instances of resisting hegemonic thought brought forth by colonialism, instead of examples of adapting to cope with these systems. Cecilia adapted to oppressive racial constructs by passing for white in both novel and film, but she damaged this colonial order when she ended her life. Rather than staying alive and bringing a colored child into the cycle of white superiority as she does in the novel, her suicide became a mutation within the traditionally accepted social construct. In effect, as she removed herself and her offspring from the system of people willing to adapt to this social norm who also

contribute to keeping it in place, the normalized construct became damaged and as such, a little less normalized. Meanwhile, Sierva María is herself a mutation in the system of masculine dominance, as she escapes it and adapts instead to a more accepting and liberated way of life, the African culture of her family's slaves. While this resistance is crushed by her murder in both the original and the adaptation, the adaptation's focus on the female gaze upon Sierva María suggested that her efforts were not entirely forgotten, as the child's peculiarity has inspired the women who have beheld her. The emphasis on the women and their reactions to Sierva María is the mutation of the original story. By the same token, in both versions of *Vers le sud*, the black vendors and participants of the Caribbean tourism industry adapt to their economic hardships and gaps within social classes by selling their bodies to the rich white tourists. Suggesting an impending mutation in this system, however, is the film's focus on the prostitutes' cross-generational empathy and sense of responsibility. In the original *In the Time of the Butterflies* and its Spanish-language film version, *Trópico*, furthermore, Trujillo has adapted to hegemonic colonial hierarchies by being a good actor— by fashioning a white-elite sociopolitical costume to fit the interests of these hierarchies. Fernández's emphasized and often comical portrayal of *El jefe*'s flaws is a mutation of the original that exposes Trujillo's superficial front and denounces societies' tendency to form their governments according to Western social orders.

This journey through the adaptations of the Caribbean, however, is not and will not end any time soon, as the patterns of cultural adaptation and imitation that we can see in the adapted Caribbean narrative are on the move. We saw how this is taking place in

New York City with the retellings of Alexander Hamilton's story, and we are beginning to see how the cultural tendency of "faking it to make it" belongs as much to societies in the U.S. as it does to those within the Caribbean. Looking at adaptations and their originals within a Caribbean context has enabled us to gain a better understanding of the cultural identity discourses that once occupied creative Caribbean thought and those that are still maintaining presence, growing, or dying out within its societies, and its diasporic societies. By focusing on different works of various Caribbean regions, we have not attempted to find elements of sameness among Caribbean populations. We have not strived for a way to generalize about Caribbean identities. Much more importantly, we have highlighted the significance of difference, and the variety of distinct cultural commentaries that arise from different regions of the Caribbean. In effect, there is much more to be said for the case of adaptations, and many more of its powers to be discovered. I would suggest Adaptations Studies as a teaching and learning tool for any student, teacher, or scholar who is interested in any branch of study related to Cultural Studies, Film Studies, or Literature Studies. It is a way to connect regions that have many cultural differences but are related through some of the same processes of cultural adaptation. Moreover, through this approach, the study of adapted works becomes much more significant than simple conclusions drawn about which version was better or more entertaining. From the view of my study of adaptations, the original never loses its relevance, and even gains more cultural force through its adapted version's creation. In this way, adapted versions and original versions are in constant dialogue with one another, not only in the way one version of the plot compliments or disrupts the other, but

in the way of communication methods, such as writing to stage or screen. There are ways that authors and artists can express themselves in some modes of communication that they cannot in others. There are significant reasons behind artistic choices on how to convey stories. With each adaptation of a work of cultural production, something important is being said about societies around the world and the way they choose to express themselves. As this voyage through Caribbean adaptation adjourns, another is just beginning.

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