Failed Manhood, Failed History: Masculinity and Agency in Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* and Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*

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Written nearly one hundred years apart, *Benito Cereno* (1855) and *The Kingdom of This World* (1943) are two seminal works in the indictment of slavery and its racist ideological apparatus. They tell of colonial decadence, slave uprisings, the brutality of freed slaves, and ultimately mourn failed Afrocentric models unable to take hold as national models. In both narratives, the violence of the uprisings reads ambiguously and, while not removing all responsibility from the actors themselves, they both ultimately argue that the system of slavery is the cause for the horrors the insurrections produced. In Melville's tale, the slaves take over a Spanish slave ship, the San Dominick, a name used interchangeably for the island of Hispaniola and the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In Carpentier's novel, the text follows the uprising of Haitian slaves in the first revolution in the western hemisphere after the U.S. gained independence.

The most compelling reason to revisit both texts together is the scope and transnational nature of the slave trade in the Americas. We should "reexamine its root causes and present day effects," recognize that slavery was hemispheric and that its "fullest literary representation as well as its fullest political critique required a view that embraced several cultures, several nations, much as Du Bois was later to recognize that the attack on American racial injustice and the reconstruction of African American cultural history had to be pursued in a diasporic Pan-African framework" (Sundquist 136). Centered on the enslavement and trafficking of Africans, both texts can, and should be read in transnational terms.

But an examination of the dynamics of slavery in these texts is not as transparent as one might think. Their denunciation is not at all Manichean: we do not have the luxury of seeing good and evil distinctly separated, although that was a common reading for *Benito Cereno* up until the 1950's (the rebellious slaves embodied evil and the goodness of the American captain was their diametrical opposite).[1]

Herman Melville and Alejo Carpentier's texts lack the one dimensional language of simplistic propaganda; they are narratives where monological explanations are not always possible and the reader must construct complex interpretations. I will argue that beneath the dialogism of the texts lie failed models of masculinity, and male characters' "positive" and "negative" types of maleness and agency; that is, they ascribe admirable qualities to certain male characters and undesirable traits to others, all of which can be associated with the male characters' possibilities for historical change.

In order to show the role masculinity and ambiguity play I will divide my analysis into three parts: the weak masculine characters and the resulting historical

implications; the use of shaman and trickster masculine archetypes; and the dialogic nature of the texts.

In *Benito Cereno*, Melville sets the story off the coast of Chile and changes the date of events to 1799. Captain Amasa Delano, an American, goes to a ship to offer his assistance and is met by a skeletal Spanish captain (Benito Cereno), his attentive black servant (Babo), and a motley crew of mostly slaves. (Benito Cereno tells Delano that the San Dominick tried to round Cape Horn and hit terrible weather, disease broke out on board, and all but a few of the Spaniards and many of the Africans were killed). Delano notices that many times during the course of the day Cereno is reduced to trembling and speechless gagging. When Delano's questions become especially direct, Babo leads Cereno away into the hold in order to shave him; he explains that they are on a *strict schedule*. For a long time during his visit, Delano experiences an interpretative dilemma: what is happening on the ship? Is Cereno simply a lackadaisical and inefficient leader, or is something sinister afoot? This ongoing tension precedes and imperils the moment of enlightenment, which comes after Delano takes his leave and attempts to return to his own ship. At that moment, Benito Cereno jumps into the boat with Delano, followed by Babo, who attempts to stab the Spanish captain. Delano quickly (and finally) understands what has been happening on the San Dominick; he realizes that the African slaves have revolted and control the ship. As they depart, a shroud falls from the bowsprit of the San Dominick; it has a human skeleton tied to it. Underneath are the scrawled words: *Follow your leader*.

Alejo Carpentier was clearly impressed and influenced by Melville's tale. Melville's story has the same esoteric opaqueness of much of Carpentier's work, but its blunt dealings with slavery, violence and history make it especially appealing to Carpentier, who writes in 1955:

> On one of his trips, he came across a dismantled ship which was apparently left to try its own fate in the Pacific. Upon being visited by the captain of another ship, the ship's crew examined the visitors with a strange reserve. He soon learned that the black slaves aboard the ship had rioted and were forcing the captain and his officials to return them to their native Africa. A skeleton was hung from the ship's bow: the ghastly remains of a Peruvian gentleman assassinated during the mutiny. Melville was therefore given all the necessary ingredients with which to write *Benito Cereno*, a tale named after the captain of that tragic vessel and one of his most hallucinatory and mystic works. (Stavans 57)

Carpentier's own novel is published after a visit to Haiti in 1943. He sets his story there during the period of the French Revolution, and we can see how beneath a sheen of economic prosperity and social tranquility lies the desire to revolt and

overthrow the French masters. Leading the uprising is Macandal, a one armed slave who escapes and poisons livestock and men. While he is captured and burned publicly, his spirit lives on and inspires the other slaves to rise up when the French Revolution takes place. A former cook, Henri Cristophe takes power and creates his own kingdom, modeled grotesquely after his own masters' aesthetics. The story is told through the eyes of another slave, Ti Noël, who is forced into labor after the Revolution and wanders aimlessly throughout most of the action. This novel, like *Benito Cereno*, has a layered texture of meaning that is reflected in the action of the story; it is up to the reader to disentangle meaning from the chaotic events and unreliable points of view. What they also share is a utilization of a gendered system that assigns *positive* male qualities to particular characters and *negative* female ones to others. In that respect, they operate much in the same way that our society does today.

Our social organization is not dramatically different from Melville's in 1855 or Carpentier's in 1943 in terms of patriarchy; we are still essentially societies that are *male-identified* in that "core cultural ideas about what is considered good, desirable, preferable, or normal are associated with how we think about men and masculinity" (Rothenberg 130). And that male identification manifests itself as ("the cultural description of masculinity and the ideal man in terms that closely resemble the core values of society as a whole. These include qualities such as control, strength, efficiency, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, forcefulness, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and control over any emotion that interferes with other core values (such as vulnerability)") (Rothenberg 131).

In a bipolar fashion, we still operate in a system of opposites, where a contrast between the ideal male individual and the resulting core cultural qualities produce a non-male subject that is equated with ("inefficiency, cooperation, mutuality, equality, sharing, compassion, caring, vulnerability, a readiness to negotiate and compromise, emotional expressiveness, and intuitive and other nonlinear ways of thinking are all devalued *and* culturally associated with femininity and femaleness") (Rothenberg 131). This devaluing of the feminine, especially when attached to a *male* character in these two texts, is a common rhetorical strategy used to devalue them individually, and by extension, to undermine the social environment in which they operate.

While a surface reading of *Benito Cereno* would lead us to believe that strength resides in the American captain Amasa Delano and weakness in the Spanish captain Benito Cereno, a closer reading reveals that in fact the object of Melville's criticism is the American captain. Melville presents a clear contrast between the physical strength of Delano, a manifestation of his country's growing economic and political might, and his moral weakness. Delano has the *muscle* but not the *inner strength* of Cereno and Babo. While the Spanish captain is seen through Delano's eyes as a man devoid of authority and strength, Melville is

challenging the sense of superiority held by his countrymen through the character of Delano (Zagarell 127).

The moral weakness in Delano represents a country that is a perpetuator of commercialism, colonialism, and slavery; the contrast between his power and his morality reveal how Americans denied the consequences of these practices. Through this dual portrayal of Delano, authoritarian but spiritually hollow, Melville criticizes a variety of American cultural codes and assumptions to expose what Americans "didn't know, why they didn't know it, and the consequences of their ignorance" (Zagarell 128). Zagarell argues that Melville's "presentation of cultural discontinuities result from an unstable social order" because when "there is inequity, the social conventions in place in the society are converted by disempowered groups into dissent and insurrection" (Zagarell 128). Those cultural discontinuities and the resulting dissent and insurrection are portrayed *narratively* in the gendered binomes male/female and strong/weak.

Babo's *strong* mind is clearly separated from his *weak* physical strength; and in a reverse fashion, Benito Cereno's *weak* constitution is often underscored (the emphases are mine):

> As for the black (Babo) – whose *brain, not body*, had schemed and led the revolt, with the plot – his *slight frame*, inadequate to that which it held, had at once yielded to the *superior muscular* strength of his captor, in the boat. Seeing all was over, he uttered no sound, and could not be forced to. His aspect seemed to say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words . . . Don Benito did not visit him. Nor then, nor at any time after, *would he look at him*. Before the tribunal he refused. When pressed by the judges *he fainted*. On the testimony of the sailors alone rested the legal identity of Babo. (Melville 258)

Don Benito's inability to look Babo in the eye, Don Benito's refusal to testify against Babo, and Don Benito's fainting when pressed to do so shows that while he is a weak and unworthy leader in Delano's eyes, Don Benito has fully appreciated the moral validity of Babo's uprising and is unwilling to seek reprisal against him. What appears to be his effeminate lack of courage, (fainting when compelled to help the state punish the slave), can in fact be seen as a defiant show of moral fortitude. At the end of the story, when both Benito Cereno and Babo meet their end, they do as the ship's writing had admonished: they follow *their leader* (emphases are mine):

> Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his *voiceless* end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, *unabashed*, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza *looked towards*

> St. Bartholomew's church, in whose vault slept then, as now, the recovered bones of Aranda: and across the Rimac bridge *looked* towards the monastery, on Mount Agonia without; where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow *his leader.* (Melville 258)

Babo, silenced by the *superior muscular strength of his captor,* is corporally destroyed while his head remains defiant. He meets his oppressor's gaze unabashedly and looks towards the resting place of his former slave master. Cereno, in seclusion on Mount Agonia, suffers the weight of moral enlightenment. Babo's head, the violent remains of his attempt at freedom and a return to Africa, is strikingly similar to two famous episodes in Carpentier's novel.

The two scenes in *The Kingdom of this World* that speak to Babo's decapitated head are the opening sequence when Ti Noël, the slave protagonist, sees wax heads in a store window next to calf heads for sale, and the dramatic scene where Macandal, the leader of the slave revolt, is burned in public.

In the first scene, we can see how the lifelessness of the wigged wax heads metaphorically and metonymically represent the moral, spiritual and historical bankruptcy of the French colonial forces. Their *fixed stares* are *dead,* their voices as phony as an itinerant *talking head.* The juxtaposition with the calf heads next door is a foreshadowing of the violence that will eventually come to the French. And in a third parallel, the pictures in the next shop are *heads* of *state*, images of the kings of France and an African nation:

> While his master was being shaved, Ti Noël could gaze his fill at the four wax heads that adorned the counter by the door. The curls of the wigs, opening into a pool of ringlets on the red baize, framed expressionless faces. Those heads seemed as real – although their fixed stare was so dead – as the talking head an itinerant mountebank had brought to the Cap years before to promote the sale of an elixir for curing toothache and rheumatism. By an amusing coincidence, in the window of the tripe-shop next door there were calves' heads, skinned and each with a sprig of parsley across the tongue, which possessed the same waxy quality. . . . The morning was rampant with heads, for next to the tripe-shop the bookseller had hung on a wire with clothespins the latest prints received from Paris. At least four of them displayed the face of the King of France in a border of suns, swords and laurels. . . . But Ti Noël's attention was attracted at that moment by a copper engraving, the last of the series, which differed from the others in subject and treatment. It represented a kind of French admiral or ambassador received by a Negro framed by feather fans and seated upon a throne adorned with figures of

monkeys and lizards. (Carpentier 11-12)

The importance of this first imagery is that it will lay out the values that will follow throughout the novel. The powdered wigs, effeminate and out of place in the tropics, are connected to a corrupt and worthless masculinity. Its end will soon come when the African model, closer to nature and defined by strength, will challenge it.[2] But the characters in the Haitian revolution are presented with a choice: take the flamboyant and frivolous French model of manhood or the strong Afrocentric one of their ancestors. The tragedy, of course, is that the slaves opt for the defunct model and it spells their downfall.

In both *Benito Cereno* and *The Kingdom of This World*, we see moments of historical and economic transition where paternal figures are being replaced by new models, and in both a discredited economic and social paradigm is associated with a weak masculine figure. Delano represents the "corporate nation," a "father-figure of national proportions" to which the old masculine models forfeited their authority (Sommer 113). Both Delano and Henri Cristophe, the former slave who becomes the leader of a free Haiti, represent how "the Western imperial governments that gave birth and fostered notions of individual rights and freedoms proved intolerant of the Haitian Revolution" (Sommer 120).

Christophe's reign is a manifestation of this transition from colony to a new social paradigm led by a weak masculine figure, a new yet unworthy father figure. When Cristophe assumes the throne of Haiti, he takes that image of the African King Ti Noël sees in the print and contaminates it with the European: monkeys and lizards become mixed with feathery fans. The *abominable feast* that the wax heads, calf heads and prints foreshadow eventually give way to an actual grotesque banquet at Sans Souci, presided over by Cristophe (Gray Díaz 53). The degradation associated with the European ("radishes cut open in the shape of the *fleur de lis*") leads inexorably to the abject ("innards and kidneys"), a parallel rendering of the violent end that befalls both the French and the Haitians that assume power after the revolution.

Like many other American uprisings where former slaves rise to power, Cristophe surrenders an "organic view of society and the idea that men were responsible for each other, while they retained the worst of both traditions, most notably, their ever deepening arrogance and contempt for the laboring classes and darker races" (Handley 113). Similiarly, he "proves committed to the oedipal error in his desire to both control his destiny and ignore the historical difference created by the presence of blacks and a separate geography" (Handley 125).

In his attempt to inscribe himself as a European subject, Cristophe ends up a tragic parody of what he tries to imitate. The historical failure of his government, his cruelty and contempt are the result of his misguided project, is represented by the hellish scene Ti Noël witnesses near the palace:

> On the way down he could see coming up the flanks of the mountain, by every path and byway, thick columns of women, children, and old men, each with a brick to be left at the foot of the fortress, which rising like an ant-hill, thanks to those grains of fired clay borne to it unceasingly, from season to season, from year's end to year's end. Ti Noël soon learned that this had been going on for more than twelve years, and that the entire population of the North had been drafted for this incredible task. Every protest had been silenced in blood. Walking, walking, up and down, down and up, the Negro began to think that the chamber-music orchestras of Sans Souci, the splendor of the uniforms, and the statues of naked white women soaking up the sun on their scrolled pedestals among the sculptured boxwood hedging the flower beds were all the product of a slavery as abominable as that he had known on the plantation of M. Lenormand de Mezy (Carpentier 122).

Cristophe's downfall can be read in terms of masculine iconography. In a desperate attempt to salvage his empire, he takes a symbol of male strength, the bull, and corrupts it by sacrificing it in order to protect his hold on power. At his palace, many bulls were killed every day in order to protect Sans Souci. "Every day in the middle of the parade square several bulls had their throats cut so that their blood could be added to the mortar to make the fortress impregnable" (Carpentier 120). That corruption of an African religious male icon, the bull, leads to his demise. He fails because he chooses to imitate the French models and ignores the possibility of the African model: as a mere parody of the European masculine ideal he is an inadequate leader for his people.

Ti Noël and Babo are border subjects, living on the margins, connecting two separate realities and having the opportunity to choose between the corrupt and abject model that imitation represents, and the honorable and potentially redeeming African model. Ti Nöel drifts without direction, staying on the outside of events and worrying mostly about surviving. As victims of injustice, Babo and Ti Nöel have lost faith in their capacity to participate in society and feel no qualms about killing, lying, or pillaging. In terms of masculinity, they are both modeled on an *archetypical* model: the trickster. Although using archetypes to discuss constructions of gender is ripe with problems, one cannot deny that both of these authors intended certain characters to have transhistoric gendered qualities, which necessitate the use of the Jungian model.[3]

Both are concerned with survival first. They feel that their victimization gives them a right to fight for their lives at any cost. As Ulysses, they use deception in circumstances that test them constantly and feel no remorse for the violence they inflict on others:

> Odysseus resorted to tricky deceptions out of necessity, as his encounter with the Cyclops dramatizes . . . Like the little peasant, Odysseus is not a simple criminal, whose goal is to remain unknown and escape punishment. In general, after stealing, Tricksters do not flee and try to evade responsibility for their actions. They typically stay around to see the results of their ruses and suffer the consequences. (Chinen 66)

Babo and Ti Nöel's masculinity, a trickster archetype, is a pre-patriarchal model that is not historically viable in their current contexts. It turns out to be not much more than a nostalgic or utopian project with little or no possibility of redemption.

Babo's apparently sadistic violence has led to conflicting readings of this character. He seems intent on terrifying his captives rather than actually producing a good outcome for the slaves. In the court documents that appear at the end of Benito Cereno we see Babo's cruelty and intimidation: "(T)he negro Babo showed him a skeleton, which had been substituted for the ship's proper figure-head – the image of Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the new World; that the negro Babo asked him whose skeleton that was, and whether, from its whiteness, he should not think it a white's" (Melville 245). Babo's attempt at rewriting history, of finding political agency aboard the mutinied ship, turns out to be full of misguided ideals, but short on practical results. Against the advice of other slaves, in particular Atufal, he opts for the romantic flight of fancy that a return to Africa represents, ignoring the reality that such a trip in their condition was an impossibility, an irrational option.

Despite their unreliability, both Ti Noël and Babo function as go-betweens in archetypical fashion. As in many narratives, "where the patriarch and hero claim one viewpoint, one mate, one family, and one territory as their own, the Trickster crosses boundaries and constantly seeks out new connections" (Chinen 111). They also serve as message bearers, communicating between disparate groups, the masters and the slaves, the Europeans and the Africans, the outsiders and the insiders. "Tricksters carry messages and are even credited with inventing language itself. They also mediate between the archetypal and the mundane, the inner and outer worlds, and combine the sublime with the demonic in their world" (Chinen 115).

But at the conclusion *of The Kingdom of this World*, Ti Noël, like Babo, finds a kind of historical dead end. He recognizes that being a Trickster, having stayed on the margins of historical events, has meant failure for him and his people. He had the opportunity to use another masculine model, that of the revolt's leader Macandal, but did not use it:

> Ti Noël vaguely understood that his rejection by the geese was a punishment for his cowardice. Macandal had disguised himself as

> an animal for years to serve men, not to abjure the world of men. It was then that the old man, resuming his human form, had a supremely lucid moment. He lived, for the space of a heartbeat, the finest moments of his life; he glimpsed once more the heroes who had revealed to him the powers and the fullness of his remote African forebears, making him believe in the possible germinations the future held. He felt countless centuries old. (Carpentier 184)

In sharp contrast to the moral weakness of Delano and Cristophe, and the physical weakness of Cereno, Babo and Ti Nöel, both texts have strong and threatening male characters that are "true" to their African heritage. While Babo and Ti Nöel follow an archetypical model of trickster masculinity, Atufal and Macandal are drawn with a hunter-shaman model instead. As such, they place more emphasis on healing rather than heroics, and communication over conquest. Atufal is "a powerful negro, who being supposed to have been a chief in Africa, his owner set great store by him" (Melville 240) while Macandal, who represents shamanic values, is the bearer of a collective memory, serves as a guide to others, and presents an etymological alternative to European rationality. He organizes the resistance, keeps traditions alive and encourages others to sacrifice for the common good. He tells of the Great Kingdoms of Popo, Arada, Nagos and Fulas, of great migrations, secular wars and battles where animals had helped men (Carpentier 12). Macandal's sense of *alienation* and *rebellion*, and that of his fellow slaves in Haiti, is manifested in his metamorphosis:

> Yet the existential form which Macandal's animal metamorphoses take in *The Kingdom of This World* parallels that of the animal metamorphoses of Maldoror and expresses also a very modern and Western sense of alienation and rebellion which has its roots in Romanticism. In *El reino* animals provide the model for humans to conceptualize their alienation from convention and for rebellion, just as the female shark and so many other animals had done for Maldoror (Gray Díaz 54).

Macandal weaves an African epic, based not on the Eurpean written word but on oral tradition. In contravention of a positivist world view, his African history includes magical and mythical elements, where traditional lines between rationality and fantasy are blurred. He incorporates animal characters in his tales and he himself transforms into one. He is the *Mandigue*, at once a member of an African group and the devil himself. If European rule is rhetorically tied to the forces of "good," with Macandal the line between good and evil is also undefined. As a shaman, he is allowed to transgress established social norms.

But an Afrocentric masculinity, both in Atufal and Macandal, fails because they are not able to find a way to synthesize in an effective way the African and

European models. If we read both texts as *postslavery* narratives, regardless of the anachronistic implication of including Melville's, we can understand the reason they are both at once so ambivalent and defeatist. We can see the apocalyptic closures of both texts as serving a particular purpose: to expose "the very driving forces of the historical imagination and suggest the possibility of new histories beyond the memory of slavery" (Handley 10).

The failure of Afrocentric masculine models in both works are failures of the "generative impulse," where "modernization presented the challenging task of finding 'new and different ways of conceiving of human relationships' in order to 'substitute for those ties that connect members of the same family across generations'" (Said qtd. in Handley 113). Carpentier and Melville's hypermasculine African royal slaves are a simplification of "another past that is free of colonial chains – that of the African and the autochthonous – and that is itself antimodern and perhaps also ahistorical" (Handley 114).

Macandal, the African leader martyrized in *The Kingdom of This World*, is metonymically the "father" that is killed in the novel, standing in for a collective self that is discarded by both the Europeans and the black revolutionaries. Like in *El siglo de las luces,* the "father that Hugues has slain is not the father figure he replaced in Sofía's home, but rather what proves to be the real directive force of history to which Esteban and Sofía eventually ally themselves, that of the people" (Handley 125).

Why are these two texts, quite apparently denunciatory, somewhat evasive in their criticisms? I would argue that when we read them through a gendered lens those apparent contradictions or ambiguities seem clearer because the gendered apparatus that both use is traditional and easily interpreted. So we are still left to wonder why they invested such dialogism in their texts.

Melville's is so because of a combination of stylistic preference and political circumstances. And precisely because of those characteristics, Carpentier was impressed by *Benito Cereno* and eventually would draw inspiration for his own *The Kingdom of this World.* In Melville, the historical allusions and dramatic enactment are meant "to exploit the revolutionary spirit present in the American New World" (Sundquist 146). Melville depicts the "climate of the entire region and the epoch: Columbian discovery, democratic revolutions in the U.S., Haiti and Latin America, and the crisis of 'slave power' in the United States, in order to define his different characters (African, American, and European)" (Sundquist 148). The tensions in contemporary discussions of slavery are manifested in *Benito Cereno* and that is why it has been read as both an indictment of and an apology for, slavery. That such opposing interpretations could exist is possible because of the purposefully ambiguous nature of the text.

Joyce Sparer Adler expresses this difficulty in assessing a true reading in the following way:

> An oracle for the United States before the Civil War, with resonating meaning for all humanity, *Benito Cereno* has been, like many a legendary oracle, misconceived by those who expect meaning to be conveyed in conventional ways . . . But Melville was a poet – maker, not taker, of symbols, methods, and forms. His head, being like Babo's a "hive of subtlety," he transformed the 1817 narrative written by a real Amasa Delano into strange suggestive art through which he explored, more deeply and creatively than ever before, the master-slave relationship and the entanglement of slavery and violence; though he felt here, as everywhere else in his works, that the great iniquity resides in slavery, not in those who fight, no matter how bloodily, against it, he was impelled by the extraordinary situation recounted in the source to probe as profoundly as possible "horrors that happen so." (Burkholder 76)

Benito Cereno is an antislavery piece, though certainly not in the manner of typical antislavery writing (such as the Cuban novel *Sab*): "Antislavery literature was primarily aimed at moralizing, with the use of black speech, about the humanity of the slave and inhumanity of slavery, and it pointed primarily to a future where such speech would find legitimacy and where the black subject could reconstruct a family community" (Handley 3). So if we see *Benito Cereno* as one of those texts that "are haunted by their own shortcomings in attempting recovery of repressed histories and in finding meaning in such failures," and if we read it as a postslavery text, the inner tensions acquire a more cogent meaning (Handley 3).

Melville was already problematizing a point in the future when there would be a need to address "the use of a tainted history" and is therefore ambivalent about presenting projects for the future. In *Benito Cereno* and *The Kingdom of This World*, the authors "wrestle with the contradictions of depending on a reprehensible history for establishing new postslavery life and identity and warn against simple or hasty solutions" and also strive to establish a "contemporary responsibility to 'unread' history, to read for what has been buried by ideology" (Handley 11).

Another characteristic of postslavery narratives that applies to Melville and Carpentier is the fact that in both authors we see a particular tug o' war:

> The narratives all have a double movement of resistance and complicity because they all contain an oscillation between an omniscient narrative control ... symptomatic of a foundational, generative impulse, and disruptive testimonial languages, [and] are symptomatic of the genealogical impulse to wrestle with the questions of historicity and contingency. (Handley 32)

Finally, the dialogic nature of *The Kingdom of This World* and *Benito Cereno* can also be explained by a similarity to other transnational postslavery texts: they

are "riddled by the contradictions of egalitarianism and imperialism and inevitably condemned by its own historicity" (Handley 115). One thinks of the scene where Ti Noël, a free man, takes a break by sitting on top of a stack of discarded encyclopedias, unaware of their use or of his place in history: "He had also carried off a doll dressed as a shepherdess, an armchair upholstered in tapestry, and three volumes of the *Grand Encyclopédie* on which he was in the habit of sitting to eat sugar cane" (Carpentier 170).

Benito Cereno's labyrinthine structure can also be explained by Melville's political convictions and frustration with his readership. His frustration with failing to produce books that were both fulfilling to him as a writer and financially successful led him to write on a dual level:

> Out of his failures with *Mardi* and the slave labor of the next two books, Melville had built a literary theory in which a writer writes simultaneously for two audiences, one composed of the mob, the other of "eagle-eyed" readers who perceive the true meaning of those passages which the author has "directly calculated to deceive – egregiously deceive – the superficial skimmer of pages. (Baym 2152)

In *Benito Cereno* we see this strategy in the naïve Delano's "superficial skimming" of the ship and its people, and the more "eagle-eyed" narrator that provides clues for the more enlightened reader to develop a much earlier understanding of the events.

The constant attempts in *The Kingdom of This World* to subvert a logical and linear reality are manifested through the non-linear hidden reality of Haitian culture. The visible model, the French, is denounced and mocked; the latent and ungraspable, the Afro-Caribbean, is presented in a more preferential light. Ideologically both models, whether cultural, historic or gendered, are manifested in two different epistemologies: science and belief, the European and the primitive, in a dichotomy that the *real marvelous* represents.

What both of these novels do is grapple with the legacy of slavery in terms that are not transparent or heavy handed. They lay out the tensions, abuses, contradictions and ironies that follow the uprising and liberation of the oppressed. Their texts narratively reflect those dualities. But in terms of the gendered universes they create they do not take any great risks: the traditional bipolar system of male and female is used to ascertain each character's worth. The effortlessness of the truly admirable male characters and the self-conscious struggles of the weak characters is the product of a patriarchal axiom: "To be seen to labour in anything deprives a man of credit; whereas admiration doubles if he seems to throw it without effort or forethought" (Schwenger 30).

End Notes

1. For example, see Schiffman's article in Burkholder. "Williams says: '{Natural} to Babo...is hatred for the happiness of hatred, evil for the sake of evil...{his is} a motiveless malignity...) This is a customary misinterpretation, for Babo's malignity is not motiveless. He was leading a rebellion of slaves in their fight for freedom, and all his acts of cruelty were dictated by this purpose ... Almost all critics who insist that Babo is evil refuse to discuss the question of slavery" (30).
2. This *primitivist* strain that Alejo Carpentier taps into was typical of other *avant-garde* artists of the time and the essence of Carpentier's famous thesis on the *marvelous real* in the New World, which appears in the 1949 edition of *The Kingdom of This World.* Carpentier's *marvelous real* proposition states that the American reality is inherently different from the European: while artists like the surrealists must strive to invent worlds that are wondrous, the American reality is such that it "naturally" is given to produce the marvelous.
3. R.W. Connell explains that Jung distinguishes between the self constructed in transaction with the social environment, which he calls the "persona," and the self formed in the unconscious out of repressed elements, which he calls the "anima." These tend to be opposites, and the opposition tends to be a gendered one. But his work gradually went away from the process of repression towards one of the resulting *balance* between a masculine persona and a feminine anima. He also argues that the "feminine interior of masculine men was shaped not only by the life-history of the particular man but also by inherited archetypal images of women. So while Freud was struggling to overcome the masculine/feminine polarity, Jung not only settled for it, but presented the familiar opposition as rooted in timeless truths about the human psyche." Jung's treatment of the masculine/feminine polarity as a "universal structure of the psyche also leads to quagmire. No historical change in their constitution is conceivable, all that can happen is a change in the balance between them" (Connell 14).

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