

ALEJO CARPENTIER'S *THE KINGDOM OF THIS WORLD* AND THE SPECTRAL
VOICE OF COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS

By

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This document is dedicated to my husband, Michael, without whom I could not continue to realize my dreams.

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Alejo Carpentier's foundational Latin American text, *The Kingdom of This World*, is of critical importance in part because of its historical account of the Haitian Revolution. But its enduring value derives more from its function as a site of literary intervention in Western Enlightenment discourses, an intervention that firmly places the Haitian people at the text's ontological center. In the text, Carpentier uses the form of Latin American magical realism to tell the story of the Haitian Revolution through the lens of a distinctly Latin American regional sensibility, a concept he was personally invested in. Focused around figures previously obscured in Western historical accounts, *The Kingdom of This World* rejects the Enlightenment viewpoint inherent in those accounts and proffers alternative definitions of "truth" and "reality."

In that process, it appropriates and disrupts the discursive fields arising from Western scopic drive, an epistemic insistence on the primacy of vision/observation for both defining "truth" and possessing the seen. Western scopic drive *colonizes through the*

gaze. Furthermore, because it asserts its field of vision – and thus its authority to define – as absolute, it maps the totalizing narratives and universalizing impulses of Western Rationalism onto colonized spaces and functions to establish and sustain European hegemony. Consequently, by contesting Western scopic drive, *The Kingdom of This World* models specific strategies of resistance to European hegemony.

As a mechanism for analyzing those strategies of resistance, this paper introduces a new concept, spectral voice. In *The Kingdom of This World*, spectral voice operates within the framework of the genre of magical realism and operates to deconstruct the claim to totality that empowers scopic drive. It manifests in several modalities, ranging from the symbolic “voice” of Haitian drums functioning as a “calling forth” of communal will, to the literal voice of a specter whose presence provides a powerful disclaimer of Western Rationalism’s linear and temporal frameworks. In these modalities, spectral voice rejects the defining authority of Western scopic drive and therefore provides a discursive space where the risks of using “the Master’s tools” for the project of self-determination are diffused. In that space, the previously silenced stories of the marginalized emerge from the suffocating silence imposed by Western insistence on “truth” and “reality” as unequivocal absolutes. The site of production for “truth,” “reality,” and spiritual value is effectively shifted, revealing the voids in those totalities and demonstrating finally the strength and validity of the subaltern’s voice.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

At its surface, Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* (1957) is a chronicle of the Haitian Revolution. In its content, Carpentier scrupulously adheres to accepted chronologies of historical events surrounding that moment (Young 12). Consequently, the novel merits consideration as "the only sustained account of the Haitian Revolution in Spanish-Caribbean literature" (Paravisini-Gebert 115). But on a more fundamental level, the novel's value arises not from its historical accuracy but from its positioning of Haiti and its people at its ontological center. While in form the novel is historical narrative, in spirit it is a recuperation of elements such narratives elide. The novel rejects the value markers of European History and redefines value through a Latin American lens, replacing the vision of Europe with the voices of the New World.

This positioning reflects two central premises of Carpentier's perspective as both a writer and as a Latin American¹ subject. First, Carpentier demonstrates that, while Latin America is a space formed from and reflecting many divergent influences, it is not a space of mere imitation or assimilation. Although it conscripts and transforms external forms and discourses and creates from them uniquely Latin American articulations, it resists definition by those forms and discourses. Specifically, it contests the imposed identities levied upon it by European colonial domination. That imposition overwhelmingly coincides with the salaciously intrusive Western scopic drive (Stanley

¹ Latin America herein is understood to embrace the Caribbean.

293, Marazzi 89), a gaze that seeks to instill in its subject a “state of conscious and permanent visibility” (Foucault 201). As Frédéric Regard tells us, “Knowing begins with seeing,” (79) and Western scopic drive seeks to “know” in order to colonize. So Carpentier counters that gaze – that relentless desire to know and consume - through a mechanism that I have termed herein “spectral voice.”

Spectral voice emanates from a source that resists identification by Rationalist means and thereby evades or confuses Western scopic drive – it emanates from “the hidden.” It manifests at times as complexly nuanced “possessions,” “reincarnations,” or symbolic representations but more often it is quite literally the voice of a “specter.” But whatever modality it takes, it is a critical concept because its spectral nature – its origination from beyond the penetration of Western scopic drive - allows Carpentier to represent the liminality of those spaces from which his story emerges, the interstices of History in which the agency of the Other is hidden. Yet its spectral nature also repudiates the desire inherent in Western scopic drive, the desire to know, possess, and define. Spectral voice makes possible transgression and resistance without submission because to speak need not mean to be seen, and when spectral voice coincides with vision, it is the vision evoked by the voice, not by Western scopic drive that consumes. Spectral voice evokes the power of hidden knowledge.

This investment of power and control in spectral voice diffuses much of the danger of appropriation, the danger that using the discourse of the master will invite the master’s gaze and thereby validate the master’s authority. Thus, spectral voice powerfully articulates the silenced narratives of alterity and resistance. It subordinates the story of the slave owner de Mézy to the story of his slave, Ti Noël; it shows us Ti Noël’s exile

from and return to Haiti as more relevant than the impoverishment and death of de Mézy or the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire. It tells us that the failure of King Christophe of Haiti is not because he fails in the ways of Western rule, but because he embraces them and fails in the eyes of Haiti. It calls King Christophe to account for his failure not through the devices of Western authority, but through the thundering liturgy of a dead priest resurrected by communal will. Thus, Carpentier uses spectral voice to forefront the power, vitality, and durability of Haitian community and destabilize the narrative of Western hegemony.

The second premise apparent in this novel is that Carpentier views Latin America from a regional rather than a strictly national perspective. He strives to show not only the appropriative powers at play in creating a uniquely Latin American sensibility, but to express that sensibility as a communal consciousness (meaning those shared elements of identity that situate the individual within the history, traditions, and beliefs of a people) that transcends traditional boundaries of space and time. Community becomes an interconnectedness forged from shared values and traumas that cannot be delimited by arbitrary boundaries of nation. However, in this endeavor, Carpentier undermines the transgressive powers of spectral voice. In his desire to develop a Latin American unity capable of refuting European hegemony, he appropriates the Western discourses of anthropology, discourses in which the inherent desires of Western scopophilic drive are tenaciously embedded. This manifests most prominently in Carpentier's portrayal of Vodoun, a portrayal that reflects the West's "perennial attachment to an occult Haiti" (Dayan 32). Consequently, while spectral voice powerfully refutes the authority of Western scopophilic drive and allows for constructive appropriation, the anthropological

traces of the novel reinscribe that authority and once again render appropriation dangerous. The result is a subtle but pervasive tone of romantic primitivism that insists on differentiating Latin American identity from its correlative Western image, but fails to confer on that identity any internal specificity. Characters that loom large in *The Kingdom of This World* function not only to resist the yoke of European hegemony, but also to *monolithically* assert Latin American subjectivity. The Latin American space of Carpentier's vision is "flattened out" and undifferentiated, and the implications of spectral voice become tenuous.

But even though Carpentier oversteps his aims in his appropriative strategy, he develops in spectral voice an explosively powerful tool that continues to hold relevance today, not just in Latin America but anywhere resistance to Western hegemony is of critical importance. Erna Brodber's *Louisiana and Myal*, Ana Castillo's *So Far From God*, and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* all use spectral voice in at least one modality. Thus, a new examination of *The Kingdom of This World* and its use of spectral voice are overdue. A close analysis of spectral voice, which has to date gone without critical comment, can deepen understandings of the ways in which literature today seeks to confront and refute Western scopoc drive. Since that drive underpins much of the West's aggression and possessiveness, spectral voice is poised at a threshold of change, a threshold on which our world hovers dramatically as previously colonized peoples struggle to redefine it, to recuperate their stories of old and tell their stories anew, to raise their voices in a clarion call for acknowledgement in the emerging world order.

CHAPTER 2 SPECTRAL VOICE AND MAGICAL REALISM

The first appropriative move evident in *The Kingdom of This World* is Carpentier's use of a literary form known as magical realism, a form adapted from Franz Roh's European art aesthetic (Zamora and Faris, Editor's Note, *Magical* 15). This appropriation is not the work solely of Carpentier, but also of a number of his contemporaries such as Gabriel Garcia Márquez. However, the Latin American magical realism that arose from this appropriation is implemented somewhat differently in *The Kingdom of This World* than in most other Latin American magical realist texts. While Carpentier utilizes Latin American magical realism, he juxtaposes it with a literary rendering of Roh's magical realism. Carpentier refers to his approach as "lo maravilloso real," or the marvelous real (Carpentier, "Baroque" 102). This juxtaposition, which will be the focus of more in-depth analysis shortly, plays a large role in how effectively magical realism functions with spectral voice in *The Kingdom of This World*.

Magical realism lends itself to the use of spectral voice because magical realism contains what Wendy B. Faris identifies as an "irreducible element of magic" (Faris 7). This "irreducible element" represents the incursion of the phenomenal world into the material world, producing a shadow region between faith and fact that blurs or dismantles perceptual boundaries and produces "unsettling doubts" about the very nature of reality. An excellent example of this in *The Kingdom of This World* is a pair of scenes that focus on King Henri Christophe and a Capuchin monk named Breille. The first scene depicts Breille's death, and the second depicts his resurrection and the beginning of the end for

Christophe. The two scenes function together in multiple ways. They delineate a concept of communal consciousness that privileges Haitian ways of knowing, and they shift the lens of history to focus on Christophe's failure in those ways of knowing. They also clearly juxtapose the two forms of magical realism, Roh's aesthetic and Latin American magical realism. That juxtaposition creates an indeterminacy that allows spectral voice to operate through a critical permeability of boundaries in the text.

The first scene details the rather gruesome manner in which Christophe executes Breille, "immur[ing him] in the Archbishop's Palace, buried alive in its oratory . . . for the crime of having wanted to go to France knowing all the secrets of the King" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 131). The monk's death and the community's reaction to it mark Breille as a figure representative of and constituted from communal consciousness, despite his European origins. This connection becomes evident in the way voice functions in the description of Breille's death. It both marks Breille's demise and prophesies his resurrection through a dual inscription of "silence" as at once the material absence of corporeal voice and the metaphysical presence of voice. The monk's death is a passage from the world in which voice coincides with Western scopic drive to the world in which voice arises from hidden knowledge: "After a week of incarceration, the Capuchin's voice had become almost inaudible, fading away to a death-rattle *rather sensed than heard*. And then silence came at the corner of the Archbishop's Palace" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 132, italics mine). The monk's death-rattle is the place of conjunction for the two inscriptions. It is at once a voice and not a voice, inaudible in the material world but sensed – *heard* – in the phenomenal world of the hidden. Consequently, the silence that follows Breille's death signals colonial presence, as

analysis will show Christophe to be, but also signals the falling away of the fetters of Western scopic drive.

The clearest indicator of this scene's importance is the means by which that silence is broken. It is "the over-prolonged silence of a city that *had ceased to believe in silence and which only a newborn infant dared to break* with its whimper of ignorance" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 132, italics mine). Here, the community's rejection of the silence marked by Breille's death rattle is a rejection of death and a harbinger of Breille's resurrection. That rejection is embodied in the infant's cry, a vibrant marker of communal continuity. By counterpoising the renewal of life with the eminence of death, it "reroute[s] life toward its customary sonority of street-cries, greetings, gossip, and songs sung while hanging clothes out in the sun" (132) and calls into play the history, traditions, and beliefs of the community. This clearly associates Breille's impending resurrection with communal consciousness. What Christophe has done the community undoes in its refusal to believe in the boundaries that shape Christophe's world. As a result, the infant's voice becomes "spectral" because it arises from the hidden, from the will and knowledge of the people that Western scopic drive is incapable of penetrating. Breille becomes a signifier of that will, and of the silenced narratives of the enslaved and oppressed masked over by the totalizing claims of Western hegemony.

Breille's signification of communal consciousness manifests as spectral voice in the second scene of this pair. That scene signals the fall of Christophe, a freed former slave who has taken control of Haiti following the revolution. He subsequently tries to replicate a European system of aristocracy in the revolution's aftermath, assuming the role of colonial presence. Significantly, Carpentier elides from *The Kingdom of This*

World the role of two revolutionary leaders, Dessalines and Toussaint L'Ouverture, who are central to Western accounts of the Haitian Revolution. He also ignores Christophe's rise to power through his role in the assassination of Dessalines, who had declared himself emperor after the revolution. These elisions are critical because they clearly decenter Western narratives of the revolution and put at center instead Christophe's failure in the eyes of the Haitian people. The second scene highlights this failure by focusing on Christophe's relationship with Corneille Breille.

Christophe attends the Mass of the Assumption shortly after Breille's death. During the Mass, the Capuchin, "whose death and decay were known to all," (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 137), appears before the congregation and Christophe is subsequently paralyzed. His affliction foreshadows his eminent overthrow, death by suicide, and internment in the very concrete of his own Citadel. But even before Breille's appearance, the account of the Mass assumes an air of the unusual with the description of the morning as a "mysterious harmony" (136). Yet this harmony resonates from the mundane elements of "the fragrance of the orange trees in the near-by patio, and certain words of the liturgy of the day which referred to perfumes whose names were inscribed on the porcelain jars of the apothecary's shop of Sans Souci" (136). Repeatedly, concrete details like orange trees oscillate with the unusual, such as Christophe's inexplicable mood, which makes him "unable to follow the service with due attention, for his breast was oppressed by an anxiety he could not account for" (136). Christophe's discomfort, because of its unidentifiable origin, is part of the "irreducible element" leading us closer to the "magical" appearance of the Capuchin. Yet we are offered even more details of the ordinary to ground us in the material world before this remarkable event. The "delicately

veined gray marble” and the “delightful impression of coolness” in the cathedral contrast viscerally with the highly sensory image of “the tightly buttoned swallowtailed coat and the weight of decorations” in which Christophe perspires uncomfortably. The tickle of the sweat and the cloying itchiness of “Sunday best” clothing heighten the appeal of the calm and cool atmosphere in the cathedral. That sensory contrast grounds the reader in the moment with Christophe, anchored to the material world by the physical sensations even as the magical world unfolds. Like the details offered in the scene of the Capuchin’s demise - the “newly plastered wall,” the red towers, and the number of lightening strikes associated with his place of entombment (131) - the attention to the ordinary in the description of the Mass inspires those “unsettling doubts” as the reader tries to reconcile the presence of a dead and decaying monk with the very concrete world of fruit trees and marble walls.

Breille’s presence creates a disturbing juxtaposition of two distinct contexts; one is the “rational,” viscerally experienced, material world (a world favored by Roh’s aesthetic) and the other is the phenomenal, irrational world of the spirit from which Christophe’s nemesis appears (a world favored by Latin American magical realism). The presence of both contexts serves to unsettle concepts of real and imagined, leaving open to question how concrete the reader should understand Corneille Breille’s phantom to be. Is it a part of the “real” world of cathedrals and perfume, or is it a manifestation of Christophe’s agonized psyche? Does the answer to this question even matter? After all, the sense of smell and the aesthetic appreciation of music, both of which are evoked in this passage, are not objectively measurable qualities. So those very elements that ground the passage in the material also point to the perceptual as the stronger context.

The tension between modes of reality here is heightened by the contrast between “the Latin intoned by Juan de Dios Gonzáles” (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 136) in the Mass, which Queen Marie-Louise finds incomprehensible, and the impact of the phantom Breille’s voice: “When, thundering like the roll of a kettledrum, there arose the words *Coget omnes ante thronus*, Juan de Dios Gonzáles fell moaning at the feet of the Queen” (136). Breille’s voice similarly impacts Christophe: “his eyes starting from his head, [he] bore it until the *Rex tremende majestatis*. At that moment a thunderbolt that deafened only his ears struck the church tower, shivering all the bells at once” (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 138). Breille’s presence and the contrast between the two priest’s voices unsettle rationalist ideals of truth and demonstrate the permeability of boundaries. Certainly, a psychological mechanism of guilt might explain Christophe’s paralysis, and the lightening strike suggested by the thunderbolt may be the cause of other material manifestations in the passage. However, the details that allow such a rational analysis can also be linked dramatically with spectral voice. For instance, Breille’s words are clarion sharp, precipitating (and perhaps constituting) the thunderbolt. That thunderbolt, as Christophe’s punishment, links directly to the reason for Breille’s immurement – the Capuchin’s knowledge of the “truth” about Christophe and his citadel. So the precipitating event to this scene is an attempt by Christophe to silence Breille and hide his knowledge, to silence the voice that now speaks out with spectral force to condemn him. Because of this connection, regardless of whether Breille is a concrete, “real” presence in the citadel, his perceived presence is more eventful and significant in the text’s reality than Gonzáles’ presence. Thus, Breille subverts the rational – the living priest Gonzáles – to the irrational – the dramatic impact of a knowing and “truthful”

spectral voice. Its spectral nature – its origination from beyond the categorical boundary of death – lends it a validity denied the words of the living priest.

Just as the power of Breille’s voice correlates to his relationship to truth (his knowledge about Christophe), this same kind of correlation exists between the incomprehensibility of Gonzáles’ liturgy, his rise to favor with Christophe, and his fate in the cathedral: “Tired of the chick-peas and dried beef across the mountains, the sly friar found the Haitian court to his liking . . . It was rumored that certain words of his, spoken, as though offhand, before Henri Christophe one day . . . were the cause of Corneille Breille’s terrible disgrace” (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 132). Gonzales’ deceptiveness correlates with a transformation reflected once again in voice. The “fine bass voice” (131) he arrives at Christophe’s court with becomes “baritone inflections of unfailing effect” (138) that are nevertheless impossible for Queen Marie-Louise to comprehend. The contrast of “unfailing effect” and incomprehensibility identifies Gonzales as a point where rational modes of understanding unravel and the “magical” intercedes. His “effect” (and therefore his power) is illusory in nature. It is hollow ritual, a form that attempts to bridge the gap between material and phenomenal but fails because it is incomprehensible to the people. This is in direct contrast to the idea of “the hidden,” in which underlying the obscuring veil of “reality” lies content and validity that is not only comprehensible but vital to the people. Gonzales’ ritual is hopelessly devoid of meaning, leaving him powerless against the force of truth in the spectral voice. This interpretation gains merit from Gonzales’ reaction to the appearance of his disenfranchised counterpart, Breille; Gonzales is struck prostrate at the queen’s feet, incapable of anything more articulate than a moan. Gonzáles and all he stands for become ineffective and irrelevant to the

reality of the text, and Queen Marie-Louise adheres to the ritual he proffers despite its irrelevance is symptomatic of a larger bankruptcy within the Rationalist paradigm.

Like Queen Marie-Louise's blind allegiance, Gonzales' infatuation with the European fineries of Christophe's court makes him emblematic of Western value systems. Similarly, Christophe's obsession with creating a Haitian class of nobility in the European model marks Christophe as such an emblem as well. Additionally, both men are eventually left prostrate in the presence of Breille, who is in contrast elevated above them: "Now, with a great bound, the specter had seated himself on one of these beams, in the very line of Henri Christophe's *vision*, spreading wide arms and legs as though the better to display his bloodstained brocades" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 138, italics mine). The preeminence of Western scopic drive, represented here by Christophe's vision, is struck aside by spectral voice and its visible manifestation. Breille's image, emanating from beyond the boundary of death and beyond the penetrating Western scopic drive, *commands* Christophe's vision, denying the prostrate king access to the rational constructs upon which he has built his kingdom. Christophe's undoing is his faith in the forms of Europe and his failure to recognize their irrelevance to Haiti.

Struck down as well in this scene are the concrete symbols of European domination (qua the domination of European religious systems). Breille's thunderbolt levels the precentors, the thuribles, the choristers' stand, and the pulpit, and like Gonzales and Christophe, these symbols correlate to European domination and the colonial presence. The effect of Breille's voice on them thus represents an inversion of colonial power dynamics because the manifest forces of the colonized dominate or destroy the Rational

forces of the colonizer via the spectral voice. It reasserts the vitality of the silenced and hidden, and challenges the authority of Western scopic drive.

Breille's death and his subsequent presence in the cathedral, then, precipitate a crisis of reality in which an inherent ambivalence in Western scopic drive – and Western discourse – becomes apparent. This ambivalence has its root in what might best be termed “the anxiety of spectacle.” This anxiety arises from the dual registers of reality that spectacle makes manifest. With Breille's appearance, the surety of Western scopic drive is called into question, but because the reader can never be quite certain how “literally” to read Breille's appearance, the text refuses to situate him unequivocally in the material world. Thus, the question itself is questionable. The resulting indeterminacy of reality gives rise to a tension similar to what Homi Bhabha terms “mimicry,” which he describes as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite* . . . the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha 86). Like mimicry, the anxiety of spectacle pivots on the desire of Western scopic drive to fix and define its subject on Western terms. That desire surfaces as discourses of “fixity” that attempt to claim a subject by naming it. For example, the Western discourse of superstition and the occult comes into in an overwhelming number of discussions concerning “voodoo”; the deliberate choice herein to refer to the religion as Vodoun is an attempt to mediate that discourse. However, the term “spectral voice” borrows from that same discourse. It “mimics” the fixity the dominant discourse signifies with “spectre” in the attempt to subvert that discourse.

This attempt relies on the idea that co-emergent with that fixity is the irremediable *otherness* of the Other, the difference that is increasingly marked as the perceived identity of the named subject approaches the vision of Western scopic drive. Here, that drive desires knowledge of Breille's specter, but that knowledge means situating the specter in the material world. This results in paradox, because such a placement demands the identification of the specter *as* Breille, an identification that assaults the very boundaries of Western Rationalism with which the identification is made. The response to that paradox is ambivalence, a stance that allows the dual inscription of Breille to stand. In fact, it acknowledges his very nature *as* dual inscription. Instead of exhibiting the "almost the same, but not quite" of Bhabha's mimicry that "conceals no presence or identity behind its mask" (Bhabha 88), Breille exhibits the anxiety of spectacle as "the same *obscuring* the different;" Breille's spectacle – his "specter" – does serve as a "mask," or more accurately as a shield. Whereas Bhabha's mimicry makes no endeavor to preserve the hidden because it hides nothing, the ambivalence arising from the anxiety of spectacle is important precisely because it does preserve the hidden as a place of enunciatory power and transgression. That power arises in part from a hyper-awareness in Western scopic drive of an impenetrable space beyond the spectacle – of the *totally hidden*. Only in the presence of such awareness is the drama of spectral voice fully realized. This is a subtle yet critical difference.

The preservation of the ambivalence of dual inscription lends power to the spectral voice by sustaining the hidden *as hidden* while simultaneously calling attention to its power as knowledge. It is the preservation of ambivalence that drives Carpentier's application of magical realism. Because the form embraces the incommensurable, it

provides an ideal frame for spectral voice to function in ways discontinuous with other literary forms. Consequently, an understanding of how Carpentier contributed to magical realism's transformation and how magical realism facilitates spectral voice brings into sharper focus the critical import of *The Kingdom of This World*. Such an understanding also forefronts the novel's relevance to the continuing project of examining inter- and intra-communal relationships in the region today.

The inception of Latin American magical realism is located in European Surrealism and visual art aesthetics. Consequently, it shares with Surrealism an impulse to co-represent divergent perceptions of "reality" as one unified vision (Zamora and Faris, Introduction 11). However, Carpentier's application of magical realism significantly changes the form. In fact, as Bobs. M. Tusa notes, while the novel arises from Carpentier's "enhancing experiences of Surrealism" during his time in Europe, it is also "his rebellion against Surrealism and his counter-challenge" (25). Thus his application of magical realism demonstrates the conscription and transformation of a European form as repudiation and resistance, and as a means of explicating Latin American identity. Since his role in developing Latin American magical realism so clearly illustrates his philosophy of appropriation and adaptation, it is central to most discussions of Carpentier's work today. Just as he appropriates historical narrative to display its voids, so too does he change magical realism to accommodate the Latin American context.

His efforts in this area coincide with the efforts of other writers of Latin America's "El Boom" of the mid-1900s (Zamora and Faris 1; Janney 9), and together those efforts constitute a major Latin American literary influence. During that era authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Miguel Angel Asturias, and Jorge Luis Borges shared

Carpentier's concern for developing a literary form that focused on Latin American experiences from inside that space, in contrast to imposed European forms and narratives that had previously defined it. Their success is apparent not only in the impact their efforts had on Latin American literary traditions, but also in the number of writers around the world they influenced then and now. Today such authors as Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, and Haruki Murakami continue to use the form, and other traditions of magical realism have arisen that, if not derived from,¹ are at least in dialogue with the work of Carpentier and his contemporaries.

However, some critics argue that *The Kingdom of This World* does not fit the model of a magical realist text. This assertion is based on a binary formulation of magical realism as either the aesthetic vision of art critic Franz Roh, who coined the term in 1925 to apply to Surrealist painting (Evans 3; Faris 15; Roh 15), or magical realism as it appears in Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (perhaps the most critically examined magical realist text of all). But this is a false binary for several reasons. First, *The Kingdom of This World* was first published in Spain in 1949, whereas *One Hundred Years of Solitude* first appeared in 1967, nearly two decades later. This alone makes a comparison of their literary forms anachronistic, as Latin American magical realism was undergoing rapid transformation in those decades. Comparing Carpentier's novel to Marquez's is tantamount to comparing the Theory of Relativity to quantum physics. Additionally, as Richard A. Young explains in his discussion of the two novels, Marquez's conception of magical realism takes the prerogative of altering

¹ One example of this is the emergence of a literary tradition in West Africa that some theorists identify as Magical Realism. Some authors who deploy this form, however, object to its identification by that name. For an extended discussion of this, see Brenda Cooper's *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing With a Third Eye* and Olatubosun Ogunsanwo's review of the same.

material reality, whereas Carpentier's "lo maravilloso real" focuses ostensibly on phenomenological differences, similar to Roh's conception. However, it is critical to note that Carpentier presents phenomenological difference as an effective force in the material world, which is a clear departure from Roh's aesthetic. Also, as Young further points out, the final two chapters of *The Kingdom of This World* present in material terms the metamorphic transformations of the slave Ti Noël. This makes apparent Carpentier's cognizance of magical realism's potential to produce a coherent, "alternative" reality, and indeed Marquez's later effort may in fact owe its perspective to Carpentier's vision. But more importantly, *The Kingdom of This World* brings together both poles of magical realism's potential and inserts the European form into the New World context. The result is a text that insists on the reality of perspective and the illusion of reality.

This distinction is critical in understanding Carpentier's use of spectral voice. Used alone, Roh's formulation of magical realism would deny the effective impact of such a phenomenon on the material world. Roh uses the term ("Magischer Realismus") to describe a form of visual art in which traditional realism is overlaid with elements of surrealism and the fantastical (Evans 3; Faris 15; Roh 15). In the term's application Roh emphasizes the "realism" of the art, and he viewed that realism as a rebuttal to Expressionism's "exaggerated preference for fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote objects" and "shocking exoticism" (Roh 16). In the works of such artists as Schottz, Nebel, and Picasso, Roh sees "a new style that is thoroughly of this world, that celebrates the mundane" (17).

"The mundane" that Roh speaks of is in direct contrast to Expressionism's dramatic deviation from "accurate" and "objective" representation of the world and nature. The

importance of realistic representation for Roh becomes more evident when we examine how he defines “magic” in the following passage: “The clash of true reality and apparent reality . . . has always had an elemental attraction. . . . Such a juxtaposition of reality and appearance was not possible until *the recuperation of the objective world*, which was largely lacking in Expressionism”(Roh 20). Roh goes on to explain how magical realist art recuperates the objective: “We could say that in this new painting the very system of categories has been refined, gaining in clarity, richness, and precision” (Roh 29). We can draw from these passages that for Roh the magical element of the art is not in any sense an element of transcendent or supernatural agency, but rather arises from the space between “true reality” and individual perspectives or representations of that reality. Roh’s magical realism does not arise from an exalted state nor presuppose faith as does Carpentier’s. It is a fervent embrace of the objective while simultaneously acknowledging the irreducible multiplicity of representation. Consequently, the “magical” depends on and is a function of a startling contrast between objective reality and subjective judgment, and that contrast reinforces rather than challenges the “system of categories,” the “true reality,” by which Rationalism defines the concrete world.

But Roh’s emphasis on a definable, concrete reality differs significantly from ideals of magical realism that grow out of its Latin American formulation. As Zamora and Faris explain, “Roh praises Post-Expressionism’s realistic, figural representation, a critical move that contrasts with our contemporary use of the term [magical realism] to signal the contrary tendency, that is, a text’s *departure* from realism rather than its reengagement of it” (15). A fundamental shift in perspectives separates today’s magical realism and its ideological Latin American parent from the aesthetic Roh sought to define in 1925.

That shift occurs in part because of a distinctive narrative approach that rejects Roh's privileging of the objective world and differentiates Latin American and contemporary magical realism from other literary forms. Wendy B. Faris terms this approach "defocalization," (43) or a narrative given from an indeterminate, unlocatable perspective. The defocalized narrative voice arises from the hidden, and in this respect it is "spectral." Like spectral voice it has the power of knowledge, but only at the expense of inverted paradigms, since one effect of defocalization is to record as empirically true elements that in fact depart from rational or empirical standards. Defocalization thereby mimics the empirical dependency that realist texts derive from a more determinate narrative perspective, like an omniscient narrator, but allows the text to leave unfixed the categorical boundaries of "truth" and "reality." For example, in *The Kingdom of This World*, we more readily consider the idea that Breille's appearance at the Mass of the Assumption is "fact" rather than simply Christophe's hallucination because we are not invested in any single narrative perspective. Therefore we have the broad scope of the omniscient narrator, but not the certainty. Because our narrator remains ideologically unformed, meaning we cannot determine from which viewpoint of reality the narrator speaks, we have no clearly defined framework for determining the narrator's reliability or the text's interpretive parameters. We must therefore retain some discomfort about anything we accept in the text as "real." If we accept the narrative judgment that Breille does indeed appear at the Mass, we must also accept the implicit challenge to the authority of objective history. In what "official" historical record will we find a spectral Breille? Yet the defocalized narrative lends his appearance the ontological weight of reality.

The unsettling doubts that defocalization produces set apart both Carpentier's and Marquez's approach to magical realism from Roh's. Both Latin American authors resist the reinscription of material reality with the appellative "true" with which Roh marks it. But in another respect Carpentier and Marquez use magical realism quite differently, and had Carpentier adhered to Gabriel Garcia Márquez' magical realism, this would have placed spectral voice too solidly in the realm of the fantastical. Whereas Roh privileges material reality, Marquez's formulation of it does little to preserve the demarcation between realities. For example, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* "Macondoans ride magi carpets, Remedios the Beauty rises up to the heavens, a pot in Ursula's kitchen spontaneously creeps to the edge of the table and falls, José Arcadio and Amarant give birth to an infant with a pig's tail, Melquíades foretells the family history" (Faris 121). Throughout Marquez's novel, the magical asserts itself in ways that transform the material world. As a result, we gain a sense of being constantly in a world that is almost, but not quite, the one in which we reside. That world is different but cohesive.

But for Carpentier in *The Kingdom of This World*, the challenge to Rationalist values and hegemony arises in part from the disjunction between perspectives, a disjunction that partially disappears in Márquez's novel. Carpentier deploys both forms of magical realism to achieve an effect distinctly different from either. Because he juxtaposes the two, we gain from *The Kingdom of This World* the sense that reality is layered, and the fabric of one layer is rent to reveal what lies beneath. We can never be certain whether the differences we see are phenomenological or material because the level of incoherence in the text is greater than that in Marquez's. Consequently, we catch a glimpse of the hidden while retaining a heightened awareness of its hidden status. We

hear the voices of the silenced and remain aware they have been silenced. This makes brutally obvious the violence of colonial oppression as more than a physical violence. It reveals it as a colonization of the spirit and calls into question the categorical boundaries that make that colonization possible. Consequently, when spectral voice intercedes to mark a given moment as significant, it provides a place to which the reader can anchor the desire for truth and knowledge. Spectral voice simultaneously becomes the manifestation of instability while serving as the point of coherence in the text.

Yet spectral voice also illuminates a will to resistance, a will that the narrative of Western hegemony must elide for the sake of totality. It accomplishes this by revealing those moments when Rationalist categorical boundaries such as “the magical” and “the real,” “past” and “present,” or “body” and “spirit” collapse (as we see in Breille’s case). Magical realism as Carpentier reconfigures it provides an ideal frame for this revelation, since magical realism is adapted to the dissolution or transgression of such boundaries. As Zamora and Faris express it, “magical realism is a mode suited to exploring – and transgressing – boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic . . . [It] often facilitates the fusion or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction” (Zamora and Faris 6). Breille’s death and resurrection are preeminent examples of this in *The Kingdom of This World* because in Western ideologies death is arguably the ultimate marker of Rationalist order. It is an impermeable boundary whose monumental weight marks the centrality of the individual and signals the absolute linearity of time and progress². Consequently, by challenging this boundary the spectral voice carves out a

² For extended discussion on the categorical imperative of death in European systems of belief, see Deborah Gorman’s *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, which discusses the significant change in

space for the hidden by bringing under scrutiny perceptual voids in the Western Rationalist body of knowledge. That challenge explains why the manifestation of spectral voice as “ghostly” is the prevalent mode, and why magical realism as a form is so conducive to the function of spectral voice. Magical realism helps validate this function because it accepts the “reality” of spectral voice – and of resistance - a priori, regardless of the ambiguities that may surround any particular instance of its manifestation. This allows spectral voice to refine its focus, putting aside the question, “Is it real?” and bringing under examination instead those categorical boundaries that insist the question be posed at all.

mortality rates among children in 19th century England. Additionally, see “‘She Cried a Very Little’: Death, Grief and Mourning in Working-class Culture, c. 1880-1914*,” in which author Julie-Marie Strange takes a slightly different view with regard to the working class, yet on the whole supports the idea that perceptions of death were changing and the categorical divide between life and death becoming more insurmountable. Finally, social scientist Pat Jalland “argues that the middle and upper classes had begun to retreat from death some decades earlier,” (qtd in Strange 143). Cumulatively, these sources point to death as the ultimate categorical boundary in dominant Western ideologies, serving to separate not only the dead from the living, but also the rational or “scientific” from the irrational or “superstitious.”

CHAPTER 3 CARPENTIER'S REGIONAL VISION

As the analyses of Breille's connection to Haitian communal consciousness and Christophe's connection to European values demonstrate, spectral voice challenges ideas of communal "belonging" – the European Breille "belongs" to Haiti whereas the Haitian Christophe "belongs" to Europe. With the cry of an infant, spectral voice collapses polarities of identity and replaces them with a circular, discursive relationship between past, present and future; it fundamentally alters ideals of community, identity, and individuality. These strategies redefine community in a way that effectively decenters Europe (as the seat of rationalist and objective thought) and forefronts the syncretic qualities of Latin America.

This focus on syncretism is the indicator of the text's second major premise, which concerns Carpentier's view of Latin America from a regional rather than a strictly national perspective. While Carpentier was very active in the nationalist project of Cuba, he ultimately came to insist on situating cultural production simultaneously within both a national and a broader regional sensibility (Young 34; Smith 65). He conceived of Latin American identity and community as functions of shared experiences that transcend artificially imposed boundaries. He accordingly viewed syncretism as the disclosure of that regional sensibility.

His desire to privilege syncretism results in several strategies that contest the artificial circumscription of community and identity by nationalist boundaries. Particularly, in *The Kingdom of This World* he refocuses the lens of history to cameo

connections and events quite different from those usually placed at center by Western historiography. He also focuses on the syncretic elements in Vodoun as a unifying thread between disparate times and places. But it is this last strategy that brings to light a critical problem in the novel; it engages in an essentialist view of Vodoun that reinscribes problematic European discourses on the novel's representational space.

Syncretism finds expression in *The Kingdom of This World* most frequently when Carpentier explores what Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert calls "the seamless flow between the life of the body and the life of the spirit that characterizes Vodou" (116). Breille's appearance in the cathedral is such an exploration. Because of this "seamless flow," Breille's physical demise does not foreclose his continuing resistance. The power of faith arising from shared trauma at the hands of the colonizer facilitates his transition from a corporeal being to one of spirit and communal will. Additionally, Breille's role as priest aligns him with modes of religious expression, and his transformation into the world of spirit further reinforces this alignment. As a result, he emerges as a socio-religious signifier of Haitian communal consciousness. Similarly, his destructive power over emblems of European power, and specifically over European religious practices, powerfully marks him as representative of Vodoun, the Haitian "religion of resistance and revolution [that] gives collective strength and identity to the disenfranchised" (Dayan 39). Through his death and transformation, Breille becomes a model for religious syncretism.

That syncretism appealed to Carpentier's interest in Afro-Cubanism (Edison 54; Janney 10),¹ a term coined by Cuban ethnologist and social scientist Fernando Ortiz. As

¹ Frank Janney notes particularly the overarching presence of animism in Carpentier's early fiction, and also notes, "According to J. C. Froelich animism is the basic element of all Black religions in Africa." (53).

Ortiz's term suggests, one of the movement's primary concerns was highlighting the indigenous and African components of Cuban and Latin American culture, and as Donald L. Shaw explains, early in Carpentier's career the author adopted much of Ortiz' philosophy (3-6). Gonzáles Echevarría identifies that philosophy as part of the struggle to disentangle Latin America from a culturally bankrupt Europe and assert authenticity and independence for Latin American cultural production (55-57). As loci of the African presence in Latin America, syncretic religions such as Vodoun and Santería., which arose from West African religions in close and continuous contact with Catholicism, are integral to that struggle (González-Wippler, *Powers* 1; *Rituals* 8; Turlington 15), . Accordingly, Carpentier's focus on Vodoun in *The Kingdom of This World* logically follows his interest.

The significance for Carpentier of Vodoun and syncretism in developing a regional sensibility cannot be overstated. This becomes evident in *The Kingdom of This World* with an analysis of Ti Noël's experiences immediately after the Haitian Revolution. This analysis reveals both the critical role of Vodoun in communal identity and Carpentier's strategic use of the historic lens to relocate the center of meaning to Latin America. After the revolution, the story of Ti Noël shifts away from Haiti and leads us to Cuba during moments in which European historical accounts forefront events in Haiti. This move, in establishing Ti Noël and his social context as a thread of continuity,

Janney's observation highlights Carpentier's interest in recuperating the Black heritage of the Caribbean and thus suggests that interest plays a large part in Carpentier's literary focus. However, Janney's analysis of Carpentier's animism also inheres a problematic categorization of such religions as emanating from "primitive cultures," (53) which reflects an ongoing practice of imposing Western ethnographic views on non-Western cultural practices. Janney assumes Carpentier shares this characterization of such cultures, an assumption with merit the text will demonstrate.

challenges Western historical narratives and rejects the idea that community (and identity) is geographically or nationally bounded.

Ti Noël's master M. Lenormand de Mézy seeks refuge in Cuba, taking Ti Noël with him. While in Cuba, the two men find themselves in a Catholic cathedral, and the importance of the scene rests in Ti Noël's experience of that space. Because of its location, the scene echoes the Mass of the Assumption, and issues of power, voice, and vision appropriately come into play.

De Mézy goes to the cathedral after "seeing in the mirror how the marks of age deepened with every passing week, [and he] began to fear the approaching summons of God. . . . And so, accompanied by Ti Noël, he took to spending long hours groaning and rasping out ejaculatories in the Santiago Cathedral" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 85). The slave owner's sudden bout of piety is precipitated by a disabling malaise that accompanies a sharp downturn of his fortunes at the card tables. Like Gonzales, his piety is hollow, based on self-interest and material concerns, disconnected from communal values or any concordant sense of identity.

In sharp contrast, Ti Noël finds in the cathedral a strong tie to his home and past. The passage describing his experience is highly visual and verges on structural fragmentation as it weaves from disparate elements a remarkable discovery for the slave in his exile: "the Negro found in the Spanish churches a Voodoo warmth" that has "an attraction, a power of seduction in presence" that emanates from "The baroque golds, the human hair of the Christs, the mystery of the richly carved confessionals, the guardian dog of the Dominicans, the dragons crushed under saintly feet, the pig of St. Anthony, the dubious color of St. Benedict, the black Virgins, the St. Georges with the buskins and

corselets of actors in French tragedies, the shepherd's instruments played on Christmas Eve" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 87). This passage demonstrates in both content and form the composite nature of the church's interior. Its list-like structure amidst conventional prose is disjunctive, and its contents abound with disjunctions as well. The rich imagery injects into the overarching European milieu elements rendered uniquely Latin American by the synthesis of their parts. The emblems of Christian ceremony and tradition become instead the emblems of appropriation and transformation. The list and the scene thereby serve as an effective metaphor for Carpentier's vision of Latin American identity.

Contrasted with the cathedral setting of the Mass of Assumption, the scene's syncretic elements are heightened and its invocation of Vodoun practices forefronted. Whereas the Mass of the Assumption occurs amidst the signs of Catholicism and the colonial presence, the Cuban cathedral abounds with "symbols, attributes and signs similar to those of the alters of the houmforts [sic] consecrated to Damballah, the Snake god. Besides, St. James is Ogon Faï, marshall of the storms, under whose spell Bouckman's followers had risen" (87). The conventional markers of Catholicism are shot through and through with dominating markers of the African gods, and these elements of religious syncretism collapse for Ti Noël the distance between home and Cuba, between community and exile. National boundaries succumb to the unity of shared history, traditions, and beliefs.

Notably, voice and vision function in this scene to invert the thrust of Western scopie drive, giving authority of sight to Ti Noël and rendering European voice incomprehensible. This is evident in "these discordant symphonies, which Don Esteban Salas enriched with bassoons, horns, and boy sopranos" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 87). As in

the case of Gonzales' liturgy, European voice is here associated with the superfluous, with the irrelevant droning of "discordant symphonies." Ti Noël ponders the purpose of the noise, noting "It was really impossible to understand why this choirmaster . . . was determined that the singers should enter the chorus one after the other, part of them singing what the others had sung before, and setting up a confusion of voices fit to exasperate anyone" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 85-86). The imposed – and to Ti Noël illogical – structure the choirmaster strives for, like the hollow ceremonial gestures of Gonzales, have no underlying meaning in the syncretic world of Latin America. In the presence of guardian spirit-dogs and St. Anthony's pig, his efforts are worthless.

So while the scene lacks the revelatory clarity of spectral voice, we find its antithesis signaling the bankruptcy of European forms and values. The focus turns away from hollow, incomprehensible ceremony because Ti Noël draws meaning not from the babble of the functionaries and the European musical forms but from the points of intersection between realities, between the African gods and the saints of Europe, between the Son of God and the son of war. These points of intersection highlight the syncretic origins of Vodoun, and in turn, Vodoun provides continuity between Ti Noël's experience of community in Haiti and his experience in the Cuban church. Ti Noël's revelation anchors community and identity to shared practices arising from a syncretic heritage and rejects the idea that community is always geographically bounded. While the routed Europeans may be devastated by their exile and find little reassurance in the hollow forms of normalcy, Ti Noël finds comfort and warmth. In his exile he discovers the far-reaching embrace of community in the chocolate tones of a black Madonna. .

Another important aspect of this passage is its reference to “the baroque golds” of the cathedral because the idea of the baroque is central to Carpentier’s concept of Latin America. He sees the Latin American space as inherently baroque, as a place where “the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place” (Zamora and Faris, Editor’s Note “On the Marvelous” 75). Consequently, in his search for Latin American authenticity, Carpentier again uses an appropriative strategy. He transforms the European notion of the baroque into a distinctly Latin American configuration, one that strives for an overall balance of disparate parts and “steep[s] the reader in whatever atmosphere he [Carpentier] is evoking” (Smith 64). Carpentier’s Latin American “neo- baroque,” as César Augusto Salgado explains, is a critical redefinition of European baroque that “refocus[es] on the hybrid refigurations that European baroque paradigms have undergone when transplanted into the colonial arena [. . .] ‘New World Baroque’ cultural artifacts of the colonial period could be read as instances of discontinuity rather than as application of European aesthetic norms despite their visible allegiance to a metropolitan school of style” (317). The baroque in Latin America, then, marks those points of divergence at which syncretic formations depart from European norms.

By using this “neo-Baroque” within the framework of magical realism, Carpentier challenges the putative success of European Rationalism and the Enlightenment within the Caribbean space. He shifts the view of artifacts in the Caribbean we might interpret as European baroque to one that shows us incongruities wrought by the irresistible forces of the New World: “angels playing the bassoon, the theorbo, the organ, and the maracas” perched atop a burned church overrun by jungle growth in *The Lost Steps* (116); a “Ceres with a broken nose and discolored peplum” holding court from “a fountain of crumbling

grotesques” in *War of Time* (105); Christophe’s Citadel in *The Kingdom of This World*, built on the energies of sacrificial blood, of “the mighty bellowing of bulls, bleeding, their testicles to the sun (125). All are transformed in that shift to images whose principle characteristic is their incongruous melding of Old World and New. They are European baroque in form but American in spirit, and the emphasis in that melding for Carpentier is the transformative power of creolization/metizaje. So the overarching baroque tone of Ti Noël’s cathedral experience works with the refocused historical lens to mark the moment as a remarkable instance of creolité.

But Ti Noël’s experience also points to a critical problem in the text. That problem arises from Carpentier’s intention to illustrate a unified Latin American sensibility capable of shaking off the fetters of Europe and claiming authenticity for the Latin American creole subject. By tuning the lens of history to show Vodoun’s importance in *The Kingdom of This World*, Carpentier seeks to recontextualize historical, social, and moral relevance by shifting critical focus from distant Europe to America. As Robert González Echevarría suggests, this goal is evident throughout the corpus of Carpentier’s work as “a search for origins, the recovery of history and tradition. The foundation of an autonomous American consciousness serving as the basis for a literature faithful to the New World,” (qtd in Paravisini-Gebert). Barbara Webb expands on this, saying “*Lo maravilloso real*, with its emphasis on the mythohistorical heritage of the Americas, represents the beginning of a dialogue . . . concerned with establishing a New World cultural identity based on *the shared heritage of all of its peoples*” (Webb 13, italics mine). That emphasis on the shared heritage *of all*, however, leads Carpentier (like many other authors before him and since) into an unintended essentialization. In *The Kingdom*

of This World, a monolithic representation of Vodoun blunts the otherwise razor-sharp effects of spectral voice. It invites in Western scopie drive and grants its authority to define and circumscribe.

In his eagerness to portray Vodoun as a unifying influence, Carpentier adapts the methodologies of Western anthropology and ethnography even as he tries to diffuse their negative impact. These academic discourses are arguably inextricable from Western scopie drive, since their primary purpose is to produce knowledge of cultures through penetration, observation, and categorization. The problematic influence of these discourses is apparent in Ti Noël's experience in the Cuban cathedral, which exhibits a difficulty symptomatic of Vodoun's representation in the text. The features of the cathedral's iconography that appeal to Ti Noël are features he associates with Vodoun, made evident by his invocation of the hounfort. As Joan Dayan explains, the hounfort is the alter around which the Vodoun community "articulates itself" (40). The cathedral scene contains nothing to contradict Ti Noël's identification.

However, the prevailing religion of syncretic origins in Cuba is not Vodoun, which is uniquely associated in its specificity with Haiti. Rather, in Cuba Vodoun's counterpart is La Religión Lucumi, often referred to as Santería (González-Wippler, *Powers* 1, González-Wippler *Santería* 3, Pérez 18). Certainly, Ti Noël's association of these elements with Vodoun is understandable; his prior experiences make it a reasonable identification. Also, Carpentier's intent was clearly to draw attention to the shared African origins of these two faiths. But because the text imposes one upon the other with no clarification, both of them lose specificity. They become flattened out into a monolithic representation of syncretism. This move reflects the influence in Carpentier's

writing of Cuban ethnographer and social scientist Fernando Ortiz, who “identified the end result of syncretism as ‘transculturation’ and saw it as similar to the Anglo-American paradigm of acculturation and assimilation” (Pérez 16). Such a flattening may well serve to highlight common bonds of shared heritage and traumas, but does little to acknowledge the unique elements imbedded in every faith by the agency of its practitioners. To suggest that syncretism follows the same pathways everywhere is to deny that agency.

Anthropology, ethnography, and related social science discourses also have another impact, indirect yet equally negative, on perceptions of Vodoun. They spawned in their early years popular discourses that titillated Western audiences by fetishizing elements “peripheral to the more basic beliefs and practices that articulate the multiple and ambiguous versions of the Haitian socio-religious life” (Dayan 33). These discourses, both academic and popular, find their way into *The Kingdom of This World* as another manifestation of Carpentier’s appropriative tendencies, but not the conscious manipulation evident with magical realism. They manifest most noticeably as the urge to homogenize identified above, and in an unintended – or at least unexamined – *reactionary* pattern evident in Breille’s example. This pattern nearly always associates Vodoun with supernatural or supranatural forces. Even in Ti Noël’s Cuban cathedral experience, although no supernatural or supranatural elements emerge, the overall tone and ambiance of the scene is highly suggestive of them. While this association facilitates the power of spectral voice, it also reinforces an early anthropological discourse that makes a distinction between “modern” religions and “primitive” religions, a distinction that hinges on “the so-called primitive-mentality problem” (Geertz 110). In these

discourses, “primitive” is inextricably connected to “superstition,” “shamanism,” or – as in this case – “blood ritual.” As such, the primitive religion is cast as the under-evolved precursor of modern religion, and as in other such polarities, is almost inevitably racialized. Consequently, the association of Vodoun with super- or supernatural phenomena in *The Kingdom of This World* in the absence of any offsetting representations renders a troubling view of the religion. That view is just as reductive as Hollywood horror films featuring bloodthirsty rites of black magic and zombified monsters bent on the destruction of humanity.

Popular discourses on Vodoun such as the horror film genre are not alone in their reductionism. For example, in the early decades of the twentieth century, ethnographic interpretations of “primitive” cultures abounded, and in fact colonial expansionism had prospered from the Rationalist notion of cultural evolution². Even well-intentioned anthropological efforts to explicate the role of Vodoun and its socio-religious function typically fell short of their intentions. Consequently, in the decades that followed, authors such as Carpentier had to contend with the perceived legitimacy that the science of evolution and early cultural anthropology lent the colonial endeavor. However, countering such legitimacy often results in accepting unaware any number of the premises on which it is founded. Consequently, Rationalist notions like the idea of “primitive” cultures as less evolved and therefore closer to “a state of nature” or a

² Cultural evolution adapts LaMarckian and Darwinian notions of evolution to cultural development. Colonialism used the concept to shift justification of the colonial endeavor from a strictly religious claim (saving the souls of the “savages”) to one that also incorporated the notion of “saving the savages” from their evolutionary backwaters and “civilizing” them for their own good. For a more detailed analysis of cultural evolution and its relevance to colonialism and post colonialism, see Sander A. Gilman’s “Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race to a Race to Theory.” Also see Sandra Siegel’s “Literature and Degeneration: The Representation of ‘Decadence’” and Joë Roucloux’s “Can Democracy Survive the Disgust of Man for Man? From Social Darwinism to Eugenics.”

“childlike” state creep into otherwise resistant texts. Some aspects of *The Kingdom of This World* suggest that Carpentier may have been influenced by such endeavors, such as W. B. Seabrook’s 1929 ethnography of Haiti, *The Magic Island*.

Seabrook’s agenda in *The Magic Island* is to challenge previous, deleterious assumptions about Haiti and the practice of Vodoun, but his perspective is so unquestioningly accepting of Rationalism’s civilized/savage dichotomy that his intended altruism toward his subject becomes milquetoast condescension. Passages such as this one from *The Magic Island* reveal his attitudes toward the Haitian people: “the mass of the populace, possessing childlike traits often naïve and lovable as well as laughable, have also a powerful underlying streak of primitive, atavistic savagery” (Seabrook 276). This image of “primitive” peoples as childlike and naïve yet capable of explosive violence pervades early ethnographic studies, reinforcing the ideal of white Eurocentric superiority even when it is intended to condemn the “mature and jaded West,” like this statement of Seabrook’s related by Joan Dayan:

[He] told his blasé readers back in New York to get some passion into their lives by putting blood in their Fifth Avenue cocktails: “Perhaps if we mixed a little true sacrificial blood in our synthetic cocktails and flavored them prayerfully with holy fire, our night clubs would be more orgiastically successful and become sacred as temples were in the days of Priapus and Aphrodite.” (32)

The “back to nature” message in this passage is unmistakable. Urban imagery counterpoises the dark spirituality of “true sacrificial blood” to firmly demarcate the primitive/modern divide, and builds on a scene in *The Magic Island* in which Seabrook witnesses a vodoun ceremony: “The blood . . . spurted in a hard, small stream from the bull’s pierced side, where the mamaloi knelt with her bowl to receive it and transferred it bowl by bowl to the great common trough. The papaloi and mamaloi now drank

ceremonially of the holy blood” (Seabrook 40). The relative truth of Seabrook’s description aside, this passage panders to a rapacious desire for titillation in his audience and exacerbates problematic views in the West of Haitians and Vodoun. By focusing on such “blood rites,” Seabrook perpetuates a formulation of Vodoun that obscures the more pervasive and overarching functions of the religion, such as promoting communal cohesion, regulating social behavior, and providing a sense of “pastness” to a people denied a history throughout the tenure of colonialism.

Comparing Seabrook’s passage with the following passage in *The Kingdom of This World* arouses at least a suspicion that Carpentier is aware of Seabrook’s work and incorporates some of it into his own novel: “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, *Kingdom* 120). The passage describes ritual sacrifices Christophe implements during the construction of the Citadel La Ferrière. The blood of the bulls sanctifies the structure as the sacrificial blood purifies the participants in Seabrook’s reported ceremony. While this example is complexly nuanced because ultimately Christophe fails, it is still problematic. Granted, the text suggests through Christophe’s fate that his relationship to Vodoun and his understanding of it are flawed. His entombment in the very walls the sacrifices are meant to fortify illustrates his faith as “fixed” and “dead,” in sharp contrast to the faith that animates Breille. The supernatural protections the sacrifices are meant to confer fail to materialize. Still, in that very failure is the implicit and unyielding correlation of Vodoun with blood rites and supernatural manifestations.

This pattern is likely unintended. On a conscious level, Carpentier professes to privilege syncretism because it mirrors creolization, the merging of indigenous, European and African elements that produces, for Carpentier, the “authentic” Latin American subject. More specifically, he expresses a desire to recuperate the African influences in Latin America (Cheuse 21). But his position reflects the same problem inherent in certain ethnological attitudes because it reflects an unquestioning acceptance of the discourse of race-based superiority. In his desire to contest white Eurocentric privilege, Carpentier envisions the black Latin American subject as “closer to nature” or “more natural,” a vision implicit in his treatment of Vodoun. While the example of Breille mediates this to a degree, and is clearly intended to serve as an ideal of creolization, it is worth noting that Breille attains his “authentic” status only through death and resurrection. Other examples of Vodoun in the text are all racially marked; for instance, the color consciousness inherent in “the dubious color of St. Benedict” (86) in Ti Noël’s Cuban cathedral experience. Carpentier attempts through this color consciousness to recuperate the African presence and grant superiority to the creolized Latin American subject. He thereby strives to relocate the wellspring of spiritual and moral value to Latin America. But in so doing he reinscribes the racialized Eurocentric discourses that give rise to claims of white superiority in the first place.

The Kingdom of This World contains other examples that may also manifest such unexamined reactions to anthropological discourses. For example, the novel is an overwhelmingly masculinized text. Women in the novel are either hysterical white women, like Pauline Bonaparte or the second Madame de Mézy, or objects of male sexual desire, like Ti Noël’s kitchen wench: “Twenty years had gone by in all this

[waiting for Macandal's resurrection]. Ti Noël had fathered twelve children by one of the cooks" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 60). This is one of several references to Ti Noël's reproductive potency, and in each the recipient of his urges remains nameless, insignificant to the demonstration of his fecundity. Some might argue this is because Carpentier has no awareness of gender issues that problematize these representations. But given his already demonstrated engagement with other anthropological discourses and their popular offshoots, the overarching masculinity of the text may well be a response to Western discourses that routinely constructed the Afro-Caribbean Creole male as alternatively either hypersexual or impotent, and either animalistic or effeminate. Unfortunately, the reactionary portrayal of Afro-Caribbean masculinity in *The Kingdom of This World* does as much to reinforce the oversexed, animalistic vision of these discourses as to refute the vision of impotence and effeminacy.

Another example of this occurs during the text's portrayal of a slave insurrection. This insurrection marks the onset of a thirteen year period that culminates in the Haitian Revolution and is led by a slave and Vodoun priest named Boukman. During the insurrection, Ti Noël's sexual exploits take a cruel turn: "For a long time now he [Ti Noël] had dreamed of raping Mlle Floridor. On those nights of tragic declamations she had displayed beneath the tunic with its Greek-key border breasts undamaged by the irreversible outrage of the years" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 74). The "irreversible outrage" in this passage is a double entendre signaling both the inevitable effects of time on a body that Mlle Floridor's breasts have apparently escaped, and the irremediable impact of years of slavery on the Haitian people. Ti Noël's actions are overtly manifestations of physical lust, but on a deeper, far more fundamental level they are a scream against the

injustices of slavery and colonization. By framing that protest in terms of Ti Noël's sexual prowess and reproductive energy, Carpentier articulates that scream through the creative force of the strong and forceful Afro-Caribbean male. Unfortunately, with this assault (which leads to Mlle Floridor's death) Carpentier also at least partially validates the image of him as animalistic and hypersexual.

Notably, Ti Noël gains his intimate knowledge of Mlle Floridor's anatomy in a way that forefronts the functions of voice and vision, again demonstrating that the transgressive mechanisms of the novel and its problematic points often coincide. Mlle Floridor is a failed Parisian actress who marries M. Lenormand de Mézy after his second wife's death. But her failures in Paris do not prevent her from imposing her questionable talents on her slaves: "There were nights when she took to the bottle . . . [and ordered] all the slaves to turn out . . . [she would] declaim before her captive audience the great roles she had never been allowed to interpret . . . this player of bit parts attacked with quavering voice the familiar bravura passages" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 60). As in Ti Noël's experience in the Cuban cathedral, Mlle Floridor's drunken performances upend the dynamic of Western scopic drive. Instead of seeing and claiming/naming, she yields her body to the sight of slaves while her words lack the power to shape her reality. Much like the priest Gonzáles, her voice is irrelevant in the context of Haiti.

Voice and vision also play into the insurrection as a whole because of the Vodoun ceremony that marks its inception, a ceremony that again demonstrates the problematic use of Vodoun in the novel. Boukman's leadership and the impending revolt are augured by "claps of thunder . . . echoing like avalanches over the rocky ridges of Morne Rouge" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 66). The thunder here and Boukman's role as priest tie him to

Breille and connote Boukman's words as spectral: "Suddenly a mighty voice arose in the midst of the congress of shadows, a mighty voice whose ability to pass without intermediate stages from a deep to a shrill register gave a strange emphasis to its words. There was much of invocation and much of spell in that speech filled with angry inflections and shouts" (66). Again, the power of spectral voice to initiate dramatic changes in the material world functions transgressively, articulating a unity amongst the slaves that supersedes the expectations of the slave-owners' rationalist worldview. But Vodoun is directly linked to the super- or supranatural, with no counterbalancing evidence that it plays a more pervasive and mundane role in the lives of the slaves. As Joan Dayan explains, Vodoun is a religion in which the people have a "close, reciprocal, even palpable relation" with their gods. Given the scope and depth it has in their lives, followers of Vodoun would hardly be capable of functioning in the material world if every instance in which their faith was relevant was a dramatic and catastrophic event. Yet the novel presents Vodoun as dramatic spectacle, narrowing its scope and promoting a view of its followers as overly emotional and aggressive.

Another excellent example that demonstrates the double-edged role of Vodoun in *The Kingdom of This World* is a pair of scenes focusing on Macandal, an escaped slave and leader of a slave revolt around which Carpentier focuses much of his narrative. Macandal is the character that most clearly represents the African presence in Latin America. He is the purveyor of preserved African knowledge, and through a process of physical and spiritual transformation, he incorporates that knowledge into the material and phenomenal realities of the Haitian people. He is, in many respects, the embodiment of Vodoun, and he marks it even more clearly than Breille as the affirmation of

communal consciousness. His life – and ultimately his death – becomes a powerful articulation of resistance and subjectivity, recovering the “pastness” of Africa elided by Western domination. Here again, in this example, the monolithic view of Vodoun is present, but the function of Macandal in the text is so powerful that it demonstrates convincingly how spectral voice can ultimately overcome such problems and effectively give presence to the hidden without succumbing to Western scopie drive.

The first scene narrates the return of Macandal from a self-imposed exile after his escape from de Mézy’s plantation. It builds on accounts of shape-shifting abilities the Haitian slaves ascribe to Macandal. The slaves’ stories transform him into a symbol of resistance, giving him legendary (or even mythic) status. This transformation finds expression in tales of physical metamorphoses that “the Negroes communicated to one another, with great rejoicing” (Carpentier *Kingdom* 41). In their stories, Macandal shape shifts from a man to “a green lizard [that] had warmed its back on the roof of the tobacco barn,” “a night moth flying at noon, or “a big dog, with bristling hair, had dashed through the house, carrying off a haunch of venison,” or even “a gannet – so far from the sea! – [that] had shaken lice from its wings over the arbor of the back patio” (41). Through these stories, the slaves refine a powerful legend of Macandal as a figure who in his myriad forms, “continually visited the plantations of the Plaine to watch over his faithful and find out if they still had faith in his return. (41). Macandal has been transformed in the imagination of the people to a savior.

This role arises from Macandal’s powerful connection with and sustenance of African faith and tradition. From the novel’s beginning, he articulates the African roots glossed over by the amnesiac conditions of colonialism: “[He] would tell of things that

had happened in the great kingdoms of Popo, of Arada, of the Nagos, or the Fulah . . . But, above all, it was with the tale of Kankan Muza that he achieved *the gift of tongues*, the fierce Muza, founder of the invincible empire of the Mandingues”(Carpentier, *Kingdom* 13 italics mine). The italicized phrase above is heavily laden with implications. It evokes a phrase attached to charismatic and pentacostal Christian practices, and thereby constitutes another appropriation from the West. Like the cathedral scenes, this appropriation directly juxtaposes systems of belief because Macandal is also the purveyor of African faith: “He knew the story of Adonhueso, of the King of Angola, of King Da, the incarnation of the Serpent, which is the eternal beginning, never ending, who took his pleasure mystically with a queen who was the Rainbow, patroness of the Waters and all Bringing Forth” (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 13). This places Macandal on a level with Breille, and the paralleling of figures, one European and one African, constitute a powerful manifestation of Caribbean creolization and syncretism in which Macandal is the spiritual anchor to Africa.

Accordingly, the slaves’ faith in Macandal is a preservation of their pastness and sustenance of their African roots as a basis for community. The strength of their faith not only sustains Macandal’s legend, but lends material power to it as well. The text does not assert Macandal’s abilities on anything more than an imaginative level; it allows the transformations to remain an element of the slaves’ belief alone. Yet that belief in the fluidity of spirit and flesh ultimately has dramatic impact in the material world, since the slaves follow Macandal in a revolt against the white colonists. This is the central contrast between Carpentier’s magical realism and Roh’s, which would acknowledge the

coexistence of different perspectives but stop short of engaging “the magical” as an effective force in material reality.

But in contrast, magical realism as Marquez constructs it would not provide for the double register here of phenomenal incursion into material events. It would instead erase the distinction that allows Macandal’s importance to so clearly arise from faith. Only by maintaining the tension between material and metaphorical can Carpentier demonstrate that faith resides in the space of slippage between layers of reality. In this instance it is the tool of regeneration, of another “resurrection” from a metaphorical death that deepens the resonance between Breille and Macandal.

Whereas Breille’s death is literal, Macandal’s “death” is a traumatic maiming. Injured in a milling accident on de Mézy’s plantation, he loses his arm: “With his right hand he was trying to move an elbow, a wrist that no longer obeyed him . . . The master called for the whetstone to sharpen the machete to be used in the amputation” (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 21). It is fitting that de Mézy performs the amputation, because his enslavement of Macandal is also an amputation of power and self-determination. The physical loss of Macandal’s arm stands in for the spiritual loss of all he has known before his captivity. His inability to control his arm’s movements, even with his uninjured hand, demonstrates the totally debilitating effects of slavery, an “amputation” of independence and a severance from origins. Because the changes wrought in Macandal by these dual amputations fundamentally change who he is, they are tantamount to a death in which his old self is destroyed and a new one reborn.

Like Breille, Macandal is “resurrected,” transformed by his ordeal and called forth by the will of the people. But because Macandal’s death is not literal but figurative, that

return is a dramatic double inscription: “Behind the Mother Drum rose the human figure of Macandal. The Mandingue Macandal. The One-Armed. The Restored” (47). This passage’s culminating phrase, “The Restored,” inarguably demonstrates Macandal’s return from exile as regeneration. He has been reconstituted as “The Mandingue Macandal,” the spirit of Africa in the communal consciousness. Yet he still bears the mark of his maiming as evidence of his materiality and of the inescapable impact of the colonial presence. It also marks him as *distinct from* the Mandingue Macandal. Like Haiti, he is irremediably altered by the traumas of colonialism, at once restored but changed. He hovers between two worlds, that of Africa and that of Europe, and in his indeterminacy he captures the essence of the Creole dilemma – at once both and yet neither.

Unlike Breille, Macandal’s reappearance is not fleeting; he remains among the slaves inciting unrest and resistance until he is captured and killed. So his reappearance might more accurately be called a metaphorical “reincarnation,” since his corporeality after his return is never at issue as it is with Breille. And just as Macandal has imaginatively possessed the forms of animals during his transformation, he is in turn “possessed” by the will of the people, given over to the function of resistance in the battle for deliverance. The people still reside in that space of “natal alienation” that Orlando Patterson identifies as “social death” (Patterson 8-9). Because they do not own their own bodies . . . or history . . . or destiny . . . they are as dead as Macandal before his sojourn in the mountains. Consequently, when Macandal takes on the mantle of their will, of communal consciousness, it is a possession of the living by the “dead.”

Macandal's escape and return consequently marks him as "spectral" like Breille, and his voice accordingly has the power, relevance, and knowledge of spectral voice. This is doubly so because in his storytelling he speaks from a place hidden from Western scopic drive through erasure. The Western perspective cannot conceive of that space represented by the memories and traditions he preserves. It is incommensurable with the totalizing narratives of History, Rationalism, and Enlightenment. That incommensurability is manifest in the "Mother Drum" Macandal emerges from behind.

Drums in *The Kingdom of This World* mark the hidden, and thereby mark the space from which spectral voice arises. The hidden knowledge they connote is best exhibited by a moment of troubled observation by M. Lenormand de Mézy: "It [the sound of drums] filled him with uneasiness, making him realize that, in certain cases, a drum might be more than just a goatskin stretched across a hollow log. The slaves evidently had a secret religion that upheld and united them in their revolts" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 79). DeMézy's unease at the sound of the drums results from his realization that they vocalize hidden knowledge. He acknowledges that "Possibly they [the slaves] had been carrying on the rites of this religion under his very nose for years and years, talking with one another on the festival drums without his suspecting a thing" (79). But even this belated suspicion is just that – a suspicion, a "possibility." Despite the testimonial the drums offer, de Mézy still resists the admission that his gaze – Western scopic drive – has been turned aside. He cannot even bring himself to consider his own ignorance as a symptom of critical absence in his worldview: "But could a civilized person have been expected to concern himself with the savage beliefs of people who worshipped snakes?" (79). De Mézy's shock at the realization the slaves could share a spiritual unity makes obvious the

hidden and silenced status of the slaves' social practices. So too does his rejection of the idea that he, as a "civilized" (read also as "rational") man, should have perceived such a possibility or even cared about it. The idea of the slaves as a functioning, believing, and knowing social unit is too far outside the scope of his mindset. Consequently, the symbolic function of the drums is to signal the spectral, and Macandal's emergence from behind the Mother Drum fundamentally alters the way his voice in the text can be received.

Such a reading of Macandal's metamorphosis engages in the discourse of superstition that is so problematic in *The Kingdom of This World*. But it does so necessarily, because Carpentier has invested Macandal's return with an ambiance of reductive spiritualism. The dramatic spectacle of Vodoun is again the site of that investment. But this approach will also demonstrate, when carried through to the second scene in this pair, why Macandal serves as recuperation for the text despite these problems. Because spectral voice's success in diffusing the dangers of appropriation rests on its ability to preserve hidden knowledge, Macandal's death is the most effective use of spectral voice in *The Kingdom of This World*. But revealing this effectiveness depends on fully appreciating the spectral nature of Macandal, and therefore of his voice. So in this instance, the appropriative impulse that risks reducing him to a caricature of "voodoo primitive" invests him with the power that ultimately redeems him. In weighing the effects of anthropological influence in the first scene against the effects of spectral voice in the second, spectral voice carries the day.

Ultimately, Macandal dies martyred to the cause of freedom, but his legend persists in the imaginative forces of the community, a detail Carpentier draws from his visit to

Haiti in 1943. He notes in his essay “On the Marvelous Real in America” that “The American Macandal . . . leaves an entire mythology, preserved by an entire people and accompanied by magic hymns still sung today during voodoo ceremonies” (Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real” 88). The durability of Macandal’s legend attests to his symbolic power in the struggle for freedom in Haiti. He is a savior every bit as redemptive as the Christian Christ, and the details of his death in *The Kingdom of This World* make that glaringly apparent.

The scene of Macandal’s death is often read to signal the narrator’s disbelief in the slaves’ perceptions of Macandal, but reading the passage through the lens of spectral voice reveals again a double register of reality that resists defining either register as “real.” This resistance is successful because spectral voice makes of Macandal’s death a final metamorphosis, one that commutes him, like Breille, entirely into the space of the hidden. That space, one of “spirits” and “specters,” lays completely beyond the reach of Western scopic drive . . . it is accessible only through the power of faith, and it manifests as spectral voice and the vision that voice evokes. Consequently, the hidden *remains* hidden by appropriating the very discourse intended to reveal it to Western scopic drive. The term “spectral” counts on the connotations of superstition it evokes in the Western mind to render it truly spectral, not in the sense of false beliefs, but in the sense of hidden knowledge. By presenting Macandal as specter, as reincarnate, as possessed, the text renders him *totally hidden*. This quality of the hidden makes Macandal’s death a place at which competing realities collide. In the end, it is the material reality of Rational world view that “flinches.”

Macandal's final transformation is set in motion when he is captured by colonial forces after they have tortured a betrayal from another slave. He is sentenced to burn at the stake for his role in the slaves' campaign of terror, and his execution is spectacle in both conception and implementation: "Macandal was now lashed to the post. The executioner had picked up an ember with the tongs. With a gesture rehearsed the evening before in front of a mirror, the Governor unsheathed his dress sword and gave the order for the sentence to be carried out" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 51). The Governor's intentional drama here betrays his unwillingness or inability to acknowledge the gravity of what is about to happen. His near-comic theatricalism compares gruesomely to the events that follow: "The fire began to rise toward the Mandingue, licking his legs. At that moment Macandal moved the stump of his arm, which they had been unable to tie up, in a threatening gesture which was none the less terrible for being partial, howling unknown spells and violently thrusting his torso forward" (51). Macandal's actions are a startling contrast to the vision of authoritative state ceremony evoked so blatantly by the Governor's ritualizing gestures. The precision and intentionality of the governor's signal provides the exact antithesis of Macandal's flailing, truncated limb, yet despite the fatal implications of the Governor's gesture, Macandal's signification is far more potent and empowering. His actions energize the slave population, directly refuting the intent of the execution by refusing to allow his death to become a tool of subjugation: "The bonds fell off and the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves. A single cry filled the square: "Macandal saved!" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 52). Macandal's momentary freedom marks a sustaining moment in which the magical, the marvelous, trumps the logic and order of Western rationalism.

That final cry is a crystalline expression of hope that presages Macandal's continuity in the minds and hearts of the slaves. It is also the most powerful instance of spectral voice in the text.

Because Macandal is the spectral double of Breille, the embodiment of Mama Drum, and the agent of resistance possessed and empowered by the hopes and desires of the people, the cry is the spectral voice of communal consciousness. Like the crying infant that signaled Breille's transformation, it is the harbinger of Macandal's transformation as well. As in other instances, the enunciatory power of spectral voice denies Western scopic drive and instead invests scopic power in the people.

Consequently, although Macandal is recaptured and the execution continues, his death is never validated by that scopic power: "When the slaves were restored to order, the fire was burning normally like any fire of good wood, and the breeze blowing from the sea was lifting the smoke toward the windows where more than one lady who had fainted had recovered consciousness. There was no longer anything more to see" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 52). Since the confusion of Macandal's escape prevents the slaves from seeing Macandal recaptured and thrust into the flames, this is the moment often read as signaling a narrative investment in the material registry of reality. In short, critics often insist the narrator simply does not believe the slaves' perceptions of Macandal.

But this interpretation ignores the dynamics of voice and vision diagramed herein. Because spectral voice has the power to render its subject totally hidden, and because it divests Western scopic drive of its truth claims, the material reality the Europeans see – Macandal incinerated in the flames – has no relevance. The "truth" about Macandal, like Macandal himself, is hidden from the predatory Western scopic drive. As

a result, the Europeans present at the execution are confounded by the subsequent behavior of the slaves: “That afternoon the slaves returned to their plantations laughing all the way. *Macandal had kept his word, remaining in the Kingdom of This World*. Once more the whites had been outwitted by the Mighty Powers of the Other Shore” (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 52 italics mine). Here the narrator relates the slaves’ perceptions as knowledge, with nothing to indicate the reader should take it otherwise. It tells the reader “the whites *had been outwitted*,” presenting this as an unequivocal statement in the same defocalized manner as it presents Macandal’s recapture and death. Reality is still functioning in that double registry, and that allows ambivalence to mediate the contradiction between Macandal’s material death and his continuing existence in the phenomenal world of the slaves. The slaves *know* what spectral voice has obscured from the Europeans. Macandal remains an effective force in their communal consciousness, and inasmuch as it informs their lives, he remains an effective force in their material reality.

As in the case of Breille’s transformation, Macandal’s perpetuity is augured by a procreative moment. In a passage resonant of the infant’s cry, the text discloses that “Ti Noel got one of the kitchen wenches with twins, taking her three times in a manger of the stables. (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 53). Ti Noël’s response effectively “twins” Breille and Macandal, doubling the power and implications of spectral voice in community continuity. Like the infant’s cry, his reaction calls upon the energy of renewal in the face of death. It blurs the boundary between the two and evokes once again the history, traditions, and beliefs of the community. Ti Noël is proclaiming his rejection of the “reality” imposed by Western scopis drive, and his fecundity validates the power of his disbelief.

Like Carpentier's appropriation of Roh's magical realist aesthetic, Macandal presents reality as a double registry. He is both dead and alive, both the past and the future of Africa in the Haitian communal consciousness. He is a categorical anomaly that defies boundaries. So later on the evening of Macandal's execution, when "M. Lenormand de Mézy in his nightcap commented with his devout wife on the Negroes' lack of feelings at the torture of one of their own" (Carpentier, *Kingdom* 52), he is attempting to diffuse an unease akin to what the voice of the drums instilled in him. His response to that unease illustrates the most significant effect of spectral voice. It can turn Western scopis drive back upon itself and preserve the hidden *in plain sight*. De Mézy copes with his confusion by wrapping it in the rhetoric of colonial domination: "drawing therefrom [the execution] a number of philosophical considerations on the inequality of the human races which he planned to develop in a speech larded with Latin quotations" (52). De Mézy explains the slaves' behavior as evidence of their savagery, but it is his fear of that perceived savagery – and his certainty of his knowledge of it – that will forever obscure the "truth" from him. In the context of Haiti, Macandal lives on.

Reading that communal shout, "Macandal saved!" as knowledge borne of spectral voice demonstrates that he has indeed transcended the boundary between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of this world. Like any good savior, he lives on to redeem his people and inform/be informed by their traditions, practices, and beliefs, and the shout attests to his transcendence. That communal impulse is not an error; it is the discursive equivalent of the infant's cry. Macandal is saved through the perpetuation of his legend and the body of knowledge it entails. Just like Braille's resurrection, his vitality belies the Western, linear construction of life and death and insists instead on an enduring

circularity, one in which the people find renewal in their past, and phenomenal reality is not separate from, but an integral part of the material conditions in which they live.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

The example of Macandal in *The Kingdom of This World* demonstrates one reason why Carpentier's work continues to hold relevance today for Latin American scholars. Alejo Carpentier's use of spectral voice and communal consciousness permits him to assault European narratives of truth and totality that underpinned the colonial enterprise. The case of Macandal and Ti Noël is only one example of this, but it is a powerful one. So too are the cases of Breille and Gonzáles. Each demonstrates the permeability of the fundamental categorical boundaries and challenges conventional perceptions of Latin American and European identity. They bring into focus the social and spiritual elements that constitute such identity, and consequently serve to illuminate the critical work Carpentier undertakes. Through appropriation and transformation, Carpentier makes of magical realism a uniquely American approach capable of capturing a uniquely American reality, a reality in which "improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, demography, and politics – not by manifesto" (Zamora and Faris, Editor's Note "On the Marvelous Real" 75). Yet, Carpentier rejects the idea this appropriation is merely imitative. *The Kingdom of This World* condemns such imitation as it strikes down both Gonzáles and Christophe and celebrates the spiritual vitality of Latin American community in Breille's resurrection. It rejects hollow form in favor of locating individual relevance in communal links. Carpentier envisioned those links as a regional bond. That vision, while plagued with

certain difficulties, had a profound and lasting effect on the direction of Latin American studies.

Spectral voice is an excellent example of that impact. It contributes to a larger project of critical analysis and introspection Carpentier and many of his contemporaries set in motion, and the momentum of that analysis still reverberates today. Syncretism, regionalism, and the recuperation of African roots remain major topics of discussion in the aftermath of decolonization. Any attempt to understand the peoples of Latin America must necessarily ground itself in an examination of these issues. Because spectral voice impinges the boundaries that categorize the Rationalist world – that delineate logical from illogical, real from imagined, truth from fiction – it lends itself to this work. It renders audible those peoples, cultural practices, and experiences that resist containment without ceding to the consuming desire of Western scopic drive. Such resistance belies the seamless totality of the Rationalist narrative, insisting instead on in-between spaces populated by the Other. Spectral voice's eminence from those liminal spaces can liberate hidden knowledge and empower the re-imagination of colonized spaces. Thus, it can function as a powerful political tool for destabilization and recuperation by challenging the very foundation on which Western expansionism and global domination has been built - the claim of Rationalism to totality, objectivity, and truth. While the term "spectral voice," like the anthropological traces of *The Kingdom of This World*, on one level invokes the discourses that construct those claims, on a higher level it rejects them. It brings to center the importance of community, faith, and shared experiences in a people's ability to endure even the harshest of conditions. Accordingly, Ti Noël reflects in "a supremely lucid moment" as he nears the end of his life, "bowed down by suffering

and duties, beautiful in the midst of his misery, capable of loving in the face of afflictions and trials, man finds his greatest, his fullest measure, only in the Kingdom of This World” (185).

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