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‘TAKING UP ARMS AGAINST A SEA OF TROUBLES’:
TRAGEDY AS HISTORY AND GENRE IN THE BLACK RADICAL TRADITION‘

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation examines a sampling of twentieth century literature generated in and around the Haitian Revolution through the optic of tragedy. It examines the tension between leader and mass base during the revolutionary process in a sampling of Afro Caribbean, African American, and European modernist texts and how this tension relates to C.L.R. James’s definition of hamartia (tragic flaw), as formulated in his 1938 study *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. James modifies Aristotle’s understanding of hamartia in his *Poetics* to signify the degeneration of communication between leader and base in the making of modern day Haiti. The dramatic work and criticism of C.L.R. James, Eugene O’Neill, Paul Robeson, Edouard Glissant, and Lorraine Hansberry capitalize on this leader and base tension constitutive of Black radical aesthetic politics and attempt to stage a useful representation of the past, in service of their individual political desires. This dissertation is in a dialog with David Scott’s 2004 study *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, a text that argues that the tragic element of James’s text was added into the latter version and worked to temper the study’s earlier Romantic tone. This project asserts that a the tragic narrative existed in James all along and furthermore, that the tragic conceived as the relationship between leader and base is constitutive of a great deal of the literature in the Black radical tradition’s effort to stage a past engagement with the Haitian revolution in service of a revolutionary future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father Barry Hue Glick, with great love and gratitude and to the memory of Shani Baraka.

And to my Mother and Sister whose help made all this possible.

To my academics in arms: Professor Michael Daniel Rubenstein and Edgar Rivera Colon

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To Wesley Brown: Your friendship and wisdom makes me hopeful about where we live.

To Mwalimu Ibrahim Noor Shariff: Asante Sana Teacher

To my friend and comrade Heidi Amanda Bramson: All my love

My brothers: Darryl Scipio, Dax Devlon Ross, Mario Ramirez Hardy, Dan Dalnekoff, Asaf Kastner, Dr. Gary Zeitlin, Ibrahim Ramey, Samuel Sanchez, Kamel Bell, Russell Shoatz III

To my niece, nephew and cousin: Now, I will have more time to play with you.

To the Glick, Mechanic, and Baraka families: "Some day, the war will be over."

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INTRODUCTION

“Backpedaling into May-flower Time”¹: Malcolm’s *Hamlet* at the Oxford Union

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?²

-*Hamlet*, 3.1

...I reminded him that during the Haitian revolution, the only person that Toussaint L'Ouverture could trust implicitly was Agé, a white Jacobin who was his chief of staff. Agé hated the bigoted French almost as much as Dessalines did, I told him. Don't worry, he said, with a broad smile, I might not have a white chief of staff. But I'll work with everyone who believes in my cause...Really? I said, looking up at him with mock disbelief, but his rejoinder was a serious one. Yes. But I've got to go about building a movement carefully. The last thing an Egyptian friend said to me when we were parting is that I should never get too far ahead of my followers, because if I'm so far ahead that I'm out of sight, they might turn back. I don't want that to happen.

-Malcolm X with Jan Carew (Carew 61)

Before presenting the main argument and focus of exploration for this project, I want to take a quick detour to explore Malcolm X's use of some memorable lines from William Shakespeare. El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz evokes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* during his participation in the Oxford Union Presentation Debate on December 3, 1964, marking his return trip from making pilgrimage to Mecca. The Presentation Debate signals the last

¹ Jan Carew, *Ghosts In Our Blood [With Malcolm X in Africa, England, and the Caribbean]*. (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994), 68

² William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark*. Edited by Edward Hubler. (New York: Signet Classics, 1963), 93

event of the term in which the President of the Oxford Union invites the person she or he respects the most to join at the podium to take on Oxford's rival Cambridge in the spirited contestation of a motion. Cricket, Rugby, and Debate all are key theaters of warfare between the two British rivals. The motion for this occasion was a July 1964 remark by Barry Goldwater upon his acceptance of the Republican Party nomination for U.S. President: "Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice, moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." Goldwater's remark was stated in the context of his defense of the right-wing group the John Birch Society.

Malcolm, the fifth of six speakers, followed Conservative Party Parliament member Humphrey Berkeley (who opposed the motion along with Lord Stoneham—Labour Party Member of the House of Lords and Christie Davies, Cambridge Student Union President). On Malcolm's side in support of a radical re-interpretation and defense of Goldwater's statement; beyond its initial reactionary connotation were Scottish Communist Party Member and Nationalist, Poet Hugh MacDiarmid and Anthony Abrahams, Jamaican student and President of the Oxford Union. Interestingly, Tariq Ali now a *New Left Review* editor, novelist, and writer-activist was Oxford Student chair of the debate. Speaking on how the "sacrosanct image of Oxford [was] shattered by...the fist of revolutionary logic", Lebert Bethune states:

The irony of his being at Oxford in a debate against, of all people, the Earl of Lonford, Privy Councillor to the Queen (whatever that might mean), wasn't lost on Malcolm. But while smiling at that, he pointed out to me that the office of presidency of the Oxford Union was held then by a black Jamaican, who was proposing the motion for the debate. He also pointed out that the incoming president for the following term was a Pakistani. I didn't believe then, nor on reflection, that Malcolm was rejoicing in the symbolic "domination" of Oxford by men of color, but it was a matter of more than simple irony for him.³

³ Lebert Bethune, "Malcolm X in Europe," in *Malcolm X The Man and His Times*, ed. John Henrik Clarke 1969. (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc, 1990), 232

In a videotaped interview, Abrahams stated: “I have never been as sorry for a man as I was for Humphrey Barkley [a left leaning Conservative Parliamentarian] that night, because Malcolm took his speech and, I mean, he just tore him up.” Barkley sparked Malcolm’s ire when he unfairly referred to him as “North America’s leading exponent of apartheid,” compared him to South Africa’s Verwoerd⁴ (Bethune, 233), and stated that for Malcolm “Liberty...means racial segregation” (Carew, 74-77). Nevertheless, Malcolm lost the debate 137 to 228.

In a televised interview, the former Oxford Union president painted a picture of Malcolm as an organic intellectual dedicated to Black internationalism: He highlighted Malcolm’s “gift of analogy,” the fact that he never repeated himself during his stay, his poignant differences with Dr. King yet his respect for strategic flexibility, and the expression of his thoughts “at a totally cerebral level.” Italian Communist philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the “organic intellectual” captures well Malcolm’s position as a key voice in the Black liberation movement:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its won function not only in the economic but in the social and political fields...

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, permanent persuader and not just a simple orator (but superior at the same time to the abstract mathematical

⁴ In light of the ill conceived comparison between Malcolm and key ideologues of South African apartheid during the debate, it’s interesting to note that Abrahams during Malcolm’s visit was “gated” in his chambers after six p.m. due to his participation in a protest in response to the jailing of Nelson Mandela during the prior school term. Malcolm in solidarity with his host’s confinement refused to attend the evening functions planned by the University. Instead, Abrahams’s flat was transformed into an all-night meeting spot, where Malcolm and the Oxford radical student body exchanged ideas.

spirit); from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history, without which one remains ‘specialised’ and does not become ‘directive’ (specialized and political).⁵

This is not to detract from Malcolm’s eloquence, only to acknowledge in the Gramscian formulation how the new revolutionary intellectual’s power derives from an engaged stance on behalf of a variegated group of stakeholders. Malcolm as an individual leader is insufficient without “social contestation,” and “active participation in practical life,” as spokesperson for his political and social base. I’m using base here not in a stilted, static, or mechanistic sense⁶, but rather, in the sense of what community one organizes and what interests one represents in their presentation and advocacy. Malcolm’s success as an organic intellectual and Black militant (his “won function”) can be accredited to the fact that in his rhetoric he both simultaneously appeals to his broad social base (the Black inner-city working class) as well as his ever-expanding political base (revolutionary Black nationalists and their allies), without vacillating on principles.

Malcolm addressed the Oxford audience with characteristic humor, candor, and commitment. The first half of his speech, in which he denounced bombardment campaigns against villages in the Congo, is not transcribed. His remarks capture a sort of contradictory fidelity and utter faithlessness in the American legislative, congressional, and judicial branches to secure justice and protection for the majority of Black people. He oscillates between specific attention to the particularity of the American Black Freedom struggle to more universal pronouncements in terms of linking with allies both internationally and within the borders of the United States. He articulates the imperative

⁵ Antonio Gramsci *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Edited and Translated by Quinton Hare, Geoffrey Nowell Smith (NY: International Publishers, 1995), 5, 10

⁶ For a complicating of the Marxian formulation of Base and Superstructure see: Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 75-82

of maintaining strategic flexibility—“the whatever, however, whenever is necessary” key to my argument. In his remarks, he substitutes the more narrow identity marker of “position” with the more systemic-oriented keyword “condition.” It is also striking to note the occurrence of the term “racialist”, replacing the earlier oft repeated “racist” in other of his speeches. Malcolm’s remarks enact a further clarification of a mass-line radical Black internationalism that he would sustain until his assassination. He transforms Goldwater’s formulation beyond its original meaning and intent:

I read once, passingly, about a man named Shakespeare. I only read about him passingly, but I remember one thing he wrote that kind of moved me. He put it in the mouth of Hamlet, I think it was, who said, “To be or not to be”—he was in doubt of something. [*Laughter*] “Whether it was nobler in the mind of man to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”—moderation—“or to take up arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them.”

And I go for that. If you take up arms, you’ll end it. But if you sit around and wait for the one who’s in power to make up his mind that he should end it, you’ll be waiting a long time.

And in my opinion the young generation of whites, Blacks, browns, whatever else there is—you’re living at a time of extremism, a time of revolution, a time when there’s got to be a change. People in power have misused it, and now there has to be a change and a better world has to be built, and the only way it’s going to be built is with extreme methods. And I for one will join in with anyone, I don’t care what color you are, as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth.⁷

Malcolm’s Oxford podium remarks coupled with his private conversation with Guyanese novelist, critic, and political activist Jan Carew present a consolidated cross-section of the political concerns underlying this project. Malcolm helps introduce an exploration of the mediation between the particular and the universal, a different mapping

⁷ Malcolm X. *Malcolm X Talks to Young People: Speeches in the U.S. Britain & Africa*. 1965. ed. Steve Clark (NY, London, Montréal, Sydney: Pathfinder, 1991), 25-26. I want to note my reservations about this one of many co-ventures between Malcolm’s widow, the late Dr. Betty Shabazz and Pathfinder Press, the imprint of the [USA] Socialist Workers Party. Subsequent to their publication, some controversy ensued between Dr. Shabazz and Pathfinder over the ownership of these books and accusations that the SWP editors altered Malcolm’s words in order to fall suit with their specific Trotsky-inflected Marxism.

of an understanding of the tragic via Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and most importantly the relationship between leader and base in the context of revolutionary struggle. Reflecting on his Oxford visit, Malcolm recounts to Carew:

I honestly didn't know what to expect when Tony Abrahams phoned to invite me to Oxford...I remember clearly that the minute I stepped off the train, I felt I'd suddenly backpedaled into Mayflower-time. Everything was smaller than I expected, and slower and older. Age was just seeping out of the pores of every stone. The students were wearing caps and gowns as if they graduated the first day they arrived and were then handed diplomas years later, and they were riding bicycles that should've been dumped long ago. I couldn't help wondering if I'd made a mistake accepting the invitation to take part in the debate. But Tony Abrahams had met me at the train station and, somehow, his Jamaican ease banished some of my doubts. From the moment we met, I couldn't help noticing how easily he dealt with those white folks at Oxford and a lot of them seemed to know him. He kept his Jamaicaness and yet he walked around Oxford like he owned it. Negroes at Harvard and Yale always looked to me as if they were being apologetic and making excuses for their Black selves in what they're tricked into thinking is a white holy-of-holies. Looking back, I must admit that I liked Oxford. It was old and cold, but the students had open, inquiring minds. It was a place where a ruling class reserved a special space for the best of minds to be thrown into a brain-pool where they could learn to think their way out of any situation, no matter how difficult. That's something Black folks need to look into, but we would have to shape ours differently; we'd have to carve out our space to think in the middle of a struggle in the inner cities, and from there we would have to see the whole world. Still, at the end of every one of those four days, when I was alone in my guest apartment, the hustle and bustle of Harlem never failed to break into the silence and remind me that there at Oxford, I was near the top of a pyramid while below were the oppressed carrying it on their backs (Carew, 68-9).

Even in casual reminiscence, Malcolm helps introduce the underlying concerns animating my endeavor. Oxford, that strange Mayflower-like "old and cold" place provides for Malcolm a further strategy, a further institutional paradigm, and a further methodological example to relate to the specific contours of his praxis as part of the Black Radical Tradition. The conduct of the students provide another example for

negotiating “societies structured in dominance”⁸, hence expanding his ken of vision.

There was an international make-up internal to the Oxford student body. However, for Malcolm specifically and the Black Radical Tradition in general it is not a one-sided case of strict appropriation and application of a different theoretical or institutional example to local environs. Malcolm’s intervention at Oxford changed the caliber of that specific setting. He “worked” on Oxford as much as Oxford worked on his own clarification of a revolutionary vision.⁹ The theory and praxis nexus essential for moving the struggle forward as framed by Malcolm connects the “in the middle” of the inner city articulated as a core part of a broader international perspective. The moment that the individual leader settles in the serene isolation of the English quiet, his one of multiple bases, the “hustle and bustle of Harlem” seeps in disrupting the illusion of serenity. Malcolm is not hostile to the pressure-cooker or think-tank aspect of Oxford; rather, he is troubled by withdraw from society for training by the students. He works in solidarity with two publics in the above passage. Both the Harlem public and the “mass” of Oxford students he builds with during late night sessions. The “hustle and bustle” of Harlem invades the chimera of stillness at Oxford much like a similar gesture in C.L.R. James’s *Preface to The Black Jacobins Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, in which

⁸ For more on this concept and articulation see: Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in Black British Cultural Studies A Reader. Eds. Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara, Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 1996. 16-60; David Kazanjian, The colonizing trick: national culture and imperial citizenship in early America (Minneapolis, MN, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Ernest Laclau, Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics, 2nd ed. (London, New York: Verso, 2001); Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” Social Text 66 19, no. 1 (2001): 45-73

⁹ The ensemble constituting The Haitian Revolution, the main site of this investigation, likewise impacted and worked upon existing thought and praxis in the colonialist countries. Susan Buck-Morss demonstrates with an inspiring brilliance and originality how the actions and studied example of the Haitian revolutionists inspired Hegel’s concept of the Master-Slave dialectic. Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti”. Critical Inquiry. 26.4 (2000): 821-865

James writes: “It was in the stillness of a seaside suburb that could be heard most clearly and insistently the booming of Franco’s heavy artillery, the rattle of Stalin’s firing squads and the fierce shrill turmoil of the revolutionary movement striving for clarity and influence.”¹⁰ Malcolm’s negotiation with multiple masses in his political organizing, teaching, and speaking helps foreground a key point in the main problematic of this project. Exploring the problematic of leader versus base in the Black Radical imagination never means that such a base is either singular or static. Such a base is often in flux and subject to change at different points of a struggle, both highlighting the precariousness of negotiating communication between parties as well as the room for error. The base is also not a still mass waiting to be activated by the leader. There is a constitutive inter-dependence in such an exchange.

Through an extended examination of the Trinidadian activist-intellectual C.L.R. James’s writings on the Haitian Revolution, this project attempts to trace a line of concern with the leader/mass problematic in the work of an interrelated cluster of revolutionary activist-intellectuals. This problematic is a question of choices in representation, as it relates to both historiography and dramatic performance. Such an ongoing concern of narrative choice in the sample of literature corresponds with the history of radical struggles in the African Diaspora; but, in the last instance maintains its own autonomous existence as an aesthetic strategy in the literature examined. This specific problematic, that I am defining as the Black radical tragic, signifies a literary strategy (a mode of representation) used by James and others to examine the

¹⁰ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 1963 (New York: Vintage Books, 1989),xi. Subsequent references to this text will be referred to parenthetically as *BLACK JACOBINS*.

contingencies of history and the relationship between leaders and groups of people striving for radical change.

Beginning to Define the Terms and Focus The Terrain of Debate

...Even to name something, is to wait for it in the place you think it will pass.¹¹
-Amiri Baraka

The main comparative thrust of my endeavors will place James in conversation with another one of the British Empire's rebel intellectuals. Its focus leaves Trinidad for Wales and leaves the hollowed halls of Oxford for the lecture halls of Cambridge, in which the Welsh working class literary-scholar Raymond Williams¹² engaged a radical student body on the ramifications of the aesthetics and politics of tragedy as a way to think about revolution. In his book *Modern Tragedy* (1966), Raymond Williams tacitly takes on George Steiner's influential study *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), in which the author argues that a secular modern society has no room for tragedy since it has both killed its gods and extinguished the possibility for collectivist restructuring of its society.¹³ The most problematic bias in Steiner's thesis is in its privileging of Greek Attic Tragedy as the exemplary mode rendering all latter efforts to present effective

¹¹ Amiri Baraka, *Home: Social Essays*. 1966. (Hopwell: The Ecco Press, 1998), 175

¹² For further background on Williams my study consulted: Dennis Dworkin, ed., *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain. History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997). Terry Eagleton. "Criticism and Politics: The Work of Raymond Williams," *New Left Review*. 1.95 (1976): 3-23 Anthony Barnett. "Raymond Williams and Marxism: A Rejoinder to Terry Eagleton". *New Left Review*. 1.99 (1976): 47-64 Terry Eagleton. "Resources for a Journey of Hope: The Significance of Raymond Williams". *New Left Review*. 1.168. (1988):3-11. Raymond Williams. "A Dialogue on Tragedy". *New Left Review*. 1.13-14. (1962): 22-35 Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952). Raymond Williams. *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

¹³ "The metaphysics of Christianity and Marxism are anti-tragic. That, in essence is the dilemma of Modern tragedy." George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*. 1961. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980), 324

tragic drama moot. Steiner's error is the error of a Universalism taking the form of a narrow Eurocentrism (although not labeled as such by Williams).¹⁴ Kenneth Surin situates the intellectual atmosphere at the time of Williams's composition of his text as one in which "the terms of the exchange on the nature of tragedy were those of an intellectual politics very specific to the teaching of English in Cambridge in the 1950s and 1960s."¹⁵ Raymond Williams leaves a position teaching adult education classes in the study of literature and culture for a lecturing position in Cambridge, where he reconfigures his insights from an earlier study, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (1952), to meet the challenge of Cambridge radicals more interested in talking about insurrection than the nuance of stage spatial presentation and set design.¹⁶ *Modern Tragedy* marks the tension between the connotations of the "tragedy", at once as a literary genre and at the same time a colloquial term for a terrible calamity, as the key focus for Williams's analysis:

Tragedy has become, in our culture, a common name for this kind of experience. Not only the examples I have given, but many other kinds of events—a mining disaster, a burned-out family, a broken career, a smash on the road—are called tragedies. Yet tragedy is also a name derived from a particular complicated yet arguably continuous history. The survival of many great works which are all tragedies makes this presence especially powerful. This coexistence of meanings seems to me quite natural, and there is no fundamental difficulty in both seeing their relations and distinguishing

¹⁴ For an extended discussion of Eurocentricism consult: Samir Amin, Eurocentricism, Trans. Russell Moore (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), 10-11. Martin Bernal, Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Vol I, The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989)

¹⁵ Kenneth Surin, "Raymond Williams on Tragedy and Revolution," in Cultural Materialism on Raymond Williams, ed. Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 145. Subsequent references to this text will be referred to parenthetically as *PRENDERGAST*.

¹⁶ "But in the process of giving these lectures, with a particular awareness now of the more general debate over the nature of tragedy, they became transformed. It was as if I went into the lecture room with the text of a chapter from *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* in front of me, and came out with the text of a chapter from *Modern Tragedy*. The same authors are discussed in two books, the same themes developed, the same quotations used—which is the key point of continuity." Williams qt. in John Brenkman "Raymond Williams and Marxism". Prendergast 259

between them. Yet it is very common for men trained in what is not the academic tradition to be impatient and even contemptuous of what they regard as loose and vulgar uses of ‘tragedy’ in ordinary speech and in the newspapers.¹⁷

Williams uses this multiple signification of tragedy (“the coexistence of meanings”) to chart how its meanings are classed as a linguistic phenomenon and carry along side them assumptions pertaining to continuity, tradition, and modes of progress. He opens up the term to possibilities for various forms of conceptual work so it can both encompass literary production as well as signifying the life hurdles and various defeats and let downs in day-to-day working class life. The study glosses the progression of the tragic in European philosophy and cultural production and provides a reading of how its character changes in thematic focus and political weight. From Hegel’s proposition that genuine tragic action needs to include “the principle of individual freedom and independence, or at least that of self-determination” (*MT*, 55) to Schopenhauer’s secularization of fate and positing of tragic suffering as rooted in the human condition, Williams presents his meditation on tragic development from Hegel up to the modern “death of liberal tragedy”—Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams and the radical rejection of tragedy, in the case of Bertolt Brecht. Williams as a Marxist is suspicious of dramatic tragedy that focuses its attention on the fate of an individual; more precisely, on a dramatic narrative that progresses via attention to an individual’s fate. He underscores his point that, “this identification of the ‘world-historical individual’ with the ‘tragic hero’ is in fact doubtfully Marxist. It shifts attention from the objective conflict, which is present in the whole action, to the single and heroic personality, whom it does not seem

¹⁷ Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*. 1966. ed. Pamela McCallum (Canada: Broadview Press, 2006), 33-4. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *MT*. Another edition published in London by Verso in 1979 contains an afterword, not utilized in this study.

necessary to regard as tragic if he in fact embodies ‘the will of the world-spirit’ or of history”(MT, 57).

The work that I am examining in these subsequent chapters challenges the above claim. This cross-section of the Black Radical Tradition is not yet prepared to let go of its identification with the ‘world-historical individual’ and ‘tragic hero’ and certainly not because of Williams’s reasoning that focus on such an individual is “doubtfully Marxist.” I am not sure it is even useful to exorcise this productive tension between individual and mass base, even in the admirable goal of finally getting past such a crux. I am interested in looking at questions of how the opposition and interdependence between individual and variegated masses relate to questions of historical methodology and representation as articulated in the sampling of the snapshot of the Diaspora writing constituting a part of the Black Radical Tradition. The relationship between leader and base reoccurs in the literature examined in the pages that follow with both consistency and variance and demands protracted investigation. I will accomplish this via an engagement with C.L.R. James’s stretching of the category of the tragic in his full-length study of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*. Before we jump to this primary focus on James, I want to linger a little in Williams to stake out his understanding of the political work of tragedy.

Williams traces what he calls the “climax and decline” of the tragic form,¹⁸ in an article for *New Left Review*, “From Hero to Victim: Notes on the Development of Liberal Tragedy”(later incorporated as a chapter of *Modern Tragedy*). The essay argues that

¹⁸ Raymond Williams, “From Hero to Victim: Notes on the development of liberal tragedy,” *New Left Review*. 1.20 (1963): 54 Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *HERO*.

liberalism's political economy offers up no viable solutions to escape the "deadlock" represented in the tragic form. Tragedy in general is defined as "the conflict between an individual and the forces that destroy him." Liberal tragedy is defined as "that of a man at the height of his powers and the limits of his strength, at once aspiring and being defeated, releasing and destroyed by his own energies. The structure is liberal in its emphasis on the surpassing individual, and tragic in its ultimate recognition of defeat or the limits of victory."¹⁹ In his veiled critique of Steiner, it is the fault of us moderns that we read backwards imposing upon Greek tragedy a focus on the individual. The thrust of Greek tragic drama for Williams is not individual psychology; but rather, human history as "man's inheritance and relationships, with a world that ultimately transcends him." For Williams, Christianity contributes an alteration of this Greek world-view with an added emphasis on the individual culminating in a Romanticist notion of tragedy in which Prometheus and Faust are heroic exemplars of a humanist individual rebellion (*HERO*, 60). Williams performs a close-reading of Henrik Ibsen's plays, whom he sees as representative of the "crux of liberal tragedy" in which "the heroic liberator [is] opposed and destroyed by a false society"; i.e. "the liberal martyr" (*HERO*, 62).

The tragic form and aspiration of the hero takes the form in Ibsen of an understanding of debt, both as a kind of dissolving of self in the form of a proto-Freudian inheritance and the material inheritance of a bankrupt, false society. By the time we get to a post-*Crucible* Miller, the Ibsenian tragic martyr is longer an opportunity for consolation. Individual self-sacrifice is no longer presented in this scheme of the decline of liberal tragedy as a dismal way out of the quagmire. As Williams explains, "Proctor, in

¹⁹The masculinist implications of Williams's cultural criticism is examined by Shiach and Kaplan both included in the Prendergast collection: Morag Shiach, "A Gendered History of Cultural Categories", 51-70 Cora Kaplan, "'What We Have Again to Say': Williams, Feminism, and the 1840s", 211-236

The Crucible, had died as an act of self-preservation: preservation of the truth of himself and of others, in opposition to the lives of the persecuting authority... This sense of personal verification by death is the last stage of liberal tragedy” (*HERO* 67). The heroic martyr in *The Crucible* cynically morphs into the disconnected individuals depicted by Arthur Miller in his *Death of a Salesman* and *A View from the Bridge*: “In Willy Loman’s death the disconnection confirmed a general fact about the society; in Eddie Carbone’s death, Miller has moved further back, and the death of the victim illustrates a total condition” (*HERO* 67)—a total condition identified by Williams here as the self against the self, ringing the death bell for liberal tragedy. Compare this depressing no-exit assessment with Gloria T. Hull’s dated but still useful point: “Because of their historical and present experiences, black writers could never accept these conditions as being ‘in the nature of things’ and thus succumb to the defeatist, nihilistic attitude toward life that characterizes modernism. Joseph Walker, the popular playwright and actor (*The River Niger*), once affirmed that he and other young black writers still believe in human possibilities and thus have not abandoned the concept of ‘the hero’...”²⁰

Part of my project’s goal is an attempt to explore this structure in its literary representation in a cross-section of Black Radical dramatic writing and to account for the privileging of drama in such a representation. This is hardly an essentialist claim. It is not that the tragic heroes of Miller as theorized by Williams exist in a different time and place as the tragic heroes examined in my study or as canvassed by Hull. They occupy the same world system; but share in the protection, privilege, and material wealth of such a world unevenly. The gaps in need of mediation between the claims of bourgeois

²⁰ Gloria T Hull, “Notes on a Marxist Interpretation of Black American Literature”. Black American Literature Forum. 12.4 (1978): 151

democracy versus the actuality of those claims is one of the many reasons why it is an error to posit the strivings of a movement such as Civil Rights as diminutively reformist. Such unevenness dictates differing assessments about the efficacy of the individual hero as well as collectivist action—or at least begs this question, which will remain open for the time being.

In a key passage from *Modern Tragedy*, Williams takes on the tall order of trying to unhinge the opposition between tragedy and revolution:

What seems to matter, against every difficulty, is that the received ideas no longer describe our experience. The most common idea of revolution excludes too much of our social experience. But it is more than this. The idea of tragedy, in its ordinary form, excludes especially that tragic experience which is social, and the idea of revolution, again in its ordinary form, excludes especially that social experience which is tragic. And if this is so, the contradiction is significant. It is not a merely formal opposition, of two ways of reading experience, which we can choose. In our own time, especially, it is the connections between revolution and tragedy—connections lived and known but not acknowledged as ideas—which seem most clear and significant. (*MT*, 89)

With a troubling complementariness, both bourgeois histories (the tale of victors) and the history of revolutions (the brand told from the vantage point of the oppressed, regardless whether or not victorious) often insufficiently account for the full range of experience subsumed within and not fitting “received ideas”. This is both a product of their composite form as well as content.²¹ Both James and Williams work with great care to provide correctives to an “idea of revolution [that] excludes too much...experience.” James’s privileging of the chorus in revisiting the historiography of both the French and Haitian Revolutions marks a prior realization of Williams’s challenge. James uses the “chorus” to signify the mass base of social actors that both contain the drive, aptitude,

²¹ For an elaboration on this problem see: Jacques Rancière. *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*. Trans. Hassan Melehy. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)

and structural position needed to make a revolution, rendering mediation by individual leadership sometimes harmful, in other occasions completely superfluous. Both figures recoiled from the Soviet Union, due to its degeneration under the leadership of Stalin underlining the fact that Williams's opposition is, as I have suggested, "not merely formal." James's Haiti period in his scholarship successfully stretches experience to accommodate both the voices and actions that slip through a more narrow account of revolutionary triumph.

Enter Haiti

In the twentieth century, a cluster of Black radical intellectuals revisit the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1803 to further explore the tension between an individual leader and his or her base, during a process of revolutionary transformation. These kindred spirits' dramatic plays as well as James's full-length study comprise the bulk of my analysis. Keeping faith with my effort to trace this individual/mass problematic, I will also examine prose pieces on key radical figures that in their formal composition trouble the very separation between leader and base. For example, James in his full-length Haiti study explicitly structures his narrative so that the emphasis shifts from an exploration of Toussaint L'Ouverture as an individual personality, to a discussion of both the mass of Haitian people that also "make the revolution" as well as the historical and geopolitical elements that comprise that battle-ground. In such an expertly crafted example of wavering between narrative foci, the tension between individual and group motion is formally reproduced and underscored by James, via his expert use of form. Haiti is pivotal here. This is surely due to the Haitian Revolution's centrality in the Black Radical imagination as the "first successful" Black revolution. Intellectuals thinking about the

African Diaspora have spent over a century contesting the significance of some its key actors:

For De Vastey... Toussaint, like Henri Christophe, is one of the great father figures of the new nation. For Ardouin, he is a tool of the whites in the struggle, because of his hatred for mulattoes. This irreconcilable difference of opinion was followed by other writers—both Haitian and foreign, and extends into the twentieth century itself. For James Stephens, Toussaint becomes the incarnation of the Oroonoko legend of the westernized black man, whose virtues are set off against the vices of Emperor Napoleon. For Schoelcher he is essentially a good man corrupted by too much power—a view that naturally suggested itself to a disciple of Tocqueville. For Aimé Césaire (one of the founders of the *noiriste* approach known in English as “*negritude*”)—coming to the twentieth century writers—he is the catalyst that turns a slave rebellion into a genuine social revolution. For the Haitians François Duvalier and Lorrain Denis, he is a noble spirit fighting against the greed of the whites and the prejudices of the mulattoes, almost as if Duvalier were thus presaging his own elevation to black power as the historic successor to Toussaint. For C.L.R. James, finally, Toussaint take on the form of a great revolutionary leader who has lost contact with the masses and lacks ideology, almost as if James were perceiving in Toussaint a historical anticipation of the failure of the Russian Revolution after 1917 in its Stalinist phase to create a genuinely classless society.²²

The “first successful” Black Revolution never seems to lose favor in a radical imaginary. I place first successful revolution in question here not in any way to minimize the accomplishments of the Black Jacobin toilers. I only want to gesture towards what we will explore in the *Conclusion* that the question of what defines success, or for that matter also failure and defeat, in staking out an inventory of the Black Radical Tragic is surely that-- a question, not a stable consensus. Meaning, there is a danger in stating firsts²³ in

²² Gordon K Lewis, Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Up, 1983), 259

²³ On the problem of beginnings consult: Edward W. Said, Beginnings Intention & Method. 1975. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1985)

that you risk closing off prior examples of effective rebellion and revolution.²⁴ My project explores James's specific take on the notion of tragedy and demonstrates how its framing gets expanded in the sample of mainly dramatic literature.

I want to think about tragedy as the genre most suitable to think about the relation between leader and base in Black Radical projects of social transformation. Just as Cedric J. Robinson in his 1983 opus *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, a work I will return to shortly in an effort to define the terms of this study, suggests an alternative genealogy that foregrounds racist thought as central to world historical development both prefiguring and constitutive of the rise of capitalism, I propose to excavate a select segment of Black radical theoretical and theatrical production for an alternative (Jamesian) account of tragedy. The Black radical understanding of the tragic is anchored in James's formulations in both his full-length study of the Haitian Revolution and play of the same title written and performed a year prior to his composition of the book. James play precedes his historic study, which makes it constitute somewhat of a prologue or prefatory sketch to the larger book. The study *Black Jacobins* both refers to dramatic form in general and tragedy in particular when stating its claims. The main question this project asks is what is at stake in focusing a study and performance on the leader of a revolutionary movement versus granting centrality to what James refers to in his June 1971 talk, "How I Would Rewrite *The Black Jacobins*" as the "envisaged entry of the chorus."²⁵ James, in this talk argues that he did not sufficiently

²⁴For a succinct explanation of the difference between rebellion and revolution see: Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History*. 1990. (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992), 1-20

²⁵ C.L.R. James "How I Would Rewrite *The Black Jacobins*" *Small Axe* 8. (2000): 111 Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *REWRITE*.

incorporate the chorus in both the play and historical study. My study wants to preserve the original tension between leader and base of both historical and dramatic presentations and mine both for their insights. This project stresses the need to keep this problematic alive and think leader and base together, to resist the temptation for simple negation of focus on the individual for a heightened attention on the mass. In this sense, my project is primarily concerned with questions of methodology and choices of representation (both separately in political historical writing and performance) that grapples with the challenge of the leader/mass relationship to further along the goal of realizing the late Toni Cade Bambara's oft-repeated prompt to "Make the Revolution." James's tension between a strategically flawed Toussaint and a chorus of revolutionary emancipated slaves will be the backbone of this study.

Stretching Aristotle's category of the tragic in his *Poetics*²⁶, James writes the following about Toussaint L'Ouverture's (the leader and military strategist of the Haitian Revolution) failure to communicate with his base:

The hamartia, the tragic flaw, which we have constructed from Aristotle, was in Toussaint not a moral weakness. It was a specific error, a total miscalculation of the constituent events...The Greek tragedians could always go to their gods for a dramatic embodiment of fate, the dike which rules over a world neither they nor we ever made. But not Shakespeare himself could have found such a dramatic embodiment of fate as Toussaint struggled against, Bonaparte himself; nor could the furthest imagination have envisaged the entry of the chorus, of the ex-slaves themselves, as the arbiters of their own fate. Toussaint's certainty of this as the ultimate and irresistible resolution of the problem to which he refused to limit himself, that explains his mistakes and atones for them. (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 291-2)

What are the specific contours and general principles one can extract from Toussaint's "total miscalculation of events"? What according to James's notion of tragedy is the

²⁶Aristotle. *The Rhetoric and The Poetics of Aristotle*. Ed. Fredrich Solmsen. (NY: The Modern Library, 1954)

inter-relationship between poetics and history? How is Aristotle modified and challenged by James? And what does all this have to do with the leader-base relationship in the struggle to overhaul an oppressive social order? Such will be the focus for our subsequent chapters. The dramatic play provides the categories and the effective framing giving momentum to his later study. In the form of the writing itself, both play and book of *The Black Jacobins* rehearse and repeat the interdependence between revolutionary leader/individual and mass base/ chorus. Just as Williams uses his exploration of tragedy to elaborate issues surrounding the vexed notion of “tradition”, I will push James’s notion of the tragic for what it tells us about the tension between leader and base. Before proceeding to the summation of chapters, I want to further define my terms by taking a brief detour through the scholarship of Cedric J. Robinson and specifically, through his invocation of the Black radical tradition, a term that, as Frederic Jameson commented about the word post-modernism, “for good or ill, we cannot *not* use...”²⁷

Black Marxism operates under the premise that a racialized framework for the division of society was neither a by-product of capitalism nor its splintering off from feudalism via negation; it was in Robin D.G. Kelley’s words “there at the outset.”²⁸ “For the vast majority of the planet’s peoples, the global economy publicizes itself in human misery”(ROB, xxviii). Neither hagiographic studies of the individual nor a sort of infra-political exclusive attention to quotidian acts of resistance of the masses will get us out of the quagmire. Kelley argues that *Black Marxism* “literally rewrites the history of the

²⁷ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. 1991. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001),xxii.

²⁸ Robin D.G. Kelley, Foreword. *Black Marxism The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. By Cedric J. Robinson. 1983. (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xiii. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as ROB.

rise of the West from ancient times to the mid-twentieth century, tracing the roots of Black radical thought to a shared epistemology among diverse African people and providing a withering critique of Western Marxism and its inability to comprehend either the racial character of capitalism and the civilization in which it was born or mass movements outside Europe”(ROB, xii). In the first chapter, “Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development,” Robinson elaborates on his theory that “the historical development of world capitalism was influenced in a most fundamental way by the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism” (ROB, 9). Robinson focuses on the racist ideology prevalent in Europe since the twelfth century and discusses how the European working class has always exhibited a “racial calculus,” attested to by the experience of Europe’s internal racial others, like the Scots and Irish. At each moment of social growth according to Robinson, “Race was its epistemology, its ordering principle, its organizing structure, its moral authority, its economy of justice, commerce, and power”(ROB, xxxi). Robinson’s intervention stands on the back of Black radical sociologist Oliver Cromwell Cox (ROB, xiii) author of *Capitalism as a System* (1964). In his *2000 Preface*, the author expands on a Cox epigram that boldly declares: “The workers in the advanced nations have done all they could, or intended, to do—which was always something short of revolution”(ROB, xxvii). It is Robinson’s prerogative to archive the resources, energies, philosophies, metaphysics, and various Africanist retentions necessary to complete the job.

The Black Radical Tradition described as “an accretion, over generations, of collective intelligence gathered from struggle. In the daily encounters and petty resistances to domination, slaves had acquired a sense of the calculus of oppression as

well as its overt organization and instrumentation. These experiences lent themselves to a means of preparation for more epic resistance movements”(ROB, xxx). All this is to underline one of his key assertions in the text that, Black radicalism “cannot be understood within the context of its genesis” and that it is “a negation of Western civilization, but not in the direct sense of a simple dialectical negation” (ROB, 73). In this phrase—“cannot be understood within the context of its genesis,” Robinson means that Black radical praxis does not originate directly out of slavery and colonialism; but rather, something prior—what Robinson calls the “specifically African character of those struggles”(ROB, 5). This “African character” prefigures and predates the experience of enslavement, colonization, and imperialism. It is a theory of ontological totality that prefigures the African Holocaust.

The social cauldron of Black radicalism is Western society. Western society, however, has been its location and its objective condition but not—except in a most perverse fashion—its specific inspiration. Black radicalism is a negation of Western civilization, but not in the direct sense of a simple dialectical negation. It is certain that the evolving tradition of Black radicalism owes its peculiar moment to the historical interdiction of African life by European agents. In this sense, the African experience of the past five years is simply one element in the mesh of European history: some of the objective requirements for Europe’s industrial development were met by the physical and mental exploitation of Asian, African, and native American peoples. This experience, though, was merely the condition for Black radicalism—its immediate reason for and object of being—but not the foundation for its nature or character. Black radicalism, consequently, cannot be understood with the particular context of its genesis. It is not a variant of Western radicalism whose proponents happen to be Black. Rather, it is a specifically response to an oppression emergent from the immediate determinants of European development in the modern era and framed by orders of human exploitation woven into the interstices of European social life from the inception of Western civilization... (ROB, 73)

Robinson goes on to quote a source that argues that African survivals in the New World point “not to tribal peculiarities but to the essential oneness of African culture”. Brent

Edwards in the introduction to a dossier on Black Radicalism in the pages of the journal *Social Text* offers up a useful comparison between Robinson's ideas and the "subaltern studies" group of historians, in the example of scholar Ranajit Guha. Edwards argues that Robinson employs the phrase "ontological totality" in something like the way that subaltern studies historiography invests in what Gayatri Spivak has termed a "strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously political interest."²⁹ It is peculiar that Robinson in an effort to show how African retentions inform strategies of survival, resistance, rebellion, and revolution uses the term "oneness." Later on he refers to this as "ontological totality" (*ROB*, 171). Perhaps, in doing so he concedes too much force to the narrow legacy of racist revisionist scholarship his study challenges. The language of oneness and ontology reads as examples of the very simple dialectical negation his study with great learnedness and grace takes so much pain to challenge. Why conflate the different African peoples into one homogenous grouping? I do not intend, as it is beyond my scope here, to resolve such problems; but only to point to them, to acknowledge how my choice of phrasing differs from their initial formulation. The formulation of Black radical tragedy explored in these pages has to do with a commonly shared aesthetic strategy of representation, not some sort of ontological singularity. I want to offer the following proposition—Perhaps Robinson's formulation of not being able to understand Black radicalism "in the context of its genesis" could be productively read for my use here as intersecting with and echoing the challenge from Williams to think an account of revolution that does not exclude too much of social experience. The trouble abounds in

²⁹ Brent H Edwards, "The 'Autonomy' of Black Radicalism", *Social Text*, 67 (2001): 6. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *AUTONOMY*.

an examination of Robinson's short chapter "The Nature of the Black Radical Tradition" as it relates to Haiti.

In this chapter, Robinson attempts to define the character "or more accurately the ideological, philosophical, and epistemological natures of the Black movement whose dialectical matrix we believe was capitalist slavery and materialism" (*ROB*, 167). For Robinson the anti-systemic forces, "the mostly unlikely oppositions (India, Algeria, Angola, Vietnam, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Mozambique)", require "the total configuration of human experience" and new forms. Like James, Robinson wants a total re-imagining of categories. In reference to Kenya's Land and Freedom Army, he privileges what he calls "the integral totality of the people themselves" (*ROB*, 169) over the objective military capacities of their British rivals. It is in Robinson's examples where the troubles arise. He argues that an extraordinary lack of vengeful violence characterizes the history of slave rebellions. Nat Turner and Toussaint L'Ouverture and the uprising of Jamaican slaves in 1831 serve his point. Problematically, Robinson states "James ambivalently found Dessalines wanting for his transgressions of the tradition" (*ROB*, 168). This example refers to Toussaint's successor's massacre of the whites of Haiti as an example of an aberration from the pattern of non-excessive use of violence during revolts. Robinson wants the example of restraint in violence to stand in for moderation found in a prior oneness; but, James's point is that Dessalines's decision to massacre the whites on the Island comes from the prompting and avarice of the British trade representative who wants to further destabilize France's hold on the island. His footnote from James here is problematically interpreted as gesturing towards an idea that Toussaint as a slave-owner himself (an highly debatable assertion) was therefore more attracted to the "French

revolutionary bourgeois ideology”(ROB, 369). My purpose here is to signal my argument’s indebtedness to an understanding of the Black Radical Tradition as “accretion” and “collective intelligence gathered from struggle” and begin to indicate how I position my own thinking in relation to its claims. Robinson’s study is also crucial because it begins to map out an intellectual history of twentieth century Black radical intellectuals and writers in particular. Framing language and critical terminology carry the baggage of their assumptions. It is beyond my scope here to engage fully in the assertions of his study and accompanying archive, awesome in scope. I only wanted to briefly gesture towards some of the promises and problems raised by his argument’s engagement with the Haitian Revolution.³⁰

C.L.R. James’s Filling in the “Angry Silences”³¹ of Raymond Williams

Finding out what *Culture and Society* left out has become, over the years, something of an intellectual game.³²

-Stuart Hall

In his assessment of Black British Cultural Studies relationship to three major texts in the field of British intellectual radicalism—R. Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), Raymond Williams’s *The Long Revolution* (1961) and E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1980), Paul Gilroy discusses Williams’s silences

³⁰ Robinson’s first book looks at the philosophical underpinnings of anarchism: Cedric J Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980).

³¹Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and its theoretical legacies”. 1992. in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. eds. Kuan-Hsing Chen and David Morley. (London and New York: 1996), 263. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *LEG*.

³²David Simpson, “Raymond Williams: Feeling for Structures, Voicing ‘History’”. Prendergast, 35.

surrounding identity provides a definition of his concept of ‘structures of feeling’.³³ For Gilroy, it is imperative to note how Williams’s method opens up possibilities for further exploration, in excess of the often, narrow confines of his own analytical priorities. Stuart Hall, who co-authored the *May-Day Manifesto* in 1967-1968 with Williams and Thompson, (*BRENK*, 247) continues this line of reasoning in a comparable point. He flatly rejects the twin poles of celebration and condemnation used to catalog his friend’s strengths and limitations:

I recently did this memorial lecture on Raymond Williams, called ‘Culture, community and nation’. In the first half, I talked about the importance of Williams’ work on culture, on structures of feeling, and on ‘lived communities’, and so on. But in the end I offered a critique of that conception of culture, because of its closed nature, because of its reconstituting itself as a narrow, exclusive nationalism. The lecture explored hybridity and difference, rather than ‘whole ways of life of life’, etc., which can have a very ethnocentric focus. A lot of Raymond Williams’ work is open to the critique of ethnocentrism, just as he is open to the critique of being oddly placed in relation to feminism. These absences don’t mean that one has to repudiate the work. I’ve always opposed that absolutist way of approaching such questions, where you either advocate everything a writer says, in the manner of the convert or disciple, or you have to repudiate everything. Williams has his strengths, his important insights; he is a major figure, etc. But from the position of how British cultural studies is being practiced now, one sees Williams’ work differently. One begins to engage with it critically, rather than celebrate it or venerate it.³⁴

Two benchmarks in Williams’ legacy are *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*.³⁵ The former consists of literary analytical essays meant to assist in developing critical faculties in the study of literature in his adult worker students. The

³³ Paul Gilroy, “British Cultural Studies and the Politics of Identity”, Baker, Diawara, Lindeborg 233-234.

³⁴“Cultural Studies and the politics of internationalization An interview with Stuart Hall by Kuan-Hsing Chen”. Chen, Morley. 394.

³⁵ Raymond Williams, *Culture and society, 1780-1950*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975).

latter addresses the need in bringing about socialism for a gradual, deep, comprehensive change in not only the relations of production, but the cultural institutions, ideological beliefs, ways of thinking about wealth on the ideological level, cultural production, and the quality and manner in which people related to each other in order, in short the whole society for such a socialism to be effective and take. *The Long Revolution* also echoed a concern he revisits in *Modern Tragedy*-- that of the revolution producing “its own new kinds of alienation, which it must struggle to understand and which it must overcome, if it is to remain revolutionary.”³⁶ Scholar Pamela McCallum sees *Modern Tragedy*, especially the “Tragedy and Revolution” essay, as a challenge to the sort of gradualist politics explored in *The Long Revolution* (MT, 15). However, John Brenkman identifies in his essay “Raymond Williams and Marxism” the conspicuous absence of a key component of Marxian theory of revolution. “Nowhere in his work does he project the proletariat as the historically necessary agent of revolutionary change.”³⁷ It is neither Williams’ national chauvinism nor male chauvinism that troubles C.L.R. James in his own review of *The Long Revolution*, “Marxism and the Intellectuals”³⁸(1961). Rather, for James the key absent Marxian challenge and agent in both *Long Revolution* and *Culture and Society* is nothing less than the revolutionary proletariat and its relationship to production.

He begins by crediting Williams, whom he refers to as “the most remarkable writer that the socialist movement in England has produced for ten years or perhaps

³⁶Williams. *Long Revolution*, 107

³⁷ John Brenkman, “Raymond Williams and Marxism”, in Prendergast, 262

³⁸ C.L.R. James, *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings*. (London: Allison and Busby Limited 1980), 113-130. Subsequent reference to this text will be cited parenthetically as *SPHERES*.

twenty”(SPHERES, 114) for giving lie to the “lying propaganda,” for executing a “knock out blow” to the capitulation to the middle class by the British Labour Party. He quotes Williams and lauds his point:

Before World War II the condition of the working class in England was a world-wide scandal. Poverty, unemployment, social degradation in many ‘depressed areas’ seemed permanent. Undoubtedly the Labour victory in 1945 improved working-class conditions of life. What is called ‘prosperity’ is that the worst of the shocking conditions have been eliminated. The Conservatives accepted the change and promised, if they got back to power, not to go back to the old days. They have got back to power since 1951. They spend a vast amount of their resources and energy seeking to convince ordinary people that, owing to this new prosperity, labour must now desert the very idea of labour politics (SPHERES, 113)

After showing how Williams demystifies the notion of progress masking the betrayal of the UK Labour Party, James catalogues the writer’s various accomplishments. Williams argues for a concept of culture that is broad enough to frame its meaning as a “total way of life of the whole people.” For James, Williams is a socialist thinker of the highest stature that exposes “the pretenses of capitalist society and its tricks” (SPHERES, 114).

So what are the exact nature of James’s qualms here?

For James “Mr Williams [is] not a Marxist” and “does not seem to be aware of what Marxism is.” This judgment has to do with what he perceives as Williams’ neglect of the centrality of “the labour process” and “the role of production.” Contrary to the title of his object of inquiry, Williams “ignores the idea of revolution completely” (SPHERES, 115). James challenges here Williams’s knowledge of the working class—“he simply does not know what the working class really is and what are its potentialities.” James provides his own sketch of the development of the British working class, filling in his perceived gap in Williams of the centrality of production linking the British workers’ fate with the workers of the rest of the world. James accuses Williams of not maintaining any

“conception of the spontaneous creativity of the working class” (*SPHERES*, 117). He concedes that his belief in the inevitability of socialism (a belief James signals as key to Marx’s method) would weary Williams as a form of retrograde “Marxist jargon” (*SPHERES*, 118). James concludes his review of what he perceives as Williams’ flawed method with a gloss on the history of the American working class and what he couches in the term “historic weakness.” He perceives the intellectual as a being in a state of desperation, exhibiting the wish “to do something” to respond to a deepening economic crisis in capitalism. James lauds Lenin’s decision in both 1905 and 1917 at the height of revolutionary upheaval to take the time to study both Hegel and the Marxian classics. His applause of Lenin is wrapped up in a simultaneous faith in workers to make the correct decision in service of the revolution, without the mediation of an intellectual class.

This study’s earlier alluding to James’ discussion of Williams’ absence of faith in the spontaneous creativity of the working class was cut short. James tacks on a parenthetical note to the point that includes “all other progressive classes” (*SPHERES*, 117). It is this flexibility in positing revolutionary agency to different actors coupled with his emphasis on such a revolutionary class’s acumen when it comes to “watching and weighing” circumstances and waves in movement that animates his reframing of the Haitian Revolution. Williams’ “silence” on such a potential includes the subtle interdependent dynamism between leader and base. This interdependence in theorizing the seizure of power is the main object of my study. James sleights Williams for his lack of faith in the working class to move without mediation. For James, Williams characteristically projects his own analytical shortcomings in terms of the failure to grasp the fact that revolution is about seizure of power onto the workers themselves. James’s

faith in the analytic capabilities and political judgment of every-day people gets scripted into both his study and dramatic rendition of the Haitian struggle. He, like Williams, hungers for a more expansive definition of tragedy; yet, he refuses to sell short the potential for progressive movement on behalf of the workers themselves. The push and pull between leader and base is central to his Haiti writing and tragedy designates the degeneration of communication between these two forces. James echoes in his critique of Williams the critique of revolutionary mediation that will begin the next chapter's discussion of *The Black Jacobins*. The leader and base problematic is a question of aesthetic representation constitutive of this sampling of literature.

Summation of Chapters

Chapter One analyzes the tragic as a figure of dialectical mediation in James's historical study *The Black Jacobins*. What are the levels of mediation at work in James's text? How does the formal construction of the history help James to underscore Toussaint's tragic error? How does one pen a narrative of collective social transformation through the concentration of the individual leader and what problems does such a decision raise? This 1938 text coupled with the additions on tragedy and new appendix added by James for his 1963 reprinting³⁹ is the foundation for the plays examined in later chapters. We will attempt to answer the question on how James's preoccupation with a notion of categorization helps us to theorize his specific notion of the Black Radical tragic in *The Black Jacobins* as it relates to the relationship between the leader and mass in Black Radical praxis. Chapter Two discusses the use of a dramatic expressionist

³⁹ The careful, learned observation and analysis that discovered the fact that the "tragedy" parts of James's text were added into the 1963 addition comes from David Scott's study on the tragic in James. David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004). Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *CONSCRIPTS*.

aesthetic in Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones* (1920). How does its exposé on the corrupt individual leader transcend its narrow racist idioms and acts as a sophisticated discussion of the problem of colonial elites? How do O'Neill's aesthetic choices work to foreground the specific history of American slavery as the foundational building block of American empire? O'Neill is the standout white modernist writer of the study. His play was inspired by his study of Haiti and awareness of American occupation of the country at the time and represents in the last instance a failed attempt to cast an effective dramatic presentation of Black revolutionary agency and process. In this regard, as well as chronologically it begins this study of specific plays as a sort of failing springboard for better executed endeavors by Black radical writers. It also opens up a space where Black radical actors have challenged in their performances the often narrowness of O'Neill's imaginative landscape and its accompanying politics. This issue of stretching classical tragedy to denote the tension between the leader and his or her base will provide the frame for Chapter Three's exploration of James's 1936 play on the Haitian Revolution, also entitled *The Black Jacobins* and Edouard Glissant's 1961 *Monsieur Toussaint: A Play*. How does the structure of James's play temper the individualist bravado and tour de force of his lead actor, Paul Robeson? How does Glissant build on James's concerns and gesture further towards the privileging of the chorus as main actors? How do Glissant's efforts to democratize James's work build and exceed its limits? James's play's subject represented in its title is the plural *The Black Jacobins* and the similarly named full-length study's title inscribes Toussaint at the onset as part of a revolutionary collectivity. What is the significance of the fact that Glissant chooses his title to represent a singular figure and that it generically announces itself as a

play? What kind of revolutionary actors get privileged in these different accounts of the same historical event? How does Glissant, even in his singular title focus, answer James's reflexive desire to make *The Black Jacobins* truly a study of the Haitian masses? This chapter will focus a great deal on the stage directions and arrangements in both plays to make its claims. Chapter four examines Lorraine Hansberry's scene sketch for a never completed musical epic on Toussaint L'Ouverture as well as her anti-imperialist play *Les Blancs*, completed and published posthumously by her literary executor and ex-husband, Robert Nemiroff. How do Hansberry's dramatic interventions challenge the point of focus established by the prior works examined by shifting the plane of drama to include both oppressors and oppressed negotiating a shared (albeit shared unevenly) oppressive landscape? The conclusion charts future directions and points to some of the theoretical problems the study raises.

In the aforementioned *Social Text* dossier on Black Radicalism, Brent Edwards issues a warning challenge for studies of Black Radicalism--the tendency to focus on "exemplarity", "a crucial question in a historiography that so regularly has recourse to the same cast of 'representative colored men' (*AUTONOMY*, 7). For Edwards, this has to do with a patriarchal point of focus, analyzed in the groundbreaking work of feminist historians Nell Painter and Hazel Carby. I read his warning in an additional way, specific to the challenges of my argument. It is a bit ironic that a study that purports to study the tragic as conceived as a meditation on the relationship between the individual and the mass turns so heavily on a discussion of a series of exemplary figures, in most cases men. My only hope is that the following pages present a convincing argument for the need to

move through this opposition between an all too often, masculine leader and mass base, in a hope to finally move beyond it, at some future as yet undetermined place.

Chapter One

Tragedy as Mediation in C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*

...Toussaint L'Ouverture, as a man, had his limitations. But he did his best, and in reality he did not fail. He was captured, imprisoned, killed; but his example and his spirit still guide us now. The last two years, from 2004 to 2006, the Haitian people have continued to stand up for their dignity and refused to capitulate. On 6 July 2005, Cité Soleil was attacked and bombarded, but this, and many similar attacks, didn't discourage people from insisting that their voices be heard. They spoke out against injustice. They voted for their president this past February; they won't accept the imposition of another president from abroad or above.

This doesn't mean that success is inevitable or easy, that powerful vested interests won't try to do all they can to turn the clock back. Nevertheless, something irreversible has been achieved, something that works its way the trunk of the tree of liberty but that its roots remained deep.

As for Dessalines, the struggle that he led was armed, and necessarily so, since he had to break the bonds of slavery once and for all. But our struggle is different. It is Toussaint, rather than Dessalines, who can accompany the popular movement today...

- Jean-Bertrand Aristide¹

The Animating Force of Modern Civilization

The study and practice of literature sometimes prefigured but always informed C.L.R. James's life-long political praxis as a revolutionary Marxist. Constitutive of this political journey is a progressively heightened faith in the capacity for every day working people to radically transform their lives, without reliance on intermediary forces. A protracted study of Greek and Shakespearean dramatic tragedy and the English novel tradition both helped James to consolidate such priorities. Sitting in the Masters Room

¹ Peter Hallward. "An Interview with Jean-Bertrand Aristide." *London Review of Books*, 22 February 2007, 9

quiet at study in Queens Royal College, young Trinidadian revolutionary scholar Cyril Lionel Robert James read the complete work of William Makepeace Thackeray (saving the novel *Vanity Fair* strictly for much relished lunch breaks). In her reflection on her colleague James's intellectual development, Anna Grimshaw credits the work of Thackeray as "the central feature of his mature political vision, as he moved away from any attachment to notions of specialized intellectual or political leadership and increasingly recognized that people themselves were the animating force of modern civilization."² The illustrated novels of Thackeray, according to Grimshaw, helped solidify what critic E. San Juan Jr. would later refer to as "The Mass Line in C.L.R. James's Works".³ Both Greek and Shakespearean tragedy with equal zeal constituted James's literary diet. James composed and staged his play version of *The Black Jacobins* a year prior to publishing his full-length study. Cedric Robinson notes quoting James—

I laughed without satiety at Thackeray's constant jokes and sneers and gibes at the aristocracy and at people in high places. Thackeray, not Marx, bears the heaviest responsibility for me. (James qt. in *ROB*, 266)

James's engagement with literature and sport demonstrated a consistent care to attend to the desires and potentialities of the masses of people—whether in a Trinidadian, Pan-Africanist, or North American contexts. The heightened attention to antagonistic class division and a harsh portrayal of a hollow middle class, both constitutive of many landmark texts of the English novel tradition as well as both Greek and Shakespearean tragedies' agility in presenting the clash of the old with the emergence of the new, primed

² C.L.R. James, *Special Delivery: The letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb 1939-1948*, Anna Grimshaw ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 5. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically as *LETTERS*.

³ E. San Juan Jr. *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 227-250. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically as *SAN*.

James for the political analysis and work that would structure his life labor on behalf of oppressed people and nations. *Beyond a Boundary*⁴, his study on Cricket published the same year as the reissue of *The Black Jacobins*, phrases this most significant question for James the revolutionary as, “What do Men Live By?” This chapter will examine the literary trope of tragedy and how it directly applies to James’s revolutionary analysis and praxis. I will specifically look at in this chapter how James through the use of tragedy negotiates the tension between the leader and the base in his study of the Haitian Revolution-- *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. He adds further tragic emphasis in his additions to the 1963 iteration of his text via a concept of the tragic inspired by Aristotle and modified to signify the degeneration of the communication between leader and base in a revolutionary upsurge. Tracing this problematic through a sampling of dramatic and prose literature, my main ongoing argument in this chapter with David Scott’s brilliant study of the use of the tragic is that contrary to Scott’s assertion that the initial version of *The Black Jacobins* is written in a Romanticist Vindicationist style, tempered in the 1963 version by a tragic emplotment, I propose that the tragic mode of thinking through and writing the Haitian Revolution existed all along. Toussaint is scripted by James as a figure of mediation balancing the radical demands of the Haitian people striving to be free with the strategic vision needed to realize such demands. As such, his leadership is compromised by not sufficiently communicating policy and rationale directly to his base, placing his saliency as a leading organizational force in jeopardy. If a mass insistence on universality is mediated through the actions and directives of individual leadership, the constant communicative dialectical push and pull between leader and base must be maintained and

⁴ C.L.R. James *Beyond a Boundary*. 1963. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 151.

vacillation must be avoided or else degeneration of that constitutive element of revolutionary transformation is inevitable. The educators must be educated. This concern stays with James for the duration of his intellectual and activist life. Before we go further to capture the context in which *The Black Jacobins* was composed, some elaboration on James's thoughts on mediation and his ruminations on tragedy is necessary.

Throughout his career, the only two choices for James would remain socialism or barbarism. However, the tasks needed to realize the more favorable of the two options, as well as the agents privileged to get it done, dramatically shift. His "Dialectical Materialism and the Fate of Humanity"(1947) introduces this concern of the dialectic and the concept of mediation that is the focus of this chapter investigation's of tragedy. Written nine years after the release of *The Black Jacobins*, it represents the twilight hour on James's faith in successful radical mediation between leader/party and mass; yet, simultaneously, a highpoint in his faith in the masses to transform their lives. Composed during his "American period", the combination of witnessing the creative spontaneity of the American working class combined with the collective theoretical labors of his break-away renegade Trotskyist group the Johnson Forest Tendency pushes James towards repudiating the need for mediation all together:

Toward the end of the 1940s the members of the Johnson Forest Tendency began to publish the results of their intensive collaborative exercise. The lengthy essay, *Dialectical Materialism and the Fate of Humanity* (1947) was James's attempt to sort out some of the muddles in Trotskyite thinking—in particular the problem of thought and its relationship to the dynamic of history. He was seeking to clarify the dialectical method—the process by which, what Hegel called the abstract universal becomes concrete; and to demonstrate, through its use as a methodological tool, the progressive movement of society. It is one of the very few places, too, that James offered a definition of

socialism—the complete expression of democracy—mindful as he always was of its distortion through identification with Stalinism.⁵

The Stalinist terror that his piece decries is proof of the effectiveness of the Russian Revolution specifically and the confirmation of the fully expressed radical insistence on universality by the masses of Russian workers and peasants. The masses' forward movement is both simultaneously complete and partially realized such that only a counter-offensive as grisly as the Moscow trials could hope to quell its energies via mediation by a rigid Party structure. The essay gives an account of how James views both Hegel and Marx's formulation of the dialectic and how that concept gets employed by James as an analytic capable of capturing revolutionary movement in history. The essay is an introduction of terms that will remain pivotal in the formulation of James's analytic toolbox: negation, the whole, the universal, the real, totality, and most importantly for our sake here—mediation. The revolutionary process is captured the following way: "The history of man is his effort to make the abstract universal concrete. He constantly seeks to destroy, to move aside, that is to say, to negate what impedes his movement towards freedom and happiness. Man is the subject of history... the fact that man as such is 'pure and simple negativity'... is a cardinal principle of dialectical movement" (*READER*, 164).

James applies his sketch of Marxian and Hegelian dialectics to the example of the rise of the institutionalized Christian Church in Europe in which he perceives its consolidation as a mediating institution that pacifies the demands of the radical toilers. "The Christian revolutionaries, however were not struggling to establish the medieval

⁵ Anna Grimshaw. "C.L.R. James: A Revolutionary Vision." In *The C.L.R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 10. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *READER*.

papacy. The medieval papacy was a mediation to which the ruling forces of society rallied in order to strangle the quest for universality of the Christian masses”(READER, 167). The Church mediated the more radical demands of the mass and in such mediation contained and diluted their radical energy. James’s insight into religion rings true in the essay for secular politics; whereas, “democratic politics, like religion, was a form of mediation by which men gained the illusion that they were all members of one social community, an illusion of universality”(READER, 173). The series of revolutions charted in the work signify the ongoing effort of the people to realize the universalism latent and manifest in the theological/philosophical promise of a Christian Kingdom of Heaven on earth. In this framework, “man” constantly negates a particular, actual set of oppressive conditions and in this action achieves a new universality in terms of the realization of true freedom. As San Juan Jr. writes, James “holds that the dialectic of concrete and abstract embedded in the logical principle of universality has been short-circuited by Hegel’s idea of mediation. These mediations are symptoms of the failure to grasp the truth as the whole: not only in human actions but also in people’s needs and aspirations”(SAN, 231). For James, this is an ongoing, permanent process of movement. Mediation in this process works as a device to convey a certain lack captured in the disjuncture between the stated goals of universal freedom for all and the limitation of such universal freedom to a small, privileged class. James states his understanding of mediation in the writing of Hegel as: “The new state established after the revolution, the ideology which accompanies it, are a form of mediation between the abstract and concrete, ideal and real, etc.”. In cataloguing this revolutionary process, for James the agency of the masses themselves frustrates the need for mediation whether in the form of the state and its accompanying bureaucracies

or in the form of the revolutionary party. “The quest for universality, embodied in the masses, constituting the great mass of the nation, forbids any mediation”(READER, 173-174). For James mediation is defined as a bridge concept that links while simultaneously expressing a gap between the ideal statement of a revolutionary vision and its concrete actuality.

The Black Jacobins represents a more nuanced hope for the possibility of such mediation being effective. The text’s formal construction as well as its theme, renders it a little more optimistic about the positive effects of mediating forces in revolutionary processes. This chapter argues it to be a more effective declaration than in his later writings. The narrative structure of *The Black Jacobins* in its formulation of the tragic backs up a bit from this strong pronouncement to tell the story of how this specific protracted revolutionary process turns on Toussaint L’Ouverture; a key figure mediating the wants and creative energy of the Haitian people and a strategic expediency and long-haul vision. *The Black Jacobins* in the trajectory of James’s political thought is the first major attempt to theorize the relationship between leader and base. It is such blockages between these two forces, the failure to harmonize mass sensibilities and positions with the revolutionary strategy as dictated from above that is the source of the exploration on the tragic as mediation in this work. My understanding of mediation as used in this chapter comes from the aforementioned discussion of James combined with the insights of Bertell Ollman’s study of Marxian dialectics:

Marxists also tend to push the germ of any development too quickly to its final form (granted the dialectical relation between the two). This is apparent in many Marxist studies of “Who Profits?” and in the reductionism found in most versions of economic determinism. For the problem with which we have concerned, this takes the form of reducing the long and involved process of becoming class conscious into a

simple conditioned reflex, where every sign of progress is viewed as evidence of the finished result. In general, this error comes from not giving enough attention to the complex mediations that make up the joints of any important social problem. The dialectical tension, always difficult to maintain, between identity and difference has collapsed here into simple identity. The alternatives of mistaking what class consciousness can become for what it is (always a sectarian temptation) can only be avoided by giving both equal attention, as I have tried to do, as moments in class consciousness' process of becoming.⁶

A clear grasping of a definition of mediation is crucial for the goals of this chapter's discussion. It is helpful to briefly acknowledge Raymond Williams's discussion of mediation in his study, *Keywords A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983). Williams's work examines, through an alphabetic presentation of a vocabulary of cultural and sociological analysis, how "the most active problems of meaning are always primarily embedded in actual relationships, and that both the meanings and the relationships are typically diverse and variable, within the structures of particular social orders and the processes of social and historical change."⁷ Hence, the study is referred to as a vocabulary, not a dictionary. Speaking on the complexity of the concept of mediation in its current usage, Williams charts its uses as: "(1) the political sense of intermediary action designed to bring about reconciliation or agreement; (2) the dualist sense, of an activity which expresses, either indirectly or deviously and misleadingly (and thus often in a falsely reconciling way), a relationship between otherwise separated facts and actions and experiences; (3) the formalist sense, of an activity which directly expresses otherwise unexpressed relations. It can be said that each of these senses has a better word: (1) *conciliation*; (2) *IDEOLOGY OR RATIONALIZATION*...(3) *form*"(KEYWORDS 206-

⁶ Bertell Ollman. *Dialectical Investigations*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 175.

⁷ Raymond Williams, *Keywords A Vocabulary of Culture and Society Revised Edition*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 22. Subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically as *KEYWORDS*.

7). Tragedy as traced in this study is a matter of a formal issue of literary representation related to the more explicit consideration of the intermediary role of leadership in framing and articulating an agenda for radical transformation. James's study and method of analysis as related to his definition of tragedy is too attuned in its understanding of "what it is" to be dogmatically or Romantically (pace David Scott) swept away with the "what it can become". At the same time, *The Black Jacobins* is a dexterous presentation of the interdependence between leadership and a mass base that subverts both a heavy-handed authoritarian revolutionary leader prescription and the inverse: an anarchistic, idealistic notion that leadership is not crucial to bridge and mediate the gap between the "what it is" and what is possible.

For James, tragedy from the onset is always informed by mass-struggle in both its conditions of performance and content. Tragedy in James's formulation is interesting precisely because of its root as a key ritual of Athenian Democracy involving the direct and active participation of the masses. Even before its use is underscored in the revisions of his text on Haiti⁸ (again, I'm arguing against Scott that it is there all along in 1938), it is lauded for its mass-affiliation. James emphatically states this point in a June 1953 letter to an unknown literary critic named Bell. He describes tragedy as:

...A tremendous popular production in which the people themselves were vitally interested and settled who should win the prizes. I would like to mention, by the way, that Plato for certain, and I think Aristotle also, fumed with rage at the role the masses of the people played in all this. If they had had things in their hands, they would not have organized anything like the masterpieces that have come down to us. The power came from the Athenian democracy. When democracy declined the great Athenian drama declined with it. (READER 222)

⁸ David Scott's research demonstrates that James in 1963 adds six new paragraphs to the thirteenth chapter of *The Black Jacobins*, entitled "The War of Independence". These chapters emphasize the "tragic" dimensions of James's argument and include the author's definition of hamartia. See James, *Black Jacobins*, 1963, 289-292.

He adds to this assertion that the great tragic tradition in Elizabethan drama collapsed as soon as the price of admission increased from a penny to a six-penth. This fiscal coupling of the tragic with the mass directly relates to the newness of such modern artistic technological innovations such as film:

In the early days of modern film, in the days of Chaplin, D.W. Griffith and the early Keystone comedies, you had a new art being shaped and its foundations laid in much the same manner that the Greek and Elizabethan tragedians laid the foundations of their drama. The movies were new, as new as Aeschylus was new. They were a genuine creation—they had no models to go by. To succeed they had to please the people (*READER*, 222).

Expertise in judgment is not coupled with education level in James's understanding of this intimate relationship between dramatic tragedy and the masses of people. He proposes the following question challenge to his interlocutor—"How educated were the Greeks who shouted and stamped and gave Aeschylus the prize thirteen times?" (*READER*, 227) Tragedy for James couples mass approval with aesthetic judgment. The above passage linking developments in film technology with Greek and Shakespearean tragedy highlights the other key component for James lending tragedy a unique import in his work—the notion of newness. In a 1953 essay entitled "Notes on *Hamlet*", James underscores the effectiveness of tragedy to foreground the struggle between the new and the old:

A recent critic has said that Shakespearean criticism is a jungle, a wilderness and a forest; and the wildest part is the jungle of modern criticism on *Hamlet*. Mr. Redgrave says that of the great tragedies *King Lear* is the only one in which two ideas of society are directly confronted and the old generation and the new are set face to face, each assured of his own right to power. This is false. All the great tragedies deal with precisely this question of the confrontation of two ideas of society and they deal with it according to the innermost essence of the drama—the two societies confront one another within the mind of a single person. (*READER*, 243)

Toussaint in one warring body and mind attempts to reconcile the emergent new promise of Revolutionary France with the persistent legacy of betrayal and enslavement of the women and men of her colonies. The aspirations and upsets of the new Revolutionary France combined with the aspirations for a new liberated San Domingo wreak havoc in the mind of James's historical protagonist and produce a sort of tragic wavering and waffling. Toussaint's Prince of Denmark affliction is not an idealistic symptom restricted to the mind, it is a response to a concrete changing political landscape in which the failed promise of revolutionary France collides head on with the unrealized aspirations of Toussaint's Black Jacobins. In James's analysis of Shakespearean tragedy, the arc of the form dictates that the drama of the two confronting societies play out via a concentrated focus on a specific individual.

Before commencing the main discussion on how its figuration works in *The Black Jacobins* and sketching the conditions of possibility for the writing of this work, it is necessary to take an extended look at David Scott's important ideas on James's use of tragedy as it relates to the changes in the latter edition of his historical study. As indicated in the *Introduction*, Scott notes that the work in its 1963 reprinting replaces its Romanticist-Vindicationist narrative mode with a more sober and useful tragic mode of story telling. I will argue in the pages that follow for the tragic existing in James all along. My main critique of Scott's thesis consists of the following points to be expanded on in the pages that follow: The "problem-space" of the tension between leader and his or her base is still a concern today for cultural workers and organizers attempting to break the double bond of imperialism and monopoly capitalism. The elite poetics/mass politics contradiction of the text helps James formally reproduce and emphasize Toussaint's

challenge. Scott's formulation via Talal Asad of a "conscript of modernity" is a lasting double bind constitutive of the Black Radical Tradition. Scott clarifies that, "Toussaint is imagined not only as a newly language Caliban, but as a modernist intellectual, suffering like Hamlet, the modern fracturing of thought and action" (*CONSCRIPTS*, 16). Contrary to this claim, Toussaint does not suffer intellectual paralysis—he makes a concrete mistake in his vacillation and lack of communication to his base. Finally, Scott accepts without challenge James's own narrow Trotskyist periodization and understanding of key historical events therefore neutering what is most appealing in James as his work relates to the history of a global Black liberation movement. This last point will be addressed in the conclusion of this chapter.

For David Scott, James's *The Black Jacobins* "takes Shakespeare's Hamlet to stand as a paradigm of tragic figuration. If for James that melancholic and obsessively self-regarding Prince of Denmark symbolized the emergence of a new kind of individual, the modern intellectual, I suggest similarly, for James, Toussaint inaugurates a new kind of individual, the modern colonial intellectual" (*CONSCRIPTS*, 20). Scott's text does not evoke the Hamlet of Malcolm X's speech that eloquently meditates on the need for an upsurge of revolutionary violence to rupture a status quo of suffering; i.e., "Taking up Arms against a Sea of Troubles". He instead looks to a Hamlet that observes that our concept of time "is out of joint". This is congruent with Scott's desire to make a specific argument about narrative, choice, political will, and temporality. For Scott, the questions a study raise are only sensible within the specific time of their posing. James's original *Preface*'s reliance on a Coleridge/Wordsworth Romantic sensibility, his 1963 additions to the text underscoring Toussaint's "tragic" mistake, as well as his 1963 Appendix

“From Toussaint L’Ouverture to Fidel Castro” all rest on a certain set of temporally specific concerns of the author participating in his historical moment both about narrative presentation and historical transformation. For Scott, the concerns and political aspirations of James writing in 1938 then revising in 1963 are not the same as the concerns of the present. This assertion seems simple enough—it is a hallmark of dialectical method. In what is to follow, I will attempt to sketch the contours of Scott’s argument as a way to position my contrary assertions as it relates to the use of tragedy in *The Black Jacobins*.

Scott captures this concern via the language of “problem space”. He identifies the problem space as the “discursive context” for a scholarly intervention: “A problem-space, in other words, is an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs”(CONSCRIPTS, 4). He signals such a “problem space” as being a “necessarily temporal concept’. Scott criticizes a certain brand of post-colonial scholarship’s engagement with James for its anachronistic claiming of questions raised during the earlier anti-colonial period. For Scott, questions and answers cannot be successfully uncoupled. Borrowing from Hayden White he notes that, “forms of narrative...have built into their linguistic structures different myth-models or story-potentials...different stories organize the relationship between past, present, and future, differently”(CONSCRIPTS, 7). He poses the question—“Does anti-colonialism depend upon a certain way of telling the story about the past, present, and future?”

For Scott, James in *The Black Jacobins* employs two ways of story telling: Romantic⁹ vindicationist and a later tragic emplotment. Tragedy, “sets before us the image of a man or woman obliged to act in a world in which values are unstable and ambiguous. And consequently, for tragedy the relationship between past, present, and future is never a Romantic one in which history rides as triumphant and seamlessly progressive rhythm, but a broke series of paradoxes and reversals in which human action is ever open to unaccountable contingencies and luck” (*CONSCRIPTS*, 13). Scott asserts that “*The Black Jacobins* is, above all, a literary-historical exercise in revolutionary Romanticism.... a modernist allegory of anticolonial revolution written in the mode of a historical Romance”(*CONSCRIPTS*, 59). Its mode of writing is vindicationism tasked to mainly reclaim and demonstrate the agency and ability of a mass of people defamed by racist historiography. In the later version of the text, James according to Scott tempers this Romantic vindicationism with a more tragic tone, a tone more conducive to subtle meditations on the relationship between agency and necessity, actions limited by conditions. He borrows the title object from Bernard Yack’s study, *The Longing for Total Revolution* and labels such the main motif of anti-colonial Romance, a category that for Scott includes both James’s *The Black Jacobins* and Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. Again, Scott signals the addition of seven beginning paragraphs in the latter version of *The Black Jacobins* Chapter 13 “The War of Independence” as constituting the new

⁹ “The Romantic Period in English literature is dated as beginning in 1785...or alternatively in 1789 (the outbreak of the French Revolution), or in 1798 (the publication of William Wordsworth’s and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads*)—and as ending either in 1830 or else in 1832, the year in which Sir Walter Scott died and the passage of the Reform Bill signaled the political preoccupations of the Victorian era.” M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th Edition, (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 153.

tragic tone of the book. Scott elaborates on the contrast between Romantic and Tragic modes of story telling:

...Where the anticolonial narrative is cast as an epic Romance, as the great progressive story of an oppressed and victimized people's struggle from Bondage to Freedom, from Despair to Triumph under heroic leadership, the tragic narrative is cast as a dramatic confrontation between contingency and freedom, between human will and its conditioning limits. Where the epic revolutionary narrative charts a steadily rising curve in which the end is already foreclosed by a horizon available through an act of rational, self-transparent will, in the tragic narrative the rhythm is more tentative, its direction less determinative, more recursive, and its meaning less transparent. I mean to suggest, in other words, that tragedy may offer a different lesson than revolutionary Romance does about pasts from which we have come and their relation to presents we inhabit and futures we might anticipate and hope for. If one of the great lessons of Romance is that we are masters and mistresses of our destiny, that our pasts can be left behind and new futures leaped into, tragedy has a less sanguine teaching to offer. Tragedy has a more respectful attitude to the past, to the often-cruel permanence of its impress: its honors, however reluctantly, the obligations the past imposes. Perhaps part of the value of the story-form of tragedy for our present, then, is not merely that it raises a profound challenge to the hubris of the revolutionary (and modernist) longing for total revolution, but it does so in a way that reopens a path to formulating a criticism of our present. (*CONSCRIPTS*, 135).

There is no doubt that a vindicationist thread runs through the narrative arc of the text. As James made abundantly clear, there was an entire school of racist historiography that he was challenging in his study on Haiti as a trailblazer of Pan-African resistance. It would be a tough sell to completely dismiss the need still for this sort of critical spirit. Moreover, all versions of *The Black Jacobins* present a Toussaint and the masses of Haitian people calculating, pragmatic and strategic in their resistance, and tempered in their political judgment—hardly, a sort of pure Romanticist story of swooping victory of good versus evil. James and Toussaint are always attuned to the actuality of the situation at hand. Likewise, to digress for a moment, Fanon's text raised by Scott on multiple occasions is hardly a simple Romanticist story of anti-colonial revolutionary longing.

Both Fanon and James in their respective volumes outline victories coupled with upset, the pitfalls of nationalism, the brutality of warfare (both the repressive state and guerilla kind) and resist offering up facile solutions. The concluding discussion of tragic revolutionary violence in this chapter puts to bed any notion of a Romanticization of the revolutionary process in James's text. His Toussaint study is not a study in search of Total Revolution as its desired object—it posits a specific theory on a specific struggle and relates it to his present concern first for a radical future for a de-colonized Africa (1938); then, disappointment in the failure of the newly Caribbean nations to successfully join in Federation (1963). It posits a specific tragic problematic, the interdependent relationship between leader and base, a problematic still germane to movements for radical change.

“To Make the Natives Buy Lancashire Goods”¹⁰

Defending Abyssinia from the Imperialists

Caribbean specialist Alex Dupuy is not exaggerating when he proclaims that *The Black Jacobins* retains “its status as the classic Marxist statement on the Haitian Revolution as one of the most authoritative interpretations of that momentous history from any perspective.”¹¹ Through his participation in George Padmore's International African Service Bureau, James joined an ensemble of Pan Africanist activist-intellectuals in their call condemning Mussolini's 1935 invasion of Ethiopia.¹² The championing of

¹⁰ C.L.R. James “Abyssinia and the Imperialists”. 1936. In *READER*, 63.

¹¹ Alex Dupuy. “Toussaint-Louverture and the Haitian Revolution: A Reassessment of C.L.R. James's Interpretation”, in *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*. Eds. Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 106

¹² Another take on this international convergence of Pan Africanist forces in opposition to Mussolini's Italy can be found in: Winston James. *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in America, 1900-1932*. (London, New York: Verso, 1998). A great poetic treatment on the Pan-Africanist rage against

Ethiopia's self-determination is the key issue in which James coalesces around an intellectual and activist milieu that includes Paul Robeson, the Ghanaian J.B. Danquah, and Amy Ashwood Garvey. This is the intellectual community and action based milieu in which James pens *The Black Jacobins*. The volume was pivotal in formulating the consideration of an embrace of armed struggle as a tactical possibility for his Pan Africanist colleagues. The composition of the book, from the outset, is part of a collectivist struggle, attempting to intervene in defense of an Ethiopia threatened by fascism. The book helped clarify the political vision of The International African Friends of Ethiopia and contribute to its members a theoretical foundation for their agitation.

Robert Hill makes this point explicitly in speaking about the initial version of the text:

Within the specific context of the changing balance of political forces in the world at the time, the International African Service Bureau was debating the political course which the African struggle would follow. *The Black Jacobins* was probably the most important factor in the evolution of the strategic perspective of the group, which became the premise that *armed struggle* would be the form of the African revolution.¹³

When James revises *The Black Jacobins* for reissue, it is in the moment where he is cynical due to the failure of many of the newly independent Caribbean Nations to join in Federation (*CONSCRIPTS*, 144-5). Hence, the tragic temperance gets added to the work. Again, I think this is misguided and that it is there all along even in 1938¹⁴ when *The Black Jacobins* is speaking to a collectivist vision of the hope for armed revolution

Mussolini can be found in the 1935 Garvey poem "Mussolini—Scourge of God!". Marcus Garvey. The Poetical Works of Marcus Garvey. Ed. Tony Martin. (Dover: The Majority Press, 1983), 82-83.

¹³ Robert A. Hill, "In England 1932-1938," in C.L.R. James His Life and Work, ed. Paul Buhle (London and New York: Allison & Busby, 1986, 75.

¹⁴ During this time James also pens A History of Negro Revolt, London, 1938 reissued as: C.L.R. James. A History of Pan-African Revolt. (Washington: Drum and Spear Press, 1969) and then reissued under the original title, *Race Today*, London, 1985.

harkening to a liberated African continent. Robinson cites Guyanese activist-publisher Ras Makonnen to capture the centrality of Ethiopia in the praxis and imagination of the community of Black radicals in Britain:

It's very important to put the response of the black world to the Ethiopian War into perspective, especially since it is easy to get the impression that pan-Africanism was just some type of petty protest activity—a few blacks occasionally meeting in conference and sending resolutions here and there. But the real dimensions can only be gathered by estimating the kind of vast support that Ethiopia enjoyed amongst blacks everywhere. We were only one center, the International African Friends of Ethiopia, but that title was very accurate. Letters simply poured into our office from blacks on three continents asking where could they register... And the same was true of Africa. When the Italians entered Adis Ababa, it was reported that school children wept in the Gold Coast...

It brought home to many black people the reality of colonialism, and exposed its true nature. They could then see that the stories of Lenin and Trotsky, or Sun Yatsen, must have their African counterparts... It was clear that imperialism was a force to be reckoned with because here it was attacking the black man's last citadel. (Mackonnen qt. in *ROB*, 271)

The Black Jacobins tells the story of Toussaint L'Ouverture, who was in control strategically of San Domingo from 1794-1802. He did not live to see San Domingo finally wrestled from the French and renamed as Haiti in 1804. James situates Toussaint in the midst of the French and American Revolutions. As he states in the bibliography of the revised edition: "It is impossible to understand the San Domingo revolution unless it is studied in close relationship with the revolution in France" (*Black Jacobins*, 383). He designates the French scholarly reception of its Revolution as the "greatest schools of Western civilization, [combining] scholarship with the national spirit and taste, and with respect for the Revolution without which the history of the revolution cannot be written." James inserts himself into a larger continuum of French radical historiography that

includes Michelet, Lefebvre, Aulard, Mathiez, and Jaures. Michelet, referred to as “the spirit of the Revolution”, is designated by James as “the best preparation for understanding what actually happened in San Domingo” (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 384). By inserting himself into a pre-constituted tradition of French historians, James establishes himself here as an inheritor of a previous school of historiography and more importantly mimics the sort of trans-Atlantic movement via his scholarship that Toussaint and others experienced in their praxis. Just as The French Revolution and Haitian Revolution are coupled for both James and Toussaint, James refuses to separate himself from the French schools of historiography to pursue his exposition on Haiti. James provides a heavily annotated ten-page bibliography charting his historical antecedents. Footnotes from Lefebvre’s two-volume study of the French Revolution make up a large part of James’s text. In this initial way, *The Black Jacobins* as a whole links two activist intellectual communities: the ensemble of Pan Africanists struggling in London against Italian fascist incursions into Ethiopia and the school of mostly socialist French historians central to James’s study.

C.L.R. James directly employs Marx’s theory of individual agency versus historical necessity from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851-1852)¹⁵ when he states in the 1938 “Preface to the First Edition” of *The Black Jacobins*:

Great men make history, but only such history as it is possible for them to make. Their freedom of achievement is limited by the necessities of their environment. To portray the limits of those necessities and the realization, complete or partial,

¹⁵ “Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce...Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.” Karl Marx *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. 1852. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984), 10. James as a studied expert on Hegel and Marx would not miss the tragic designation in the first wave of Marx’s formulation. This further underscores my point that the tragic tone exists all along in his text.

of all possibilities, that is the true business of the historian. (*BLACK JACOBINS*, x)

It is in this line's vein that James weaves his presentation of the Haitian Revolution into an ongoing debate about individual versus mass, and freedom versus necessity. James's work tells us a great deal about the importance of narrative choice as it relates to our focus on the relationship between leader and base. Through his extended musings on Toussaint, "the first and greatest of West Indians", a careful reader can note the crystallization of James's entire critical method—"Yet Toussaint did not make the revolution. It was the revolution that made Toussaint. And even that is not the whole truth"(*BLACK JACOBINS*, x). He will repeat this formula and his 1963 additions on "tragedy" in reflections on such figures as Kwame Nkrumah, Fidel Castro, and Kwame Toure/Stokely Carmichael¹⁶ and direct his confidence in the revolutionary potential of men and women from the "sub-soil" towards a rethinking of both Leninist theories of organization and the struggle for Black self-determination. This balancing act between an individual protagonist and his or her accompanying social base animates James's study.

Further on:

...In a revolution, when the ceaseless slow accumulation of centuries busts into volcanic eruption, the meteoric flares and flights above are a meaningless chaos and lead themselves to infinite caprice and romanticism unless the observer sees them always as projections of the sub-soil from which they came. The writer has sought not only to analyse, but to demonstrate in their movement, the economic forces of the age; their moulding of society and politics, of men in the mass and individual men; the powerful reaction of these on their environment at one of those rare moments when society is at boiling point and therefore fluid...The analysis is the science and the demonstration the art which is history... (*BLACK JACOBINS*, x, xi)

¹⁶ C.L.R. James *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*. 1962 (London: Allison & Busby, 1982). C.L.R. James "Black Power". 1967. in *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings*, (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980), 221-236. C.L.R. James, "Walter Rodney and the Question of Power", in *Walter Rodney Revolutionary and Scholar: A Tribute*. Eds. Edward A. Alpers and Pierre-Michel Fontaine, (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, 1982), 133-146.

This is the heart of the dialectical motion of history informing James's reflections and praxis on behalf of Black radical struggle and helps him to clarify the work of the tragic in his latter addition of the text: "...He was now afraid of the contact between the revolutionary army and the people, an infallible sign of revolutionary degeneration" (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 279). The tragic for James is a mark of revolutionary degeneration. It marks the point when the leader loses touch and stops communicating with his base. At another point in the "Preface", James writes of "The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organize themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day" and abruptly shifts the focus by stating, "By a phenomenon often observed, the individual leadership responsible for this unique achievement was almost entirely the work of a single man—Toussaint L'Ouverture" (*BLACK JACOBINS*, vii). These lines act as primer on how to read the Haitian revolution and more important for our sake underscore the formal considerations of James's text. Contrary to Scott, James chides Romanticism as a mode of emplotment for revolutionary exposition from his 1938 vantage point. Furthermore, he chides it by name: the "infinite caprice and romanticism". The *Preface* is a primer to understand the methodology in the formal presentation that will follow in his book. San Domingo society, its class structuring, its landscape, its antagonisms and most importantly its masses of people are the sub-soil that the critic ignores at his or her peril. The chapter progression of "The Property", "The Owners", "Parliament and Property" set us up for a properly grounded understanding of the fourth discussion of "The San Domingo Masses Begin" and the fifth "And the Paris Masses Complete". That entire sub-soil prefigures the

sixth chapter discussion of “The Rise of Toussaint”. This is a subtler and finally more helpful mode of historical exposition than hasty dismissals of the need for all mediation.

According to James’s narrative, at a certain point in the struggle to overthrow colonial domination of Santo Domingo, Toussaint L’Ouverture ceases to keep his mass base informed of his various strategic calculations and decisions. This failure to inform one’s base—a failure to communicate clearly and to educate-- contributes to Toussaint’s inevitable downfall. The masses of people are no longer privy to the rationale of his decisions, so they assume motives that paint Toussaint in an unfavorable light. This is devastating when it comes to such thorny issues as Toussaint’s perceived favoritism towards the whites on the island or in the extended discussion in Chapter Three of this project of his decision to execute his nephew. Here are the first of a series of oppositions—in this case “analysis as science” versus “demonstration—art as history”-- in what constitutes a long list of oppositions and gaps in need of mediation. This includes individual versus mass, subject versus object, and metropole versus periphery. These oppositions perfectly introduce our initial stab at theorizing how the tragic works in James’s writings. This chapter begins to ask the question-- How does one pen a narrative foregrounding mass participation, as engine for progress and both anchor for radical analysis, through the lens of telling the tale of an individual?

“Every Cook Can Govern”¹⁷—James’s Engagement with Aristotle

¹⁷ C.L.R. James “Every Cook Can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece and Its Meaning for Today”. *Correspondence*, 2, no. 12 (1956). James focuses here on what he views as the radical key to Athenian Democracy, which is in the fact that the people rotate in and out of different civic and governmental positions gaining experience and a sort of rotating expertise and incorporation.

Tragedy works in James as a figure of mediation comparable to its role in its classical Greek connotation—whether mediating the relationship between the protagonist and the polis, the protagonist and the cosmos, the leader and the chorus, the individual versus the base. Kara M. Rabbitt captures James’s play on Aristotle: “James appears to make full conscious use [in *Jacobins*] of Aristotelian tragic structure, allowing a mimesis of the historical events of the Haitian Revolution to point toward the universals regarding the fall of colonialism and repressive hegemonic systems that he will underline in his 1938 conclusion and the 1963 appendix.”¹⁸ I want to mine the tension in his work between what Rabbitt argues as “a materialist analysis of history and a portraiture of a powerful individual” (*RAB*, 120).

James’s use of tragedy to describe Toussaint’s “revolutionary degeneration” does not involve a sort of convenient grafting of one set of terms from a different time-period to make sense out of a latter phenomenon. James’s employment of Aristotle marks a difference-- his working with Aristotle’s categories modifies such categories, changing them qualitatively. For Aristotle, the hamartia or tragic flaw as sketched in his *Poetics* relates to the requirements for his formulation of the tragic hero—“a man who is neither a paragon of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change of misfortune through any real badness or wickedness but because of some mistake...of great weight and consequence” (Aristotle qt. in *RAB*, 122). What constitutes Tragedy in the last instance for Aristotle is in its reception: Tragedy produces a sort of recognition/identification with the hero and his universal lessons (hence the hero cannot be too lofty) that produce a catharsis

¹⁸ Kara M. Rabbitt “C.L.R. James’s Figuring of Toussaint Louverture: *The Black Jacobins* and Literary History”, In *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*, ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 121. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *RAB*.

amongst the audience, a safety valve sublimating the polis's angst.¹⁹ James's hamartia is not about a transgression of morality; rather, it is a transgression of tried and true revolutionary strategy. For James, Aristotle's hamartia becomes one of tactical error and political miscalculation. The Aristotelian tragic structure outlined in *Poetics* clashes only somewhat with James's formulation in which he distinguishes between analysis as science versus art/demonstration as history. Aristotle differs with James's understanding of science versus art/history. For Aristotle, poetics/art is superior to history since it is the narrative mode that speaks in universals and is most suited for speculative thought. As opposed to their different understanding of the work of history versus art, James's understanding of dialectics as a process in which "you speculate, you create truth"²⁰ shares more affinity with Aristotle's formulations in *Poetics*:

It is also clear that the poet's job is not to report what has happened but what is likely to happen: that is, what is capable of happening according to the rule of probability or necessity. Thus the difference between the historian and the poet is not in their utterances being in verse or prose; the difference lies in the fact that the historian speaks of what has happened, the poet of the kind of thing that can happen. Hence Poetry is more philosophical and serious business than history; for poetry speaks of universals, history of particulars. (Aristotle qt. in *RAB*, 121)

James embraced both Aristotle and Hegel since for him both thinkers came closest to offering up analysis of the world with a heightened attention to systemic totality. He was critical of literary criticism for not integrating "piled up...mountains of information" into any "coherent system or method" and claimed unflinchingly that his "ideas of art and

¹⁹ Pabst M. Battin "Aristotle's Definition of Tragedy in the Poetics". The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism. 33.3 (1975): 293-302.

²⁰ Santiago Colas, "Silence and Dialectics: Speculations on C.L.R. James and Latin America" in Rethinking C.L.R. James Ed. Grant Farred, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 137. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *COL*.

society...like specifically literary criticism, are based upon Aristotle and Hegel”²¹.

James’s tragic configuration is in excess of Aristotle, since he “does the impossible” and “envisages the entry of the chorus”-- a feat that neither Aristotle nor his dramatist interlocutors could accomplish.

Cataloging Toussaint’s Tragic Errors

James’s hamartia is less concerned with catharsis than it is with overcoming a problem in revolutionary organization that gets repeated across time:

Toussaint had burnt his boats. With vision, courage and determination he was laying the foundations of an independent nation. But, too confident in his own powers he was making one dreadful mistake. Not with Bonaparte nor with the French Government. In nothing does his genius stand out so much as in refusing to trust the liberties of the blacks to the promises of French or British imperialism. His error was his neglect of his own people. They did not understand what he was doing or where he was going. He took no trouble to explain. It was dangerous to explain, but still more dangerous not to explain...it is no accident that Dessalines and not Toussaint finally led the island to independence. Toussaint, shut up within, immersed in diplomacy, went his torturous way, overconfident that he had only to speak and the masses would follow (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 240).

James’s wording of Toussaint’s state of being “shut up within himself” represents a challenge to understandings of the role of leadership in a revolutionary situation. His error in judgment consists of assuming a sort of static, mechanistic base that only awaits direction, in order to be mobilized. This stance presumes the sort of mass base, powerless without mediation that James’s study complicates and challenges. James’s wording here complicates his own rethinking of what actually constitutes the vanguard, and his accompanying effort to move beyond such concepts. Toussaint is effectively silenced, incapable of speech at the point he fails to consult and consider his base. His pronouncements are inaudible without the masses as their condition of possibility. He

²¹ James, “Preface to Criticism,” (1955) in Grimshaw, *Reader*, 255.

expands on this notion of Toussaint's "tragic flaw" by framing it as an error of method.

From the 1963 addition:

It was in method, and not in principle, that Toussaint failed. The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental. There were Jacobin workmen in Paris who would have fought for the blacks against Bonaparte's troops. But the international movement was not what it is today and there were none in San Domingo. The black labourers saw only the slave owning whites. These would accept the new regime, but never to the extent of fighting against a French army, and the masses knew this. (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 283)

Tragedy is the frame that narrates the failed mediation between Toussaint and his base—it is historically realized in Toussaint's Haiti by his misdirected support for the white settlers:

[Toussaint] still continued to favour the whites. Every white woman was entitled to come to all "circles". Only the wives of the highest black officials could come. A white woman was called madame, the black woman was citizen. Losing sight of his mass support, taking it for granted, he sought only to conciliate the whites at home and abroad. (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 262)

It is this strategic miscalculation that lays the path for the opportunism of Dessalines. Echoing his critique of Toussaint, James berates himself for errors in his own historiography's failure to negotiate the subtlety between revolutionary leader and base and really foreground the chorus. This has everything to do in this case with his criticism of his own use of the historical archive. In the aforementioned talk *How I Would Rewrite The Black Jacobins* [18 July 1971], he criticizes his use of the Swiss traveler Girod-Chantrans's description of a group of laboring enslaved Africans. Instead of a reliance on second hand sources in the historical archive, James in 1971 would "write descriptions in which the black slaves themselves, or people very close to them, describe what they were doing and how they felt about the work that they were forced to carry on" (*REWRITE*,

99). He chides himself for reproducing the material from the perspective of “sympathetic observer” instead of a direct accounting from the subjugated masses themselves. James in a key summing up moment of this talk revisits his use of a quotation from Pamphile de Lacroix, a soldier participating in General Leclerc’s mission to San Domingo to restore slavery. Note how James uses repetition to drum home his point:

But no one observed that in the new insurrection of San Domingo, as in all insurrections which attack constituted authority [as in all insurrections which attack constituted authority, all, ALL, A-L-L], it was not the avowed chiefs who gave the signals for revolt but obscure creatures for the greater part personal enemies of the coloured generals. (*REWRITE*, 106-7)

Note how the editors/transcribers of these remarks typographically represent variations on the theme of all, ALL, A-L-L to further highlight the spoken rhythms of James’s arguments. He heralds his repeating of a line, just in case the listener is not clear or paying attention and through repetition and explicit clarification—“Is that clear?” declares the political stakes of his argument. James goes on to repeat again the key line in de Lacroix and extends the insight to a contemporary American setting, demonstrating its universal application:

Now, I will read again from Pamphile de Lacroix: No one observed [but he did] that in the new insurrection of San Domingo, it was not the avowed chiefs who gave the signal for the revolt but obscure creatures. (They were not only in San Domingo obscure. They were obscure in Watts, they were obscure in Detroit, they were obscure in Newark, they were obscure in San Francisco, they were obscure in Cleveland, they were obscure creatures in Harlem.) They were obscure creatures, for the most part personal enemies of the coloured generals. Is that clear? And he says that in all insurrections which attack constituted authority comes from *below*...(*REWRITE*, 106)

The Black Jacobins is first and foremost, in James’s retrospective analysis, a tale of the ex-slaves as chorus—that force “in the Greek tragedy...decisive in the solution of the problem” (*REWRITE*, 111). Tragedy is a device that accounts for not only

Toussaint's failure to communicate and clarify his strategy to his base, but it also acts as a useful formal device in James's work. James's examination of Haiti presents a challenge of how to organize perception: What is the aesthetics of organization and the organization of aesthetics suitable to narrate Black radical movement? It is not enough to write a history privileging the entry of the chorus as your anchor to make sense out of multiple perceptions. One has to create the organizational structure appropriate to capture in the narrative mass-driven systemic change. The attention paid to writing about writing is a first step to fine tune the sort of methodology one needs to realize such goals. In James's text, the formal arrangement that orders the sub-soil as constitutive of the challenges, transformations, and moves of the individual leader helps to illustrate this task. James's criticism of the use of the archive only further along the initial narrative thrust of the 1938 work as telling a story of mass struggle through the mediation of the reflection of an individual leader. Through narrative choice and employment of a vocabulary of the tragic, James finds a vehicle to mediate between the "science" and the "art" of history.

"The British Intellectual Goes to Britain"²²: The Persistent Tragic in James

James uses the chance to examine the dawn of eighteenth century San Domingo as his way to talk about twentieth century aspirations for an Africa, free from colonial domination. The agenda of his inquiry into late eighteenth century Haitian liberation is early/mid twentieth century African independence. Another way to state this is to draw upon James's biography. There is conflict between James's self-presentation as solitary

²² James qt. in Hill, 61.

“British intellectual” writing about revolutionary Haiti in London and spending hours upon hours in the Paris archives versus James as participant in a community of African activist-intellectuals intervening in such events such as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Santiago Colas beautifully illustrates James’s tendency to process phenomena dialectically. Colas quotes James’s comrade and partner, Anna Grimshaw. Colas provides the bracketed additions to this passage:

First of all [this is the sense—perception part], James has a remarkable visual sense. He watched everything with a very keen eye; storing images in his memory for over half a century, of distinctive personalities and particular events, which [now she moves to Understanding] he wove into his prose with the skill and sensitivity of a novelist. Although his passion for intellectual rigour gave a remarkable consistency to the themes of his life’s work, his analyses were never confined. [finally, on to Reason] He was always seeking to move beyond conventional limitations in his attempt to capture the interconnectedness of things and the integration of human experience.²³ (*COL*, 140)

James hones and sharpens his sense of revolutionary historical methodology through his extended study of Haiti. James himself acknowledges yet downplays this context for the work’s production along with his pre-London radicalization. James treats this fact as much as a self-conscious political intervention inspired by his community of people working on African liberation as he does a sort of fortuitous oddity, a stumbling into the Parisian archives prompted by his grand literary designs. “I had made up my mind, for no other reason than a literary reason” (*REWRITE*, 67). Santiago Colas captures the dialectical imperative articulated in James’s thoughts on the consequences of narrative choice—“What do they know of cricket who only Cricket know?” (*COL*, 136). He elaborates the point that “James never just wrote *about* things—Cricket, Cuba, *Moby*

²³ Santiago Colas, “Silence and Dialectics: Speculations on C.L.R. James and Latin America,” in *Rethinking C.L.R. James*, ed. Grant Farred (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 140. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *COL*.

Dick, Lenin, and so on—he also wrote about how to write about them” in the following passage:

Dialectical thinking is thought to the second power, a thought about thinking itself, in which the mind must deal with its own thought process just as much as with the material it works on, in which both the particular content involved and the style of thinking suited to it must be held together in the mind at the same time. (*COL*, 136)

“Thinking about thinking” translates in *The Black Jacobins* as a fine sense of care in determining such questions of narrative tone and emplotment strategies. I want to take some time to further provide evidence for the existence of the tragic in the initial 1938 version of the text and elaborate further on my critique of Scott. It is necessary to catalog some of the points in which the tragic exists in both versions of the book. In this discussion, I will include a second pagination that signifies the page in the 1938 version of the text. In both 1938 and 1963, tragedy always denotes a crisis in leadership. James writes: “The vacillation of the leaders was killing the revolutionary ardour of the people at every turn”(BLACK JACOBINS, 312, 258). Speaking on Toussaint’s trusted General Christophe:

It was a terrific blow to the revolution. When Toussaint and the others reproached him, Christophe, a man known to appreciate the comforts of life, replied that he was tired of living in the woods like a brigand. Christophe had been blamed—wrongly. The fault was entirely Toussaint’s. His combination of fierce offensives with secret negotiations was too torturous a method for Christophe. It was a policy suited for war between two national states, not for a revolutionary war. True, the masses did not know of the negotiations, but it was the results that mattered. Christophe was an exslave, a man of the revolution, one of Toussaint’s staunchest supporters. If he surrendered to the French, who should the black labourers go on fighting? Once more the masses had received a shattering blow—not from the bullets of the enemy, but from where the masses often receive it, from their own trembling leaders. (BLACK JACOBINS, 326, 270)

In the latter part of *The Black Jacobins*, revolutionary violence is described as tragic not in and of itself but in its particular execution as an example of Dessalines's opportunism and the general debasement when one assumes revenge as policy rather than a short-lived outburst. Examine the parallel examples' iteration of the leader/base problematic. The tragic designates this short-circuiting in leadership, not the actuality of the restrained use of terror as a tactic of revolutionary violence.

The massacre of the whites was a tragedy; not for the whites. For these old slave-owners, those who burnt a little powder in the arse of a Negro, who buried him alive for insects to eat, who were well treated by Toussaint, and who, as soon as they got the chance, began their old cruelties again; for these there is no need to waste one tear or one drop of ink. The tragedy was for the blacks and the Mulattoes. It was not policy but revenge, and revenge has no place in politics. The whites were no longer to be feared, and such purposeless massacres degrade and brutalise a population, especially one which was just beginning as a nation and has had so bitter a past. The people did not want it—all they wanted was freedom, and independence seemed to promise that...That the new nation survived at all is forever to its credit for if the Haitians thought that imperialism was finished with them, they were mistaken (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 373-374, 308).

From the initial publication, the tragic as constituting the gap between perception between leader and mass is a persistent threat to the success and integrity of the Revolution. Its persistence is a hedge against the sort of Romanticist vindication that both James and David Scott direct their suspicion. My problem with the Scott text is not in its careful, attentive mapping of both Romanticist and tragic lines of exposition in the study. It is in its ultimately incorrect insistence that the original version of the text fails to incorporate the preferred tragic modality. Scott's misplaced critique of James fails to see that the additions in the 1963 version work to provide further emphasis not curtail or more appropriately re-route the entire theoretical endeavor. He forecloses a reading that

lauds James for presenting readers with a case study in tempered revolutionary actuality in favor of an over-stated claim of hasty dismissal. It is a curious move, considering that most readers are only familiar with the latter version. Scott's misreading of James in the service of illuminating a sort of liberal opposition to revolutionary transformation via his concept of the "problem space" fails to out-smart dialectically James's own dialectical method in the text. Although, not utilizing the terminology of problem space and total revolution, James actually executes Scott's advice on temporality in a more careful manner. It is his specific dedication to the actuality of the Haitian Revolution that allows the book to resonate with his twentieth century collectivist concerns. Scott would have done well to heed Adorno's advice as it relates to Marcel Proust and apply it to his own object of study. Adorno's epigrammatic observation from the "Dwarf Fruit" section of *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* reads: "It is Proust's courtesy to spare the reader the embarrassment of believing himself cleverer than the author".²⁴

The Universal as Sylvia Wynter's Pieza-Effect:

The Production of Tragic Subjects

The individual, that is, is not the vis-à-vis of power: it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle.

-Foucault, *Two Lectures*.²⁵

²⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott, (NY: Verso, 1974), 45.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview & Other Writings*. Ed. Colin Gordon, (NY: Pantheon Books, 1986), 98.

Thus far, we have been looking at the tragic in C.L.R. James's texts as a form of dialectical mediation. Primarily, the tragic is a modality that mediates the relationship in a revolutionary situation between the leader and the base. Sylvia Wynter's concept of "Pieza-Effect"²⁶ as it relates to James's *Beyond a Boundary* helps to further elaborate on James's uses of Aristotle's hamartia to explain the divide between leader and base. Wynter posits the Pieza, the general equivalence of value in the traffic and circulation of African slaves at the center of James "counter-poiesis." The Pieza was an enslaved African in optimal physical health that the traders from Portugal used as the abstract equivalent to judge the worth of other enslaved Africans at market. James's text in its organization and its constant mediations formally mirrors the gap between Toussaint and the Haitian masses. Sylvia Wynter posits an interconnection between aesthetic categories and political philosophy in James. "The Jamesian poiesis, taken as a system, the theoretics providing a reference for the esthetics and vice-versa, provides the condition of possibility for the emergence of a Jamesian doctrine, one that subverts its own center—the labor conceptual framework" (*WYN*, 64). James's historical positioning as a British colonial subject in the Caribbean—"the ecumenicism...of being Caliban" (*WYN*, 68) produces and dictates the necessity of a pluri-conceptual frame to determine the question of whom or what group constitutes a revolutionary agent: "Because of the multiple modes of coercion and of exploitation, the factory model was only one of many models. Thus there could be no mono-conceptual framework—no pure revolutionary subject, no single locus of the Great Refusal, no single correct line" (*WYN*, 69). Wynter's piece fuses together politics with aesthetics. She highlights James's pluri-conceptual orientation and

²⁶ Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception: The Counterdoctrine of Jamesian Poiesis". in *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*. Paget Henry Ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 63-91. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *WYN*.

demonstrates how his categorical openness is both dictated by his aesthetic sensibility and his multiple historical groundings symbolized by the phrase “an intellectual wanting to play cricket” (*WYN*, 64-65). “A pluri-conceptual theoretics, a universal-based on the particular [Césaire] is the logical result and outcome of the Jamesian poetics” (*WYN*, 84). I want to use Wynter to think about how the tragic helps underscore the sort of revolutionary subject constituting James’s analysis.

Wynter commences her discussion of James’s theoretical orientation through a detour exploring a discussion of the insights in literary production of subjectivity in Pierre Macherey. In his *Pour une theorie de la production litteraire* (1966), he extends Althusserian structural Marxism to argue that production spills into all aspects of the society creating autonomous laws of development specific to discrete objects of analysis—in this case literature. “The homology between the historical and the fictional universe is not realized at the level of a particular element but at the level of the system. It is the fictional system in its ensemble which produces an effect of reality”(Machery qt in *WYN*, 64). For Machery, Wynter argues: “the novel...is not the product of a doctrine, not the form-giving mechanism to an already pre-established content. It is, rather, the condition of possibility of the emergence of a doctrine”. Aesthetic structures shape and determine the ideological matrix of the author’s ideology. They do not reflect a one-to-one correlation to a stable, objective referent.

Here the Foucauldian insight that power creates subjects, instead of reflecting an objective, stable, prior constituted individual is applied to literary forms. James, due to his specific theoretical tendencies and political concerns, does not go as far as Wynter who advocates the “equiprimordiality of structure and cultural conceptions in the genesis

of power” and further that, both [cultural/structural] aspects of power “serve as a code for the other’s development” (*WYN*, 65). James, as Wynter is correct to point out, cannot settle with a canonical labor-centric Marxian methodology. By unhinging a classical Marxist notion of production as the key turn for revolutionary agency and transformation, one is left with more room to theorize and narrate revolutionary movement and focus attention on subjects outside the classical Eurocentric Marxist ken of vision—Women’s struggles, Black self-determination, etc. The tragic not only narrates a pre-existing revolutionary problematic in James, mainly the degeneration of communication between leader and base, it also produces such a paradox formally in its very ideological structure; hence, highlighting its urgency as priority. The Black Radical tragic manifests itself as a “quest for a [theoretical informed praxis based] frame to contain them all”(*WYN*, 69)—where, “them all” constitute the multiple identities and competing subjective entry points of struggle particular for achieving Black self-determination. The different modalities of James and his affiliations need a mediating agent to present such an ecumenicism, constituting the way James’s real life blurs the categories. James does not share the post-structuralist suspicion of totality. His ecumenicism is wrapped up in his commitment to develop a sound method of categorization appropriate to adequately frame his particular research and praxis-based objects. It will serve the argument to examine in depth Wynter’s notion of James’s “Pieza Conceptual Frame”.

Wynter, like Immanuel Wallerstein’s Worlds Systems approach, commences her analysis of the political economy underlying her study with circulation/accumulation (of enslaved Africans objectified as commodities), instead of the classically Marxist notion of production—the same production, in light of Wynter’s usage that counter-intuitively

informs Machery's analysis. The Pieza framework in Wynter accomplishes the following: It foregrounds the centrality of African labor in the development of European hegemony and also opens up standard notions of what signifies production. Her article posits a single network of accumulation divided into three stages—circulation for accumulation, production for accumulation, and consumption for accumulation positing each stages corresponding historical actors—African slaves, the working class, and the consumer. The international network of accumulation leads to a “differential ratio of distribution of goods and rewards with cultural legitimacy granted accordingly” (WYN, 82). Such cultural legitimacy rations “also distort and minimize the contributions of various pieza groups to the process of global capital accumulation.” Different Pieza groups mean different sites, opportunities, and actors of resistance to domination. Wynter grounds her theoretical claims in a historical interpretation wrapped up in twentieth century Pan African Congressional politics. James's theoretical polyvalency informs her understanding of James's disassociation with the 1974 6th Pan African Congress in Dar Es Salaam. James's chiding of certain African revolutionary elites has to do with their eliding of questions of the popular in crafting their political agendas and making sense of the past. His “pieza orientation” helps James to align more with a sort of Fanonist identification with the peasantry and makes him weary of the more statist tendencies of Sekou Touré et al. Wynter's text helps bring home the point that the poetic conception of James's study helps produce the very subjects his study wants to chronicle.

My use of Wynter here is to mark how James's framework signals an opening up that allows for the consideration of unorthodox subjects of focus in a revolutionary history. Even though her focus is on *Beyond a Boundary*, her claims still help to

illuminate the object of this chapter's study. "The Counterdoctrine of Jamesian Poiesis" is very much in the spirit of Williams in that it opens up the received ideas that "no longer describe our experience." James's method makes room for the privileged entry of the chorus. His concentration on the "subsoil" allows him to see the agency of the Haitian masses. In the tragic passages chronicled thus far in *The Black Jacobins*, it is demonstrated over and over again how James gives the masses of the Haitian people the privileged position of wisdom and revolutionary judgment often out-flanking the expertise of their leadership. However, the text also in enacting this repeated phenomenon underscores both the need to keep the two forces (leader and base) in constant play. James does not sacrifice focus on one for focus on the other. The passages on vacillation and masses a step ahead of leaders demonstrates the sort of openness that Wynter heralds in *Beyond a Boundary*. Such an openness of methodology allows for James to register these phenomena and to look for them in his study in the first place. The formal construction of *The Black Jacobins* in its chapter division, its prefatory framing and its willingness to juggle art with analysis, leadership versus mass base, and so forth rehearses and formally demonstrates the sort of gap that requires mediation and the perils to be aware of when tarrying with such gaps.

The Actuality of Revolutionary Violence in James

James's *Appendix* to the 1963 addition of *The Black Jacobins*, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," updates the historical thrust of Caribbean nation development as articulated in its prior iteration and grounds its claims in the actuality of both the Haitian and Cuban struggles. James writes: "Toussaint L'Ouverture is not here linked to Fidel Castro because both led revolutions in the West Indies. Nor is the link a

convenient or journalistic demarcation of historical time. What took place in French San Domingo in 1792-1804 reappeared in Cuba in 1958...Castro's revolution is of the twentieth century as much as Toussaint's was of the eighteenth"(BLACK JACOBINS, 391). For E. San Juan Jr., *The Black Jacobins*' Appendix "pursues the antinomy between concrete universality and its geopolitical mediations in the specific region of the Caribbean" (SAN, 314). In his essay, James sketches the development of the modern Caribbean through three stages: The first being "The 19th Century," the second "Between the Wars" and final third "After World War II." The substrata of his analysis is the actuality of the modernizing effects of the sugar plantation on a developing Caribbean: "The sugar plantation has been the most civilising as well as the most demoralising influence in West Indian development"(BLACK JACOBINS, 392). Similar to the overall narrative logic of *The Black Jacobins*, James switches registers after providing a detailed analytic historical accounting of Caribbean history. He moves towards a consideration of literature and intellectual history in his gloss of the similarity in themes reflected in Fernando Ortiz's work and Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (published in France a year after *The Black Jacobins*) and the work of Trinidadian writer V.S. Naipaul. The heart of what this chapter argues as the use of tragedy in James as split between leader and base is grounded in the historical conditions as captured in the *Appendix* in both James's reflections on necessity as the structuring force of revolutionary agency and his general point on West Indian political leadership. Respectively:

There was therefore in West Indian Society an inherent antagonism between the consciousness of the black masses and the reality of their lives, inherent in that it was constantly reproduced not by agitators but by the very conditions of the society itself"(BLACK JACOBINS, 407).

No West Indian but will have among its most resplendent stars the names of Jose Marti the political leader and Maceo the soldier. They were men in the full tradition of Jefferson, Washington, and Bolivar. That was their strength and that was their weakness (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 394).

The tragic orientation here is apparent in the above juxtaposition. The main rift producing revolutionary Black mass-consciousness is structural—"the very conditions of the society itself"-- not spawned from outside. At the same time, leaders exist and their leadership role and "great man-ness" are both simultaneously liability and virtue. To think these two contradictory scenarios, one needs to adopt a mediation device, with all its accompanying traps.

The actuality of revolutionary violence demands that it is evaluated case per case, and its tragic status rendered accordingly. Toussaint's letter to the Directory reproduced in the full-length version of *The Black Jacobins* declares that "*to re-establish slavery in San Domingo, this was done, then I declare to you it would be to attempt the impossible: we have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it*" (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 197). There is a matter-of-factness of tone in this pronouncement. There is a certain resolve that is so matter of fact that it teeters between historical over-determination and an almost "natural" development of things. Its coolness of pronouncement disables the ability to assess its worth a priori without engaging in the actuality of the phenomenon.

Speaking on the specific tragic use of violence Toussaint employs against his nephew-General Moise, San Juan Jr. notes in the following remarks from Toussaint the "strange duality" (*SAN*, 237) as it relates to his assertion of autonomy from Bonaparte's France combined with his fidelity to the country. In conclusion, I want to offer up some thoughts on this contrast between the two men's words:

Whatever my old uncle may do, I cannot bring myself to be the executioner of my color. It is always in the interest of the metropolis that he scolds me; but these interests are those of the whites, and I shall only love them when they have given me back the eye that I lost in battle. (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 275)

I took up arms for the freedom of my colour, which France alone proclaimed, but which she has no right to nullify. Our liberty is no longer in her hands. It is in our own. We will defend it or perish. (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 281)

Toussaint's order to execute his nephew crystallizes the sense of the Black radical tragic this chapter attempts to illustrate. In the act of execution, Toussaint fails to properly explain his actions to his base. It is important to recognize both Moise and Toussaint are correct in their respective assertions. Moise's fidelity to the masses of Haitian people is without question. He is the individual figure in James's study that most consistently represents Toussaint's base. However, Toussaint's competing allegiance, in all its tragic consequence, is equally understandable. His fidelity to France as the strategic proclamation of liberty for the Africans of San Domingo coupled with his belief that Africans must protect that freedom by any means necessary is not a contradictory position. In the non-Romantic actuality of the struggle, there is the constant danger that what is contingently sound as far as strategic positioning fails in the final regard to incorporate the energies and counter-wisdoms of the mass. There is nothing inevitable about this failure; however, it was true for the Haitian Revolution and for James it is a fear for future struggles that is wise to heed. This dual negotiation is a constant concern informing past, present, and future struggles for Pan African liberation. This chapter attempts to sketch the theoretical movement of the tragic in James's historiography. The chorus is alive and kicking in both versions of *The Black Jacobins* contrary to both James's self-criticisms and David Scott's careful scholarship. Modifying deposed and

illegally captured President Aristide statement that “it is Toussaint, rather than Dessalines, who can accompany the popular movement today,” I want to conclude with noting that both leaders accompany the present day journey of Haiti to harness its revolutionary past in service of a liberatory future. This accompaniment is only made possible because both in their differing styles participated in the constitutive mass/leader inter-dependence to different degrees of success and failure. Such varying degrees do not encourage one to abandon the problematic in its entirety. Their tragic shortcomings do not negate the fact that they in their efforts both tried and succeeded in the impossible, “the only thing that truly matters.”

CHAPTER TWO

Thinking about Haiti:

The Super-Naturalist Aesthetic of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*

I do not think that you can write anything of value or understanding about the present. You can only write about life if it is far enough in the past. The present is too much mixed up with superficial values; you can't know which thing is important and which is not. The present which I have chosen is one I knew.

-Eugene O'Neill, 1946¹

To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects.

Avery F. Gordon²

The Theatrical Cauldron of the Black radical tragic

The 'Yet' & 'And' of *The Emperor Jones*

Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920)³ was composed during the imperialist intervention by the United States in the Caribbean. Five years earlier, President Woodrow Wilson had sent 330 U. S. Marines to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, imposing on that nation a constitution, written in 1918 by Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt. This document undermined a longstanding principle, articulated by Dessalines in 1804, forbidding land ownership in Haiti by foreigners.⁴ In effect, O'Neill's play stages both

¹ John H Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1967), 36

² Avery F. Gordon, Ghostly Matters Haunting and the Sociological Imagination, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 17

³ Eugene O'Neill, Anna Christie/The Emperor Jones/The Hairy Ape, (NY: Vintage International, 1995).

⁴ For more information on the history of the United States in Haiti see: Mary A. Renda, Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Paul Farmer, The uses of Haiti, 2nd ed. (Monroe, Me.: Common Courage Press,

the fall of his protagonist Brutus Jones *and* an African American intervention in African diasporic sovereignty. But the relationship of O'Neill's text to a notion of radical Black tragedy generally, and to Haiti specifically, is one of marked ambivalence. If, "Western society," as Cedric Robinson writes, is the "social cauldron [for] Black radicalism," O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*⁵ presents a kind of theatrical cauldron. While it provided unprecedented opportunities to Black actors and represented an opening up of dramatic possibilities, the play's movement is both progressive and regressive; it cannot resolve the tension between its radical aesthetic and its tendency to foreclose its forays into radical politics. The aesthetic and historical implications of O'Neill's use of abstraction and what he calls "super-naturalism" will constitute the main focus of this inquiry.

Scholar Shannon Steen recounts an objection to one of the play's stage directions voiced by actor James Earl Jones, on the occasion of his lead role in the 1970 Caedmon Productions audio recording of the play.⁶ Jones objects to O'Neill's description of the protagonist as "typically negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face" and he "questioned O'Neill's use of the conjunction 'yet' in this description, asking how our conceptions of this character would be different if O'Neill had instead used the conjunction 'and'; 'as if ordinarily there is not dignity in the negroid face...as if there is something keen and *unnegroid* about him".⁷ The 'yet' of the play implies a discourse on Black essence that undermines the specificity of the representation of the individual

2003); Randall Robinson, An unbroken agony: Haiti, from revolution to the kidnapping of a president, (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

⁵ *The Emperor Jones* premiered at the Playwright's Theatre in 1920. It was revised by the Provincetown Players in 1924, and 1926, and an operatic version premiered at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1933.

⁶ James Earl Jones, *The Emperor Jones* (Caedmon Productions, LP, 1970)

⁷ Shannon Steen, "Melancholy Bodies: Racial Subjectivity and Whiteness in O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*". *Theatre Journal*. Vol. 52 (2000): 346. Further reference to this article will be cited parenthetically in the text as *STEEN*.

Brutus Jones, in favor of a politics of expressionist abstraction over-determined by a racist calculus. However, the ‘and’ signifies the latent possibility undermining such a retrograde formulation. Within a larger act of aiming exists the actuality of missing. Abstraction and particularity are in constant flux in the play, and each of those movements inherits the political consequences of their assumptions. Carme Manuel references Norman Sanders’s “Introduction” to an edition of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* to illustrate the contrary, double-signification of O’Neill’s character’s first name: “at one extreme, we have the medieval Brutus condemned to suffer at the center of Dante’s *Inferno* as a man guilty of criminal assassination and personal betrayal; and at the other, ‘the noblest Roman of them all,’ Plutarch’s ‘angel,’ the one just man, gentle and altruistic, among the wicked and envious conspirators.”⁸ O’Neill’s play exhibits a progressive and regressive movement, a tension between its radical aesthetic and its opening up and closure of its not fully developed radical politics. The critical tension between the ‘and’ and the ‘yet’ underscores the main problematic of the play. It represents an American model of Expressionism and stages an unresolved tension between a racist primitivism and a radical attempt to foreground the history of brutal, coercive appropriation of Black labor. *The Emperor Jones* balances a commitment to both acute specificity and a simultaneous radical and retrograde politics of abstraction in both its formal construction and thematic content.

. Despite and in excess of the tragic limitations of O’Neill’s attempt at saying something profound about Black oppression in a colonial context over-determined by racialism, or more precisely, because of such limitations, he provides a useful model for

⁸ Carme Manuel, “A ghost in the expressionist jungle of O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*”, [African American Review](#) (Spring-Summer, 2005), 7.

exposing such oppressive mechanisms. The super-naturalism of this aesthetic on one hand worries the line separating reality and fantasy in terms of what his character sees in the forest. There is a way in which the concept of “haunting” illuminates such work. According to Tzvetan Todorov, the supernatural ‘often appears because we take a figurative sense literally.’⁹ To represent key moments of North American oppression of African people as figurative, haunting delusions performs a complex task. On one hand, figurative representation avoids the insult of trying to capture such devastation in a literal, belittlingly simple, mimetic fashion. On the other hand, to figuratively represent such signposts renders them flimsy. Latent in such a representation is the notion that such structures can and should be toppled and resisted. O’Neill does not draw out this latent potential in his work; but still puts it out in the world for further development. The play exists as a multi-layering of extremely self-reflexive theater-tricks: a psycho-drama/hallucination within the dramatic genre, the play within the play, maintaining fidelity to its Modernist milieu by foregrounding its status as aesthetic object. Its supernaturalist employment of “haunting” memories of an African American past bound up in resistance to enslavement is useful to compare to Avery F. Gordon’s notion of haunting in her study, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997). O’Neill’s drama does not go all the way to provide what Gordon frames as a “special way of knowing”; but, it is important to recognize its use of ghostly apparitions as it relates to the African holocaust. O’Neill does not go far enough in staging this vision out of concern for justice, “the only reason one would bother”, but gestures towards the aesthetic armory needed to complete such labor. For Gordon, the ghost,

⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic. A structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (NY: Ithaca, 1975), 76-77

Makes itself known to us through us through haunting and pulls us affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as a recognition. Haunting recognition is a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening.

...The ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing. It gives notice not only to itself but also to what it represents. What it represents is usually a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken. From a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility, a hope. Finally, I have suggested that the ghost is alive, so to speak. We are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice*. Out of a concern for justice would be the only reason one would bother. (*GHOSTLY*, 63-4)

I will explore the specific contours of O'Neill's Brutus Jones's "haunting recognition" and demonstrate how such a recognition/process of memory develops via O'Neill's aesthetic innovations. This chapter engages the aporias of representation bound up in Eugene O'Neill's "Haiti play" in order to delve deeply into Houston A. Baker's prescient insight into O'Neill's work and linger a bit with its consequences—"If only O'Neill had bracketed the psycho-surreal final trappings of his Emperor's world and given us the stunning account of colonialism that remains implicit in his quip at the close of his *dramatis personae*: 'The action of the play takes place on an island in the West Indies, as yet un-self-determined by white marines.'"¹⁰ An ironic attack on US foreign policy is couched in this line. Its critique is enacted by its muddled phraseology, that begs further probing to discover its rational kernel, the assertion that the ideology of US colonial policy consists of a paradoxical double-speak in both language and practice. The yet of "As yet un-self-determined" (the veiled progressive political critique) is consistently in pushing up against the 'yet' of James Earl Jones's critique. It is that constitutive tension that makes the play a site for such heated contestation.

¹⁰ Houston Baker Jr., Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, (Chicago: The U. of Chicago Press, 1987), 7.

How does one come to terms with the critique of O'Neill as symptomatic of white authors appropriately labeled by Zora Neale Hurston as comprising the "Negrotarian strand"; yet, salvage some sort of revolutionary gestic moment in the work which would perhaps encourage a more favorable reception and more importantly use? Allow me to borrow at length an insight from Edward Said's reading of Conrad offered up his talk (and posthumously released book): *Freud and the Non-European*. Said's insight into Joseph Conrad helps elaborate on what I want to argue about the latent liberatory kernel in O'Neill's flirtation with colonial essentialist representations:

The horribly attenuated and oppressed black porters that Conrad portrays that [Chinua] Achebe finds so objectionable not only contain within them the frozen essence that condemns them to the servitude and punishment Conrad sees as their present fate, but also point prophetically towards a whole series of implied developments that their later history discloses despite, over and above, and also paradoxically because of, the radical severity and awful solitude of Conrad's essentializing vision. The fact that later writers keep returning to Conrad means that his work, by virtue of its uncompromising Eurocentric vision, is precisely what gives it its antinomian force, the intensity and power wrapped inside its sentences, which demand an equal and opposite response to meet them head on in a confirmation, a refutation, or an elaboration of what they present. In the grip of Conrad's Africa, you are driven by its sheer stifling horror to work through it, to push beyond it as history itself transforms even the most unyielding stasis into process and a search for greater clarity, relief, resolution or denial. And of course in Conrad, as will all such extraordinary minds, the felt tension between what is intolerable there and a symmetrical compulsion to escape from it is what is most profoundly at stake—what the reading and interpretation of a work like *Heart of Darkness* is all about. Texts that are inertly of their time stay there: those which brush up unstintingly against historical constraints are the ones we keep with us, generation after generation.¹¹

Conrad's and O'Neill's aesthetic objects are different entities constructed under vastly different circumstances but it is still useful to ask what is the "antinomian force" underlying O'Neill's caricature? The "return to Conrad" has its analogous moment in the

¹¹ Edward W. Said, *Freud and the Non-European*, (London: Verso in association with the Freud Museum, London, 2003), 25-7.

reception and revisiting of O'Neill's play. This will be explored further in this chapter's conclusion. Is there a comparable effect of Conradian "horror" in O'Neill's play? For Said, Conrad's representation of a "stifling horror" forces in its reception the need to push beyond it to an indeterminate cluster of possibilities. These include, "clarity, relief, resolution or denial." Part of the staying power of O'Neill's work is in its very ability to brush up against such historical constraints and to gesture towards a future problem for imminent anti-systemic forces concerned with total liberation in the colonies: the cache of memory and the haunting of future directions by the past and the representation of the oppressive structures resisted by anti-systemic forces. There is a prophetic strand implied by Baker, that I want to develop in the play as well as its foregrounding of historical memory as it relates to the traffic in Black bodies and enslaved labor as the building blocks and foundation of American Empire.

Although he presents a cogent case for a troubling racist dynamic in O'Neill's use of psycho-expressionist abstraction, one might want to challenge scholar John Cooley's point that "even though O'Neill was attempting to revive tragedy and to dramatize the self-destructiveness of the lust for power, the details of his play allow no such universality of theme." Cooley elaborates that, "the stereotypes of black character are too blatant to be overlooked" and "the retrograde movement of the play encompasses black history and thereby carries with it implied racial statements."¹² This marks the main point of departure in the argument of my chapter. Instead of reading O'Neill's engagement with the politics of a Caribbean island as simply an exercise in expressionist racist abstraction, I read *The Emperor Jones* as a meditation on a Western colonialism

¹² John R Cooley, "In Pursuit of the Primitive: Black Portraits by Eugene O'Neill and Other Village Bohemians" in The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined. ed. Victor A. Kramer, (NY: AMS P, 1987), 51-64.

that functions via coercive force and an over-determined symbolic code generated from the encounters of US imperial power in the Caribbean. A coding as Homi Bhabha states defines a Black person as “both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants; ... He is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar...”¹³ By presenting the audience with a series of signifiers of white racist tools of domination (the slave block, the chain gang, the overseer guard), O’Neill opens up space in a theatrical cauldron for more effective interventions by Black radical playwrights. In a *New York Times* review of the 1920 premiere of the play by The Provincetown Players, cultural critic Alexander Woolcott provides a condensed and loaded gloss of the plot progression:

It begins with the rattle of invisible dice in the darkness, and then, as in a little clearing, he suddenly sees the squatting darky he had slain back home in a gamblers’ quarrel. He plunges on, but only to find himself once more strangely caught in the old chain gang, while the guard cracks that same whip whose stinging lash had goaded him to another murder. Then, as his fear quickens, the forest fills with old-fashioned people who stare at him and bid for him. They seem to be standing him on some sort of block. They examine his teeth, test his strength, flex his biceps. The scene yields only to the galley of a slave ship, and his own cries of terror take up the rhythmic lamentation of his people. Finally, it is a race memory of old Congo fears which drives him shrieking back through the forest to the very clearing whence he had started and where now his death so complacently awaits him.¹⁴

Woolcott’s summation foregrounds the series of oppressive apparatuses encountered as the hallucinatory visions of the protagonist. He curiously weaves into the language of the review the ambivalent racialist language of the play. It is not clear whether or not “the squatting darky” is his repetition of O’Neill’s theatrical idiom or his own inflection in the

¹³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 82

¹⁴ Alexander Wolcott, “The New O’Neill Play.” *The New York Times*. 7 November 1920.

review. His employment of the term “race memory” marks the most interesting tension for this investigation’s purposes. Whose “race memory” is it exactly—Brutus Jones as a representative of the experience of Africans in the Americas, or race memory as the mythology generated from above to rationalize racist plunder? O’Neill’s use of abstraction opens up a space rendering visible the slave block, the grand spectacle of the consolidation of Western capital accumulation and its organizing social logic of white supremacy. He responds to an abstraction-based German expressionism with a limited, radical American model¹⁵.

O’Neill gained inspiration for the material that ended up as *The Emperor Jones* from the armory of textual imagery comprising both the United States encounter with the Caribbean island and the legacy of slavery in the Americas, including a biography of the Haitian leader, Christophe.¹⁶ In an article for *New York World* written by Charles P. Sweeney (1924) analyzing the source material for his plays, O’Neill proclaimed:

“The idea for *Emperor Jones* came from an old circus man I knew. I knew all the circus people. This man, who later was a sparring partner for Jess Willard, had been traveling with a tent show through the West Indies. He told me a story current in Hayti concerning the late President Sam. This was to the effect that Sam had said they’d never get him with a lead bullet; that he would get himself first with a silver one. My friend, by the way, gave me a coin with Sam’s features on it, and I still keep it as a pocket piece. This notion about the silver bullet struck me, and I made a note of the story. About six months later I got the idea of the words, but I couldn’t see how it could be done on the stage, and I passed it up again. A year elapsed. One day I was reading of the religious feats in the Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there; how it starts at a normal pulse-beat and is slowly intensified until the heart-beat of every one present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. There was an idea and an experiment. How would this sort of thing work on an audience in a theatre?

¹⁵ The fascinating debates contesting the revolutionary or reactionary status of the reception of German expressionism are collected in this indispensable volume: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernest Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukacs, *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism*. Eds. Frederic Jameson and Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1994)

¹⁶ Ruby Cohn, “Black Power on Stage: Emperor Jones and King Christophe”. *Yale French Studies*. No. 46. (1971): 41-47.

The effect of the tropical forest on the human imagination was honestly come by. IT was the result of my own experience while prospecting for gold in Spanish Honduras. In the first presentation of *The Emperor* with Gilpin in the role, the drum was not handled as skillfully as it might have been, and I think the effect I hoped to get was lost. But in the revival with Paul Robeson playing the Emperor it really worked in accordance with my original scheme.”¹⁷

It is worth noting, that the original idea for a serious attempt at Expressionist drama comes from a circus man; whereas, the circus represents a traveling performative model that worries the divide between high and low culture. The genesis of the silver bullet gets traced to a recently deposed Haitian leader. The psychological association with a notion of “frenzy” points as well to an expressionist occupation with psychology employed in the work. Its imaginative fabric connects three discrete parts of an African diaspora—Congo, Haiti, and Honduras. O’Neill refers to his innovation of the use of the drum as an “idea and experiment.” The heavy anecdotal resonance of the above passage is culminated in the coupling of these two nouns. Raymond Williams connects experience with experiment in his study *Keywords*: “The old association between **experience** and *experiment* can be seen, in some of the most important modern uses, merely obsolete....These can be summarized as (i) knowledge gathered from past events, whether by conscious observation or by consideration or reflection; and (ii) a particular kind of consciousness, which can in some contexts be distinguished from ‘reason’ or ‘knowledge’.”¹⁸ To ground one’s theatrical experimentation in the realm of the experiential marks an avant-garde innovation key to O’Neill’s theatrical labors. The problem of representing ‘knowledge gathered from past events’, as formulated by the

¹⁷ Charles P Sweeney, “Back to the Source of Plays,” 1924. in *Conversations with Eugene O’Neill*. Ed Mark W. Estrin, (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 57-8.

¹⁸ Raymond *Williams Key Words A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised Edition. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 126.

coupling of O'Neill's words and Williams's insights, becomes in the above passage a problem of staging.

O'Neill's mode of anti-mimetic experimentation establishes a productive framework to think about aesthetic representations of genocidal rupture that challenges a more conservative, realist modality. Nathan Huggins captures the troubling propensity for O'Neill to slide into a racist representation mode coupled with his more admirable goal of "breaking with the old habits of keyhole peeping realism":

Eugene O'Neill attempted something different. His early plays should not be considered part of the popular drama of the time. They were more special, *avant garde*. O'Neill's interest was something other than realism. August Strindberg's naturalism was the great influence on him, "super-naturalism" as the American chose to call it. His effort was to look beneath the surface realisms to the quick of human experience. "Yet it is only by means of some form of 'supernaturalism,'" O'Neill wrote, "that we may express in the theatre what we comprehend intuitively of that self-defeating self-obsession which is the discount we moderns have to pay for the loan of life." Realism (or naturalism, as that term had come to be used in the theater) was inadequate. "It represents our fathers' daring inspiration toward self-recognition by holding the family Kodak up to ill-nature. But to us their old audacity is blague; we have taken too many snap-shots of each other in every graceless position; we have endured too much from the banality of surfaces." O'Neill proclaimed himself, and the new theater, to be breaking with the old habits of keyhole peeping realism, "squinting always at heavy, uninspired bodies—the fat facts—with not a nude spirit among them; we have been sick with appearances..." Strindberg showed how to peel away the facile realities and to expose the quivering spirit-flesh which was living essence. In O'Neill's hands this "super-naturalism" sometimes appeared to be primitivism.¹⁹

As Stephen A. Black argues in his critical study Eugene O'Neill *Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*, O'Neill "was reaching not for conventional wisdom but for the vein of tragedy exposed by Conrad, Crane, Dostoyevsky, Strindberg, and the other authors he valued. In Eugene's eyes, tragedy centered around the illusion people cherish that they can master

¹⁹ Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 296..

nature and control their destinies, an illusion that is repeatedly exposed when people find they have done the very things they tried to avoid doing”.²⁰ In this sense, O’Neill’s version of tragedy neglects the subtle negotiation of men and women navigating the circumstantial constraints in their lives, as captured by Marx in his *Eighteenth Brumaire* and echoed in James’s *The Black Jacobins* in favor of an exacerbated individualistic focus. O’Neill’s tragic vision is one of the atomized individual fighting up against systemic forces often so abstract to render them invisible. Yet, that very same abstraction gives them a radical representative weight in the play. This general theme in O’Neill’s work marks one of the reasons why the critical reception of *The Emperor Jones* often attempted to exorcise the racial elements of the play and treat it as a general allegory about human ambition. O’Neill’s work both encourages and undermines such a critical exorcism. In the specific case of a super-naturalism utilized in *The Emperor Jones*, this abstraction is helpful in gesturing towards the flimsiness of structures and ideations whose base is American colonial power. In a 1924 conversation with Louis Kantor on his representation of African Americans in his play *All God’s Chillun Got Wings*, O’Neill rallies against naturalism. When asked by Kantor why the naturalism of his play *Anna Christie* fails to inspire him anymore, O’Neill responded: “Because you can say practically nothing at all of our lives since 1914 through that form. The naturalistic play is rally less natural than a romantic or an expressionistic play. That is, shoving a lot of human beings on stage and letting them say the identical things in a theatre they would

²⁰ Stephen A. Black, Eugene O’Neill *Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 150.

say in a drawing room or a saloon does not necessarily make for naturalness”.²¹

Experience and Experiment are implicitly coupled again in this formulation—O’Neill’s expressionist innovation is attempting to say something “of our lives”. At a different point in the article, O’Neill takes great pains to abstract the significance of his plays, outside of their specific racial contexts. The specific markers of difference (whether racialized or gendered difference) for O’Neill helps him, via his drama explore universal, “human” truths. In the prior excerpted passage, the notion of “self-defeating self-obsession” relates somewhat to James’s effort to portray Toussaint as cut off from his base; but in the last instance, such a comparison is generous to a fault. O’Neill’s play highlights the failure to present the sort of interdependence between individual and group reflected on by James in his staging of Toussaint’s dilemmas. O’Neill’s undermining of naturalism, via an expressionist “spookiness” both simultaneously underscores specific legacies of historical oppression as much as it in his own self-avowed presentation is really about “humanity”, abstracted from specific historical context. Despite such trouble, he does stage a revolution in the context of *The Emperor Jones*’s eight scenes and his super-naturalist aesthetic is a useful tool to formally represent American imperial power.

The Latent Textual Prophetic in O’Neill

I will now briefly outline the eight-scene breakdown of the work with special attention to the use of the drum in the play as well as the proportion in the text between stage direction and dialogue--whether monologue or words exchanged between Brutus Jones and others and the increasing incursions of phantasms in the play. This is crucial

²¹ Louis Kantor, “O’Neill Defends His Play of Negro”, 1924 in Conversations with Eugene O’Neill, Estrin, 48.

since much of the critical work of the play is performed by such structuring motifs. Revealing stage directions dominate the text as the drama unravels.

Scene one occurs “In the palace of the Emperor Jones. Afternoon”. Dialogue outweighs stage direction in this initial scene. The natives of Brutus Jones’s court have all run to the hills in anticipatory revolt. Jones’s associate, Smithers first interprets the drums before we hear them in the play: “Well, I know bloody well wat’s in the air—when they runs orf to the ‘ills. The tom-tom’ll be thumping out there bloomin’ soon”(EMPEROR JONES, 7). Exposition develops the back-story of Brutus Jones’s class ascendancy from “stowaway to Emperor”(EMPEROR JONES, 9) and the origin of his charmed silver bullet is disclosed. The “tom-tom” commences at a pulse of 72 bpm at a gradual, accelerating rate till the end of the play. Scene two—“The Edge of the Great Forest. Dusk” notes the first grand scale shift in that stage directions take up a greater bulk versus dialog. Brutus Jones is fleeing from what he assumes is the imminent revolt of his subjects and fends off hunger and fatigue during the first leg of his flight through the woods. He lifts up a series of white stones, none of which offer up the food he had hid in prior anticipation of his escape. Here marks the first appearance of the “little formless fears” that taunt Jones—described as, “black, shapeless, only their glittering little eyes can be seen. If they have any describable form at all it is that of a grubworm about the size of a creeping child”(EMPEROR JONES, 23). By Scene three—“In the Forest. Night” stage direction outnumbers dialogue. The scene notes a loud escalation of the tom toms cut by an unidentifiable clicking noise. Panic sets in when Jones sees an apparition of Jeff, a man he stabbed to death during a craps-game related altercation. Scene three notes the commencement of what will be examined further along in the chapter: the

tension in the play between its organizing logic of expressionist expression and historicist specificity. Scene four maintains the same setting and proportion as the prior. Jones becomes frantic at the continual sightings of “ha’nts”. He perceives the phantom trace and flashback of a chain gang, in which he crushes with a shovel the head of an abusive white Guard who whips him. Both the regularity and volume of the drums escalate. Scene five’s proportional logic again finds stage directions outweighing dialog. “In the center is a big dad stump worn by time into a curious resemblance to an auction block” (*EMPEROR JONES*, 31). The crowd of memory here really starts to tax Jones’s mind—he laments killing Jeff and the white guard and views an apparition of s slave auction represented solely via stage direction—right down to the auctioneer’s “silent spiel” (*EMPEROR JONES*, 33). Jones mounts the slave block—“all this in silence save for the ominous throb of the tom-tom”. Scene six exhibits a similar proportion. With his subjects in pursuit, Jones laments the fact that he only has one remaining bullet. He gets incorporated into an apparition of a group of Black men sitting down enacting a rowing motion resembling the conditions at the bottom of a slave vessel. Marking the conclusion of the scene-- the “tom-tom beats louder, quicker, with a more insistent triumphant pulsation” (*EMPEROR JONES*, 35). Scene seven represents the most dramatic proportional tipping of the balance in terms of stage directions overwhelming dialogue. Jones finds himself part of an ensemble of chained, enslaved Africans. The “Congo Witch Doctor” performs a pantomime, hypnotic dance to a rhythm of beating drums. Jones must offer himself up as sacrifice in the ritual and wastes his final silver bullet shooting at a crocodile god apparition. “*Jones lies with his face to the ground, his arms outstretched, whimpering with fear as the throb of the tom-tom fills the silence about him*

with a somber pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power”(EMPEROR JONES, 38). In scene eight, the “dividing line of forest and plain”, dialogue reclaims the foreground. Brutus Jones is captured and killed by his former subjects who melt coin money into silver bullets to bring about his demise. The tom-tom drumming has ceased.

Color is a key tool in Expressionism and performs a rigorous labor in O’Neill’s play. “Van Gough’s describing his use of red and green to portray the terrible human passions are well-known together with the spectral resonance of colors in Edvard Munch”(Manuel 9). Shannon Steen observes:

The Emperor Jones distributes terror and pleasure for the spectator in quite visceral ways. Most obviously, the play produces the titillating visual pleasure of watching Jones’s striptease as he removes items of his clothing with each phantasmatic confrontation. The design for the 1920 production of Jones focused on the exposure of Gilpin’s skin, fetishizing the contrast between the surface of his skin and the white cyclorama backdrop with which the Provincetown Players experiments to great success. The 1920 Emperor Jones, among the other ‘firsts’ that the performance included, inaugurated the use of the tabula rasa white cyclorama in the United States. A staple of experimental stage design in Europe by 1920, the plain white backdrop was incorporated into the American visual imagination for the first time as Brutus Jones battled his formless fear in his Caribbean forest. The exposure of black skin has become virtually indissociable from the visual imaginary of the play; the striptease convention is so fundamental to its performance that even the Caedmon audio production of 1970 features pictures of James Earl Jones in an unbuttoned military jacket in its sleeve notes...(Steen 348)

Toshio Kimura in his essay “O’Neill’s ‘White Sepulchre’”²² argues that the initial framing of Scene One in the play by stage directions emphasizes the ways in which Brutus Jones imitates “white” ways. I do not think it is useful to explain such matters through a language of imitation, that is not sufficiently aware of the performative properties of both racialized and gendered identities. However, Kimura opens up a crucial

²² Toshio Kimura, “O’Neill’s ‘White Sepulchre.’” In *Eugene O’Neill’s Critics: Voices from Abroad*. Ed. by Horst Frenz and Susan Tuck. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984), 91-96.

point of conversation to look at how a psychologically weighted use of expressionist color in O'Neill becomes a tool to look at the political structure of white supremacist social organization. Scene One's stage directions read: "*The audience chamber in the palace of the Emperor—a spacious, high-ceilinged room with bare, white-washed walls. The floor is of white tiles. In the rear, to the left of center, a white archway giving out on a portico with white pillars...*" (EMPEROR JONES 5) O'Neill employs an Expressionist tool of stagecraft, that in its name echoes the intersection of that specific school's engagement with psychology and attempts to stage psychic processes. O'Neill is interested in staging such depth as well; however, he further employs the cyclorama to gesture towards the fact that structural force underwriting Brutus Jones's rule is white supremacy. Steen is interested in talking about melancholia, identification, and subject formation in the play; hence, her focus on the complicated coupling of visual pleasure in the play's reception of seeing Brutus Jones's body in pain. She executes her analysis with amazing beauty and rigor. However, I want to focus more on the structural oppressive apparatus highlighted by O'Neill's use of color. The white stones that mark the place Brutus Jones stowed away provisions for the occasion of his escape show up empty. The ordering of this plot development by O'Neill is instructive. Jones repetitively uncovers empty white stones: "White stones, white stone, where is you?" (EMPEROR JONES 22). The white stones point to a consistently deferred promise of bourgeois democracy to grant justice, protection and more exactingly feed the men and women responsible for its ascendancy. 'White stones' are all form and no content. The political world inhabited by Brutus Jones cannot and will not acknowledge the fact that its prosperity comes off the back of hungry, coerced Black labor. The stones also represent the hypocrisy of a United

States brand of bourgeois democracy; from the vantage point of the revolting subjects of Brutus Jones--they represent the flimsiness of such oppressive structures. The 'white stones' cannot exist as a form of sustenance for Jones. They fail to defer his inevitable defeat at the hands of his one-time subjects.

A deeper examination of the text exposes the political rigor latent in the drama. Scene one of the text sets into place the initial power dynamic between the Emperor Jones, his partner in crime Smithers, and his native subjects. Stage directions comprise the bulk of the text. They increase in great proportion till some sort of normalcy is restored in the final scene post-Brutus Jones's death. The Emperor Jones is "outed" as an ex-Pullman porter now turned colonial bourgeois dictator. The discrepancy in the two class marker/social status groupings sets the stage for what is often perceived in the critical reception of the work as a non site-specific exploration of power lust gone bad and psychological deterioration. It is the same racist utilization of abstraction that frustrated Lorraine Hansberry in her reception of Jean Genet's *The Blacks*, which I will discuss later. I want to argue that this tendency towards abstracting *The Emperor Jones* out of its specifically marked context compromises a useful understanding of the radical nature of the work as well as its limitations in such vein. O'Neill problematically characterizes Jones in a racist fashion; although, he allows his character to be the voice of criticism of an intermediary class in the service of an insidious Western imperialism. O'Neill's use of abstraction as an aesthetic ordering principle in his work contains a latent critique of US colonial ventures as well as its accompanying racist component. My earlier mention of Jones's description marks his status as a mode of commentary on the scripted absurd characterization of a colonial imaginary: Jones as a fictional creation

(both material and symbolic) of the Western imaginary. Such an imaginary scripts the role of the shrewd (but, contradictorily puerile) leader of the “less civilized” natives, who will oversee the interests of the metropole’s pernicious consolidation of wealth. Jones captures this contradiction when he states, “For de little stealin’ dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin dey makes you Emperor and put you in de Hall o’ Fame when you croaks”(EMPEROR JONES, 10). He shares with Smithers the same contempt for the indigenous Black community on the island; yet, he also displays contempt for “the white man.” One might read the power-dynamics between Smithers, the metonym for a displaced white power structure on the island and Jones, the neocolonial bourgeoisie as influencing Amiri Baraka’s later effort to explore similar themes of power-lust in his play *General Hag’s Skee-zag* (1989). In this work, the white proprietor Samuel Burgess and the enfant terrible of the Black bourgeoisie, Charlie “nobody beats a” Blank argue over who exploits others most efficiently--both waver from their subjective roles [realist or naturalist] in the play to flattened historical motive forces [expressionist or super-naturalist]:

Burgess: There is no money here. None. Only books and religious objects. You don’t understand the language or what? Are the words too complicated for you? Are you some kind of dropout? Perhaps the public school twisted you in this manner. Or perhaps it was loud music...I won’t vote for you. You can’t move into my neighborhood. Not and leave those gnawed skulls in front of my house for my dream girl to see and be made afraid. This is not *Halloween 6* or *Rocky 12*, where the hero finally becomes a schwartze. You’re making me sad, sad for the future of the world...And that is precisely why affirmative action is a fraud, and undemocratic, I might add...

Charles: I understand all of it. All of it. But I’m not accepting any budget cuts. Rant and rave if you will. I’ll be a member of the gang yet. I want to enter those hallowed halls being saluted by music. I’ll not retreat because you impugn my character and imply name-calling...

Burgess: We swore revenge for the chains. Moving those rocks in the desert to build the pyramids. I ordered the libraries burnt at Alexandria. I ordered the nose blown off the sphinx. Remember the hold of the ship in the dark where you were inside chained and sinking? I owned the ship. I hired guys to whip guys like you. And that's not bragging, mind you, 'cause I love you, regardless of race, creed, or color...

Charles: So you don't remember how I caught the niggers and sold them to you? You're lying now again. You're claiming to have literally come in like Alex Haley said and took us off...²³

The fundamental contradiction in Scene one might be read as O'Neill's coupling of a racialized description/essence with a biting critique of Western imperialism and its native brokers. "You didn't s'pose I was head o' de low-flung, bush niggers dat's here. Dey wants de big circus show for deir money. I gives it to 'em an' I gits da money...De long green, dat's me every time!" (*EMPEROR JONES*, 10) A French gunboat will transport Jones and his stolen loot to Martinique in the event of a successful native revolt. There is no ambiguity in the play concerning Jones's status as colonial elite in the service of European power consolidation and money lust. So much for the island's status "as yet not self-determined by White Marines." Scene one prepares the audience for Jones's flight and ultimate flight and defeat, not so much based on plot exposition but on the logical consequence of a racist imaginary—the European gaze that presents Jones in what DuBois referred to as a mixture of "amused contempt and pity."²⁴

Representation of corporeality and carnality in O'Neill goes against a commonplace racist trope. As Steen argues: "Ultimately, the play posits an entirely hyperbolic vision of blackness, one impossible to realize precisely because it is fully

²³ Amiri Baraka, "General Hag's Skeezag". 1989 in *Black Thunder: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Drama*. ed. William Branch, (NY: Mentor, 1992), 190, 194.

²⁴ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. (NY: Bantam Books, 1989), 3

phantasmatic. Brutus Jones is not, nor does he represent, a ‘real’ black body, but rather the projected fantasy of blackness onto the visually blank space of the stage, even though his narrative is enacted by a very real black body, one that would have been segregated in American public space in general....O’Neill ironically, used Brutus Jones to undo the utopic primitivism that situates the black body as a repository of freedom and liberation. It is not through his body that Jones escapes his “formless fears”; on the contrary; his body functions as the register of his psychic slavery to the powerful, irresistible force of his formless fears”(Steen 247). The scripted Pullman porter working class African American turned colonial dictator will be overthrown for the crime of primarily stepping outside the rubric of his socially coded status, as legible by the Western imperialist imaginary. Stepping outside the narrow confines of such racist over-determination, The Emperor Brutus Jones as creation of Western Imperialism becomes illegible, hence has to die. Expressionist modes of character abstraction constitute a tool to convey the paradoxical labor of the imperialists: they have to install agents that they scorn to do their bidding existing in symbolic spaces as vicarious exploiters, in the forever tenuous, unrealizable status terms set up by a hegemonic racist imaginary.

The fundamental thematic tension of *The Emperor Jones* (a war between a psychological Expressionist abstractionism and specificity of action) is written into the framework and structuring of the eight scenes in the play. A problematic expressionist abstraction is tempered by the specificity of staging. An aesthetic of staging always deals with particularity and so much of the conceptual innovation in O’Neill’s play relies on such staging. Descriptions of the forest where Jones attempts to flee his revolting “subjects” ground each scene and structures its temporal progression from concrete

description to an apparition/dream-like mode, in which the tom-tom drums provide an expressionist tonal/atonal continuity. Manuel emphasizes the structuring motif of day and night in each scene as a “regressive temporal cycle” that helps O’Neill highlight the “antinomies of human existence”(Manuel 8) Such a musical strategy is reminiscent of the droning score in the expressionist cinematic beacon: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) directed by Robert Wiene²⁵. In Scene two, Jones confronts his “formless fears” which highlight the fact that the primary battle takes place in the theater of Jones’s psyche. Removal of clothing like in Shakespeare’s *King Lear* serves the function of connecting scenes with a descent into madness. The apparitions in scenes two-four are memories of Jones’s present life and past experiences. The white stones in the play are a metonym for the macro-logical organizing fabric of Western imperialism heralding the “formless fears”, his confrontation and murder of Jeff, and violent confrontation with the chain gang guard. Scene five connects Jones to the historical experience and phenomenology of objects and imaginaries of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade: the slave block, the ship, and the imaginary confrontation with the Conradian archetype, the Congolese witch doctor Jones’s dialogue becomes more fragmentary, indicating a crumbling of the projected façade. Dialogue and semi-realist modes of representation are replaced with a language of marionettes and automatons. Such mechanical descriptions—“something stiff, rigid, unreal, marionettish about their movements”(EMPEROR JONES, 32)-- work as multivalent sign- posts. The mechanistic figures help emphasize the cold,

²⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. 1947. (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press), 2004. Kracauer’s provocative thesis posits a direct chain to the Expressionist aesthetic of Caligari with Hitler’s fascism. I mention this not to decry O’Neill as a fascist but to perhaps gesture towards the fact that the Expressionist genre’s downside might be wrapped up in a sort of propensity towards a certain racialized, fascist representation. Certainly, Robert Mitchum’s sadist preacher character in North America’s cinematic expressionist gem *The Night of the Hunter* (1955) lends a certain eerie currency to this claim.

exchange-value atmosphere of the slave trade. This is most apparent in the representation of the slave auction followed by the simulation of the slave ship:

(He sighs dejectedly and remains with bowed shoulders, staring down at the shoes in his hands as if reluctant to throw them away. While his attention is thus occupied, a crowd of figures silently enter the clearing from all sides. All are dressed in Southern costumes of the period of the fifties of the last century. They are middle-aged men who are evidently well-to-do planters. There is on spruce, authoritative individual—the auctioneer. There is a crowd of curious spectators, chiefly young belles and dandies who have come to the slave-market for diversion. All exchange courtly greetings in a dumb show and chat silently together. There is something stiff, rigid, undreal, marionettish about their movements. They group themselves about the stump. Finally a batch of slaves is led in from the left by an attendant—three men of different ages, two women, one with a baby in her arms, nursing. They are placed to the left of the stump, beside Jones.

(The white planters look them over appraisingly as if they were cattle, and exchange judgments on each. The dandies point with their fingers and make witty remarks. The belles titter bewitchingly. All this in silence save for the ominous throb of the tom-tom. The auctioneer holds up his hand, taking his place on the stump. The groups strain forward attentively. He touches Jones on the shoulder peremptorily, motioning, for him to stand on the stump—the auction block.

(Jones looks up, sees the figures on all sides, looks widely for some opening to escape, sees none, screams and leaps madly to the top of the stump to get as far away from them as possible. He stands there, cowering, paralyzed with horror. The auctioneer begins his silent spiel. He points to Jones, appeals to the planters to see for themselves. Here is a good field hand, sound in wind and limb as they can see. Very strong still in spite of his being middle aged. Look at that back. Look at those shoulders. Look at the muscles in his arms and his sturdy legs. Capable of any amount of hard labor. Moreover, of a good disposition, intelligent and tractable. Will any gentleman start the bidding? The planters raise their fingers, making their bids. They are apparently all eager to possess Jones. The bidding is lively, the crowd interested. While this has been going on, Jones has been seized by the courage of desperation. He dares to look down and around him. Over his face abject terror gives way to mystification, to gradual realization... (EMPEROR JONES 33)

(He is well forward now where his figure can be dimly made out. His pants have been so torn away that what is left of them is no better than a breech cloth. He flings himself full length, face downward on the ground, panting with exhaustion. Gradually, it seems to grow lighter in the enclosed space and two rows of seated figures can be seen behind Jones. They are sitting in crumpled,

despairing attitudes, hunched, facing on another with their back touching the forest walls as if they were shackled to them. All are Negroes, naked save for loin clothes. At first they are silent and motionless. Then they begin to sway slowly forward toward each other and back again in unison, as if they were laxly letting themselves follow the long roll of a ship at sea. At the same time, a low, melancholy murmur rises among them, increasing gradually by rhythmic degrees which seem to be directed and controlled by the throb of the tom tom in the distance, to a long, tremulous wail of despair that reaches a certain pitch, unbearably acute, then falls by slow gradations of tone into silence and is taken up again. (EMPEROR JONES 34-5)

Both scenes are framed as silent, with the exception of the undercutting pulse of the tomtoms. The drums in O'Neill's play not only signify a sort of psychological rhythm and mark the temporal regressive movement of the action; they also are the stand in for the revolution that is happening on his island. The drums are communicative tools of revolt and combat. The fact that O'Neill connects them up with two central scenes of US historical memory, as it relates to the forced coercion of African labor in the service of US industrial development, marks a radical labor in the text. The auctioneer sizes up his chattel silently. Evaluative judgments about the African bodies are scripted in the silent stage direction, the space of carnality in O'Neill's text. The foregrounding of a history constantly under erasure (America, unlike Australia, is yet to have a completed, federally funded museum or memorial testimonial to the African Holocaust, let alone the implementation of a plan to make reparation) constitutes the prophetic strain in the drama. Brutus Jones is the only one given a spoken part in the auction scene. The drum structuring—the movement from “slow gradations of tone into silence” and back again in the slave ship scene-- is a radical American rendition of an expressionist *le cri*. The agoraphobic psychological state is supplemented in O'Neill by the act of bringing history back on the agenda. In the case of *The Emperor Jones*, this is a history of oppression sutured with the always possible and probable actuality of revolt.

Filming Collaboration

What is lacking in summing up this period is the objectivity and all sidedness that U.S. racism prohibits. The separateness of “white” modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, exists not only because of the still virulent segregation in the U.S. at the time, but also the continuing tendency “to cover” Black anything and report what is of significance through the opaque glass ‘White American’ social dishonesty.

-Amiri Baraka²⁶

The 1933 film version of *The Emperor Jones* combined Paul Robeson’s acting, with Dudley Murphy’s direction, J. Rosamond Johnson’s (James Weldon Johnson’s brother and co-writer of the Negro National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing”) vocal arrangements (the most redeeming element of the problematic film). The film (written by Dubose Heyward) substitutes the more radical aesthetic choices in O’Neill’s play with a static, linear model of plot progression. The film version includes a prehistory of Brutus Jones—a life prior to Emperorship on “an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by White Marines.”

In light of the fact that Paul Robeson is instrumental to both the O’Neill and James plays examined in this study, it is helpful to talk briefly about the scope of his career as a performer. Robeson performed two plays during his time at Columbia Law School. This included the role of Simon in Ridgely Torrence’s *Simon the Cyrenian* (1917) at the Harlem YMCA, in which he played the Black man who carried Christ’s cross. During this time he rejected the lead role in *The Emperor Jones* produced by the Provincetown Players. The dancer Isadora Duncan’s brother attended four of the performances of *Simon the Cyrenian* and expressed interest in having Robeson play the lead in his London production of *Taboo*, later renamed *Voodoo* in which an enslaved

²⁶ Amiri Baraka, “Paul Robeson” Self-published: 1996, 5 Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *ROBESON*.

African American slave falls asleep and wakes up in Africa. Robeson played the role in 1922 in London opposite English actress Margaret Wycherly, in which he performed the song “Go Down Moses”. Many conjecture that this play sparked the seed in Robeson’s development linking the fate of the continent with the fate of African Americans, which would be further nurtured by the Pan Africanist intellectual milieu of W.E.B. Du Bois and associates. He played in Kern’s *Show Boat* in London, 1928 opposite blues singer Alberta Hunter. During this performance, Robeson changed the lines of “Old Man River” excising its offensive, racist subtext. In 1924, Robeson played opposite white actress Mary Blair in O’Neill’s *All Gods Chillun*, in which the Ku Klux Klan threatened to picket because of its depiction of an inter-racial romance. Robeson actively participated in Langston Hughes’s Suitcase Theater and co-founded the Negro Playwright’s Company, which produced Theodore Ward’s classic Red-scare play *Big White Fog*. Speaking on a film career in a 1937 interview in London, a career that was often the source of great inner turmoil because of his inability to consistently imprint his film work with his progressive social vision Robeson lamented, “One man can’t face the film companies. They represent the biggest aggregate of finance capital in the world. That’s why they make the films that way. So no more films for me”(ROBESON, 21). His films include: Oscar Micheaux’s *Body and Soul* (1922), the Swiss production *Borderline* (1930), *The Emperor Jones* (1933—the year of Auschwitz’s opening and the Reichstag fire), *Sanders of the River* (1934), *Songs of Freedom* (1936), *King Solomon’s Mines* (1937), *Jericho* (1937) *Big Fella* (modeled after Claude McKay’s novel *Banjo* in 1937), The Welsh production *Proud Valley*, and finally *Tales of Manhattan*(1942). This chapter concludes its discussion of O’Neill via a look at Robeson in the film version of *The Emperor Jones*.

The Murphey film of *The Emperor Jones* is almost a perfect failure. It opts for a linear, semi-realist cinematic coherence at the price of exorcising some of the original play's most radical signposts. The play's two poles of oppression-resistance, the slave auction block and the gesture of Brutus Jones killing of the chain gang guard, are not incorporated into the film. Instead, a flimsy tired back-story of Brutus Jones leading up to his position on the island is offered. Not surprisingly, the musical arrangements are the most progressive element of the film. The piece starts out with a scene of African dancing and drumming cut back and forth with Brutus Jones saying farewell to his wife in a room adjacent to his Baptist Church main congregation hall. The Reverend orates a Prodigal Son sermon and expresses wishes for safe travels for Brutus Jones, on his way to work for the Pullman Porters. Robeson joins in a spirited rendition of "Let Me By" and the congregation wishes him well. In the most generous reading of this opening scene, one might argue that the quick cutting between the African chant and the Baptist spiritual houses an emergent progressive link between not only the two musical forms, but (like Robeson's own extensive writings on musicology) the political fate connecting African Americans with the African continent. On the job, his coworker Jeff, played by Frank Wilson, schools Jones about upward mobility in the Pullman work world and acquiring wealth, referred to as "The Long Green." The action cuts back and forth from Harlem to the railroad and Jones falls in love with Jeff's 'gal', Undine, played by Fredi Washington. Remember, this subplot does not exist in O'Neill's original play. Jones gets a promotion, a transfer to the President's Car and overhears a conversation with the boss Mr. Harrington and his associates about a potential merger that could cost the workers their jobs. Harrington appeases him by promising him a space as an investor in the case of a

potential merge and Jones brags to Undine that he is “getting big”, so big that the boss “takes him to his personal tailor.” Jeff and Robeson’s character clash due to a craps game where weighted die are utilized and Jones kills Jeff landing himself on a Chain Gang. Again, the Chain Gang scene is the most promising element of the film: Robeson has a chance to sing “Waterboy”, with syncopation provided by the crushing hammers of the imprisoned Black workers. He escapes when he refuses to follow the guard’s orders of striking a man hiding out in a water closet and boards a Kingston- bound steam ship as a shovel worker and in one of the most rewarding cinematographic moments of the film dives into the water to the island. This wide angle shot of Robeson diving corroborates with the Hill point examined in Chapter three of this study, pertaining to C.L.R. James’s appreciation of Robeson’s stature. Smithers, played by Dudley Digges recruits Jones to overthrow the existing King of the island and Jones declares himself Emperor whose first act is to double the tax on “homemade rum and coffee to pay off the debt to Mr. Smithers”. The subjects riot and beat up the tax collectors. After his court disappears and fails to answer his gong, Jones opts to flee the island early to join a French gunboat to take him to where his money is banked in a “foreign land where they ain’t no Jim Crow and Chain Gangs”. In the forest, he shoots at an apparition of Jeff but instead of a slave-block we get an apparition of the original church scene and a recently deposed Emperor confessing his sins. The Witchdoctor [sans crocodile] emerges and Robeson’s character is killed ending the film in the same fashion as the play.

Evoking this study’s latter discussion of Lorraine Hansberry, “the marketplace of empire”, over-determines the import of the film and mutes the more radical elements of O’Neill’s play. Market pressure dictates the need in Hollywood film to provide titillating

action and a conventional narrative progression and compromises the fleeting liberatory promise latent in O'Neill's text. The Harlem gambling, cabaret, and Juke Joint scenes in the film are all form and no content. Something else, besides the dictates of the Hollywood medium and market, is occurring in this revision of the play. To include the slave-block forces self-reflexive acknowledgment of complicity that a writer of the "Negrotarian strand" such as Dubose Heyward's could not stomach. This would force the issue demanding the courage for a white writer like Heyward to acknowledge the fact that "Black themes" innovating his aesthetics indirectly point to the indebtedness of American prosperity to African forced labor. Forcing this hand provides the writer with two choices, either acknowledgement of this fact or continuing the practice of putting history under erasure. Unfortunately, Heyward lacked the courage of an O'Neill. O'Neill's bold stage directions rendering front and center the brutal legacy of American exploitation and forced African labor were not incorporated into the cinematic drama. Despite all its limitations, the history that the play foregrounds must be purged, in accommodation with the sterility of the Hollywood filmic genre and the faltering courage of its director.

By opening up a discursive space that openly acknowledges and renders visible (however hazy) the material sign posts of an American history of internal colonialism and the brutal exchange of Black bodies, O'Neill's super-naturalist aesthetic attempts but ultimately fails in its effort to effectively use the historical past to liberatory ends. O'Neill's expressionist aesthetic undermines a conservative realist grammar and allows for a semblance of justice to be served in rendering visible an American historical legacy of coercive appropriation, enslavement, and continued failure to make reparation by precisely disavowing any claim to be able to achieve such a representation in a realist

fashion. Brutus never seems to confront his constructed past outside the realm of dream state. In response to a realist/mimetic aesthetic, a “keyhole peeping realism” fraught with challenges, the work presents a fraught example of radical individualism in figure of Brutus Jones, cut off from a larger chorus constitutive of the works examined later in this study. *The Emperor Jones* tries to push up against the limits of its own racist tropes and historical specificity as Modernist avant-garde American theater event in order to meet the challenge of foregrounding the brutality of American slavery. Following suit with Owen Dodson’s notes in “Who has Seen the Wind?” the challenge persists for Black radical artists culture workers and their allies to more effectively realize this goal.

Somewhat comparable to Lorraine Hansberry’s critiques of Jean Genet’s use of abstraction in his aesthetic commentary on European racism (in Genet’s case, French policies towards its Algerian colony in his play *The Blacks*), O’Neill ultimately fails in his attempt to harness the past as a catalyst for contemporary struggle or commentary on systemic discrimination. His use of abstraction both mutes the possibility of a possible representation of revolutionary agency as well as productively highlights the frailty of oppressive ideology. The rebelliousness of a Brutus Jones is the rebelliousness of the atomized, individual, cut off from the constitutive collective that the rest of my study’s examples takes such pains to theorize and dramatize. However, both his aesthetic innovations plus the opportunity *The Emperor Jones* afforded Black actors, and the fact that all the later writers studied here have read, seen, or performed in the play situates the work in what this chapter posits, via Cedric Robinson as the theatrical cauldron of Black radicalism. It is up to the other authors in this study to more successfully harness the past

in the service of contemporary struggle in what this study defines as the Black radical tragic.

The Persistent Emperor Jones:

Christopher Walken's Once and Future "King of New York"

Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*'s thematic import, aesthetic innovativeness and political significance continue to be hotly contested in its contemporary staging. C.L.R. James, the main figure of this study, has nothing nice to say about Eugene O'Neill. Furthermore, James voices his critique of O'Neill in reference to the earlier examined point about the popular root of classical tragedy. In the essay "Popular Arts and Modern Society", from his full length study *American Civilization* (1993), C.L.R. James elaborates on his radical understanding of American individuality captured in the following two premises: "There is today an immense concentration on freedom, individuality, the individual and the state; the one-party state, the welfare state, planning versus free enterprise, etc." and how "the concepts of individuality, liberty, etc. had a meaning a great historic meaning in the years of the foundation of America".⁷⁰ O'Neill's Brutus Jones represents the antithesis of the sort of radical American individuality lauded by James. He evokes O'Neill, along with Bernard Shaw in the essay to further underscore the point in my first chapter that links tragedy and innovation in cinema with a base of mass support:

To believe that this Athenian multitude was better "educated" or more "intelligent" than the modern film audience is to use words without any discoverable sense. The society was different and we shall have to see why and in what way. The reader will have to imagine the population of New York listening in on the radio on a public holiday to a play in which a dramatist

⁷⁰ C.L.R. James, *American Civilization*, eds. Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart, (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 118 Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *AMERICAN CIVILIZATION*.

brings Bernard Shaw and Eugene O'Neill on the stage and makes them argue why they write their plays as they do, why they use different styles, what was the benefit to the citizens; all this with quotations from the plays thrown in and analyzed as in a class on literary analysis at a university, with the audience recognizing the quotations and rocking with laughter as today they laugh at Jack Benny or Bob Hope. (*AMERICAN CIVILIZATION*, 150)

In his letter correspondence to Constance Webb, James lauds American for its “13 million organized workers”, whom “with all their faults...are the most fanatical defenders of freedom of speech, freedom of organization, the Rights of Man, etc,” and “know nothing of Martha Graham, of Eugene O'Neill...”(*LETTERS*, 193) He further elaborates on the fact “that Martha Graham and O'Neill and the rest who perhaps do not think of workers at all and work and develop solely because the workers' organizations exists. The peculiar thing is neither group worries over much about the other (excerpt for a few here and there). But the intellectual consciousness of society rest with the great mass, that and the great heritage of Western civilization”(*LETTERS*, 194). In his letter to the unknown literary critic named Bell, James casts doubts on the idea that O'Neill's dramatic aesthetic is particularly innovative: “...Does anyone believe that new forms of art that matter to our century can be found in the way e.e. cummings prints his verse on the page? That O'Neill has discovered new forms of drama?”(*READER*, 227)

Historically, critics either chide the play's entrenched racism or praise its transcendence of such xenophobic narrowness. A brief sampling of commentary on the work illuminates this critical contestation for a definitive judgment. Writing about the play in Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro* (1925), Montgomery Gregory states:

Then by a tour-de force of genius—for the histrionic ability of Charles Gilpin has been as effective as the dramatic genius of Eugene O'Neill—the serious play of Negro life broke through to public favor and critical recognition. Overnight this weird psychological study of race experience was hailed as a dramatic masterpiece and an unknown Negro was selected by the Drama

League as one of the ten foremost actors on the American stage. In any further development of Negro Drama, *The Emperor Jones*, written by O'Neill, interpreted by Gilpin, and produced by the Provincetown Players, will tower as a beacon-light of inspiration. It marks the breakwater plunge of Negro drama into the mainstream of American drama.²⁸

Contemporary writer Amiri Baraka lauds “the more genuine American theater that O'Neill helped create during the same period [that] saw black characters on the stage in something approaching realism for the first time, as well as an American working class.”²⁹ Paul Robeson defended his role as actor in both *Emperor Jones* and *All God's Chillun Got Wings* despite his life work trying to secure integral aesthetic representation of Black people:

And what a great part is ‘Brutus Jones.’ His is the exultant tragedy of the disintegration of a human soul. How we suffer as we see him in the depths of the forest re-living all the sins of his past—experiencing all the woes and wrongs of his people—throwing off one by one the layers of civilization until he returns to the primitive soil from which he came. And yet we exult when we realize that here was a man who in the midst of all his trouble fought to the end and finally died in the ‘eighth of style anyway.’³⁰

Scholar Michael Fabre notes: “Of American playwrights, [Richard] Wright only owned one volume, Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*; he liked to say to several of his friends who feared for him during skirmishes between Communist demonstrators and police: ‘Only a golden bullet is going to get me’.”³¹ In Wright's revision, gold replaces silver and a talisman ambiguously framed in the play as both an index of Jones's irrational superstition and the final cause of his death is ironically appropriated by Wright in a light-hearted autobiographical reflection on class struggle. While the play received a

²⁸ Alain Locke, *The New Negro* 1925. (NY: Athenum, 1983), 157

²⁹ Amiri Baraka, “Cultural Revolution and the Literary Canon”. *Callaloo*. 14.1 (1991): 152.

³⁰ Paul Robeson, “Reflection on O'Neill's Plays,” *Opportunity* (December 1924), 58.

³¹ Michael Fabre, “Richard Wright's First Hundred Books”. *CLA Journal*. 16 June (1973): 467.

great deal of positive critical reception, it also came under justified attack for its atavistic racist representation of “the Negro”. Its “doubtful formula of hereditary cultural reversion”, prompted William Stanley Braithwaite, writing his review of “The Negro in American Literature” to state that “the real tragedy of Negro life is a task still left for Negro writers to perform”(Locke, 35). To argue that for Braithwaite, the inability to represent them selves—“they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented”—signals the tragic valence falls short of honoring his point. The tragedy marked for Braithwaite captured by European American writers is mock tragedy—the real that has yet to emerge. It is not that the task is beyond the pale “for Negro writers to perform”; it is that such a labor is imminent.³² The tragedy is in the initial “representative” status of the play. O’Neill’s drama gets a wider reception than plays written by his African American contemporaries. Farce in Braithwaite’s formulation is not on the horizon in terms of the progress of Afro American aesthetic production and representation. In terms of the impoverished aesthetic representation of African Americans at the conjecture of Braithwaite’s written lament (mid-twenties America), farce and tragedy are coupled as one. In his autobiography, *The Big Sea*, Langston Hughes reconstructs a Harlem audience’s reception of *The Emperor Jones*. In Hughes’s account, there is no productive moment to salvage for this audience in O’Neill’s work:

Somewhat later, I recall a sincere but unfortunate attempt on Jules Bledsoe’s part to bring “Art” to Harlem. He appeared in Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* at the old Lincoln Theater on 135th Street, a theater that had, for all its noble name, been devoted largely to ribald, but highly entertaining, vaudeville

³² For a poignant series of critical reflections on the actualization of this labor see critic/playwright Owen Dodson’s essay trio “Who has Seen the Wind?” Owen Dodson, “Who Has Seen the Wind?: Playwrights and the Black Experience”. *Black American Literature Forum*. Vol. 11.3 (1977): 108-116; Owen Dodson, “Who has Seen the Wind: Part II”. *Black American Literature Forum*. Vol. 13.1 (1979): 20-3; Owen Dodson, “Who has Seen the Wind?: Part III”. *Black American Literature Forum*. Vol. 14.2 (1980): 54-59. Part two contains a particular poignant assessment of Paul Robeson.

of the “Butterbeans and Susie” type. The audience didn’t know what to make of *The Emperor Jones* on a stage where “Shake That Thing” was formerly the rage. And when the Emperor started running naked through the forest, hearing the Little Frightened Fears, naturally they howled with laughter.

“Them ain’t no ghosts, fool!” the spectators cried from the orchestra. “Why don’t you come back on out o’ that jungle—back to Harlem where you belong?”

In the manner of Stokowski hearing a cough at the Academy of Music, Jules Bledsoe stopped dead in his tracks, advanced to the footlights, and proceeded to lecture his audience on the manners of the theater. But the audience wanted none of *The Emperor Jones*. And their manners had been all right at the other shows at the Lincoln, where they took part in the performances at will. So when Brutus continued his flight, the audience again howled with laughter. And that was the end of *The Emperor Jones* on 135th Street.³³

O’Neill provides certainly a template for both Charles Gilpin and Paul Robeson to improvise how they see fit and reclaim what is useful from what is harmful in their respective turns at playing the lead role. Gilpin substituted the word “nigger”, called for in the script with the more genteel term “black baby”. Upset at this modification by the actor and what he perceived as Gilpin’s drinking problem, O’Neill according to Arthur and Barbara Gelb screamed backstage, that “If I ever catch you rewriting my lines again, you black bastard, I’m going to beat you up”.³⁴ *The Emperor Jones* is significant in that it both revolutionizes American theater, in its call for an African American protagonist and simultaneously, plays upon backwards, racist notions of blackness flatly rejected by Black audiences such as Hughes’s Harlem. Its main aesthetics of stage direction is ultimately a failed effort to curtail the efforts of actors to challenge and improvise on some of the more retrograde elements of the work. In this regard, the text as a whole when coupled with the improvisation and signifying from its Black lead actors works as

³³ Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea An Autobiography*, 1940, (NY: Thunder Mouth Press, 1986), 258-259

³⁴ Arthur and Barbara Gelb, *O’Neill*, (New York: Dell Press, 1965), 238

an interesting model of the tragic genre. Echoing Marx, the play's structure is the apparatus that "man does not choose" but is free to negotiate in the way she or he sees fit. There is enough flexibility in the stage directions of the text whereas Charles Gilpin could claim—"I created the role of the Emperor. That role belongs to me. That Irishman, he just wrote the play".³⁵

In speaking on the future of Black drama in Locke's *The New Negro*, O'Neill states: "I believe as strongly as you do that the gifts the Negro can—and will—bring to our native drama are invaluable ones. The possibilities are limitless and to a dramatist open up, new and intriguing opportunities"(LOCKE, 153). I want to take a second to dwell on this vocabulary of possibilities through a quick detour though Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History"(Completed in 1940, First published in *Neue Rundschau*, 1950). Benjamin's theses posit, via an incantation-type prose style, theories for grappling with past history in the service of achieving present radical amelioration and revolution. O'Neill's work sets up a productive precedent for addressing a matter of genocide in a temporal model that is faithful to Benjamin's theory. He writes:

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again...for every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threats to disappear irretrievably...

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger...³⁶

³⁵ Gilpin qt. in David Krasner, "Whose Role is it Anyway?: Charles Gilpin and the Harlem Renaissance". *African American Review*. Vol. 29.3 (1995): 483. For more on Gilpin see John G. Monroe, "Charles Gilpin and The Drama League Controversy". *Black American Literature Forum*. Vol. 16.4 (1982): 139-141.

³⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*. ed. Hannah Arendt (NY: Schocken Books, 1968), 255

Benjamin's notion of grabbing hold of historical memory in a moment of danger can apply to the apparition-like imagery in O'Neill's play and helps us to foreground the larger issues that *The Emperor Jones*'s modality might raise in considering inspirations for a revolutionary aesthetic project addressing aesthetic representations of Black oppression and resistance. Jones's fragmentary, figurative world in which visions of a historical past of American slavery "flits by" provides a more productive model for representing the ruptures of slavery and forced relocation than a realist modality reliant upon a politics of identification. Because O'Neill's slave block exist in the play in the currency of a dream-state, it still opens up a discursive site that can serve as an aesthetic corollary and American version of the German political project of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [coming to terms with the past]. In discussing Germany's process of coming to terms with the Nazi Holocaust, Alexander and Margaret E. Mitscherlich describe the task as a "psychic process of remembering, repeating, working through, a process which has to begin in the individual, but which can only be successfully completed if it is supported by the collective, by society at large."³⁷ O'Neill's experimental aesthetic which is loosely sewn together by a series of phantasmagoric ruptures helps provide a model to avoid a conservative, realist mimetic effect in regards to representations of slavery. Benjamin in his "Theses" also points to the fact that "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule"(Benjamin 257). The 'state of exception' as framed by Giorgio Agamben³⁸ is a decree pronounced by the

³⁷ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana U. Press, 1986), 97

³⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005)

sovereign to rationalize suspension of normative juridical checks and balances, indefinitely in a moment of crisis. It is a desperate move of an oppressive power under assault. O'Neill's play is so vexed because the sovereign, in the case of Brutus Jones, is both oppressor and part of the tradition in which emergency/exception is the rule. Its continued appeal and continued ability to be both staged and debated has to do with this complicated conundrum, as well as the play's willingness to both simultaneously foreground and mystify its radical historicity.

In 1955, Ossie Davis performed in the title role of a televised drama of the play. In light of Steen's discussion of O'Neill's later desire to stage his play using masks—"One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others, one's inner life passes in a solitude hounded by the masks of oneself"³⁹—a brief discussion of this chapter's themes as it relates to the work of Rod Serling is in order. In "The Masks" (the 145th episode of *The Twilight Zone* aired on March 20, 1964), Serling tells the story of Foster, a rich New Orleans business titan on his deathbed, during the first night of Mardi Gras. His shallow, money hungry relatives all have to succeed in one challenge if they wish to inherit his entire fortune. They must wear until midnight grotesque, party masks. Foster, in the best expressionist spirit, indicates to his relatives that the mask demonstrates supernatural properties, in that they reflect the alleged opposite of the wearer's inner self. The props are distributed to the sadistic, the narcissistic, and the greedy. After the clock strikes midnight, the survivors (Foster dies in his sleep) inherit his awesome fortune and the contours of the masks become permanently grafted onto their faces. This thematic plays upon a long tradition in Serling of attacking xenophobia,

³⁹ Eugene O'Neill, "Memorandum on Masks," in *O'Neill and his Plays: Four Decades of Criticism*, ed. Oscar Cargile, N. Brillion Fagan, and William J. Fisher (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 305.

superficiality, and discourses on surface beauty as represented in one of the series' other landmark episode "The Eye of the Beholder" (Episode 42, November 12, 1960).

However, the racist subtext of the episode is problematic. The only two Black cast members are the butler and the maid (played by an un-credited Bill Walker and Maidie Norman, respectively). They are framed as figures of ethical value, in opposition to Foster's debauched and impoverished family and demonstrate their moral integrity through silent condemning gazes directed towards Foster's relatives. The masks, praised for not only for their magical properties but their roots in an Afro-Caribbean context, graft problematically onto the white family members what O'Neill meant when he penned the direction "typically negroid features." Enchanted masks, used during the night of a Caribbean ritual performed in an American city, over-determined by its slavery past, work to reveal the impoverished nature of a privileged lot of white people by permanently grafting onto their faces a stereotypical notion of "Black physiological features". The complexities of O'Neill's play continue to plague the avant-garde, in this case the attempt of Rod Serling to craft "serious adult drama" and morality plays for a television audience. Serling was no stranger to the complexities of particularity versus abstraction, as it relates to staging prophetic commentary on racial oppression and resistance. His 1958 teleplay on the murder of Emmet Till got censored and gutted by the studio. Network executives insisted its context be morphed from Mississippi to Southwest Mexico in the 1870's. "Twenty men in hoods" got changed to "twenty men in homemade masks".⁴⁰

Abel Ferrara's 1990 masterpiece *King of New York* features Christopher Walken as Frank White, an ex-kingpin recently released from prison committed to rebuilding his

⁴⁰ See 1959 Rod Serling interview with Mike Wallace

criminal network, comprised almost exclusively of members of the Black lumpen-proletariat. His affiliation with Black people is a point of contention and open racist hostility for the other crime bosses in New York City. Upon release from jail, Walken's character and his entourage go to view a modern adaptation of *The Emperor Jones*, in which a contemporary Brutus (played by Peter Richardson) shoots a New York City police officer. The film does not strictly inherit O'Neill's anti-authoritative thematic content and ambivalent relationship to Black people and performance. It takes on the consequences and registers of its aesthetic choices. Like the play, Ferrara's film is laden with the aesthetics of improvisation. Corporeality and carnality are problematically and richly cathected onto Black bodies in the film. In one of the opening scene, Jimmy Jump (played by a young, called at the time, "Larry" Fishburne) and his posse come to the Plaza Hotel to greet their old employer. Fishburne's character is holding a paper-cup of his favorite beverage, root-beer. After the group of predominantly Black men stare down Walken's character the following dialogue commences:

Walken as Frank White: [smirking] What's in the cup?

Fishburne as Jimmy Jump: Root beer, [sucks his teeth and crumples up his cup] Want some?

White: There just certain things, I won't do...[Extended pause] Ba Ba Ba [Walken breaks out into a festive dance and 360 degree pivot, a hip-hop dance style improvisation in which he rapidly crisscrosses his legs and gyrates and pulsates his waste in one final triumphant gesture. Half way threw this solitary performance, Jump and his crew join in and copy Walken's movement. The dance breaks up and the parties commence a long, warm embrace.] Woووو!!!!

The opening dance scene is considered the most famous in Walken's career. What is extraordinary is that it was completely improvised and not called for in the script. Both Walken's call and Fishburne's synchronic response come out of the spontaneous eruption

of the day's film shooting. The dance disrupts the over-determined power struggle between the white bourgeois kingpin and his Black workers. This Dionysian revelry trumping the power dynamic between both parties is undermined by the somber reintroduction of history by Walken's character when he asks: "Jump, how come you never visited me?" A hesitant, yet confident, Fishburne answers, "Who would want to see you in a cage, man?"

It is the constant invasion of history into the work that continues to make O'Neill's play relevant. From Kate Valk's recent performance in The Wooster Group's revival of the play, to its reverberations in contemporary film and television culture it is that constant play between the specificity of staging and the abstractions of method, the foregrounding and foreclosing of historicity that makes O'Neill's attempt at a "first" so fruitful and relevant for contemporary efforts to stage Black revolution. Alexander Woollcott in his review of its premiere claims, "The Provincetown Players have squanderously invested in cushions for their celebrated seats and a concrete dome to catch and dissolve their lights, so that even on their little stage they can now get such illusions of distance and the wide outdoors as few of their uptown rivals can achieve. But of immeasurably greater importance in their present enterprise, they have acquired an actor, one who has it in him to invoke the pity and the terror and indescribable foreboding which are part of the secret of "The Emperor Jones."'" The emphasis on pity and terror in this formulation gestures to the catharsis dynamic identified with tragedy's reception by Aristotle. There is a problematic assumption in his statement that greets Gilpin's dexterity as an actor with a note of surprise. I would argue that the radical import of O'Neill's play comes from the fact that the secret of *The Emperor Jones* is its admission

of the historical fact, that the condition of possibility for the development of American civilization is the forced coercion of unpaid Black labor. Whether or not a production honors the radical potential latent in O'Neill's drama is intimately wrapped up in whether or not future stagings choose to foreground or foreclose such a fact.

CHAPTER THREE

‘Bringing in the Chorus’:

The Haitian Revolution Plays of C.L.R. James and Edouard Glissant

I must go up into the woods for the sake of the general liberty.
-Toussaint to Dessalines in Glissant’s *Monsieur Toussaint*

This chapter examines C.L.R. James’s play *The Black Jacobins* (1936) and Edouard Glissant’s *Monsieur Toussaint: A Play* (1961) as two case-studies to further explore the use of the tragic as a way of taking about the relationship between leader and base in the Black Radical Tradition. Even though both are performed, respectively in the metropoloes of London and Paris, James and Glissant write their plays during different decades, in different languages, and for different audiences. The writers constituting this study in the main: an Anglophone Caribbean writer, a Francophone Caribbean writer, a white American writer, and an African American writer all respond in their works to the possibility of thinking the historical resonance of Black revolutionary politics through the Caribbean (through Haiti in particular). The diasporic literary orbit this project implies does not to purport to extinguish the temporal, linguistic, and national differences between the texts and authors examined. The goal is simply to set up a series of encounters to develop a specific problematic. In his play, James prefigures themes explored in greater detail in his book-length 1938 history of the Haitian Revolution, also titled *The Black Jacobins*. I am interested in the differences, both strategic and structural, between the play and the history. There are interesting implications of this unusual situation, where a play seems to have some sort of formative relations to his historical

work on a similar topic. This chapter elaborates on James's approach to the tragic by juxtaposing these two texts and genres. Glissant further expands on this theme by exploding the gap between leader and base in his own dramatic intervention on the Haitian Revolution.

Our previous discussion of the uses of the tragic in C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* looks at the employment of tragedy as a way to think dialectical mediation; fundamentally, mediation between the leader and mass base. The classical tragic structure of ordering a plot often involves a protagonist who mediates his or her relationship with the chorus. The chorus, in its classical sense is often representative for the polis or the larger community, with its corresponding mores and sensibilities. More often than not, the tragic gesture performs its political work as a dramatized transgression against something entrenched in the community's belief system; a religious or more generally spiritual infraction, a political lapse, a general rift in the structures of feeling of a given body of people, or the competing loyalties to irreconcilable, antagonistic social codes. An example of this can be found in the case of Antigone's *Sophocles* (442 B.C.), wherein competing mandates of spiritual law and a secular law, kinship obligations clash.¹ James's use of tragedy helps mediate a series of oppositions and disparate gaps. It helps to both convey and bridge the relationship between 1) leader and mass, 2) aesthetic/art, and history/science, and finally a 3) chronologically connecting the time period of the study's subject matter with his collective political aims during the time period of the book's production. James's text thinks the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1803 alongside his 1938 interest in the burgeoning

¹ Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim Kinship Between Life and Death*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000)

African independence movement. It highlights the distance between the real and the ideal; in other words, tragedy points out a discrepancy or a lack of fulfillment. James's hope in the ability for that gap to be bridged differs as his thought progresses over time. His additions and revisions of *The Black Jacobins* in 1963 are partially inspired by his frustration with the way such liberation movements evolve, combined with mid-and latter twentieth century radical aspirations for the Caribbean captured in the Cuban Revolution. Along with its use as an agent of mediation, similar to Edward Said's insight that Jonathan Swift's prose in his *Modest Proposal* "mimics the cannibalism it propounds by showing how easily human bodies can be assimilated by an amiable prose appetite",² James uses the tragic structure to formally highlight Toussaint's difficulties. He views the problematic of individual versus mass base as integral to the endeavor of all history writing. Or as Fred Moten states in his employment of James to frame a discussion of the lyric qualities in the book collaboration between Congolese painter Tshibumba Kanda Matulu and ethnographer Johannes Fabian: "I intend to pay some brief attention to the mechanics of James's lyrical history in order to think what might appear only as a contradiction indicative of a failure. IT would have been a failure on the part of the author that replicates the military/political failure of Toussaint, a failure that operates perhaps in spite of, the author's mastery."³ The mechanics of James's writing intentionally reproduces through its formal composition the flaw in judgment, constituting Toussaint's revolutionary judgment. Moten in his piece is interested in using James to think about how the Black Radical Tradition to quote Cedric Robinson "cannot

² Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. 1975 (NY: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 71.

³ Fred Moten, "Not in Between: Lyric Painting, Visual History, and the Postcolonial Future". *The Drama Review*. 47, 1 T177, (Spring 2003):127-148.

be understood within the particular context of its genesis”(qt. in Moten, 133). I will return to Moten’s reflections when thinking about the relationship between Dessalines and Toussaint. Moten here wants to look at the excess, the excessive lyricism and “musicality” of the Black Radical Tradition, which distends a Marxian dialectic that dogmatically insists on a position in which the creation of a proletarian class is an integral and pre-condition for socialist transformation. It is such a heterodox interpretation of Marxist theories of revolution that allows for different types of subjects—the peasantry, the ex-enslaved, James’s “abstract creatures”—to take center stage in the revolutionary drama. Moten’s prescient observation helps emphasize how the formal construction of James’s work on Toussaint replicates the content in terms of the chasm between leader and base. The centrality of the chorus and the tension between individual star of the tragic drama and its choral counterpoint is part of a Black radical tradition that thinks social change as a problem between leader and base. This chapter works to elaborate on this specific narrowing down of a central theme of tragic degeneration: the Jamesian hamartia as a breakdown in communication between revolutionary leadership and masses of people. This persistent thematic depicted in this point from James, this specific utilization of tragedy in the sample of literature discussed, is what constitutes it as the political aesthetic form par excellence. It raises the question: How does one pen a narrative foregrounding mass participation, as engine for progress and both anchor for radical analysis, through the lens of telling the tale of an individual?⁴

⁴ For further reading see: Paul B. Miller “Enlightened Hesitations: Black Masses and Tragic Heroes in C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins*” *MLN* 116.5 (2001): 1069-1090. Nick Nesbitt, “Troping Toussaint, Reading Revolution” *Research in African Literatures* 35.2 (2004): 18-33. J. Michael Dash, “The Theater of the Haitian Revolution/The Haitian Revolution as Theater” *Small Axe* 9.2 (2005): 16-23. Louis-Phillippe Dalember, J. Michael Dash, Edwidge Danticat, Dany Laferriere, Evelyn Trouillot, “Roundtable: Writing, History, Revolution”. *Small Axe* 9.2 (2005): 189-199. Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990)

This chapter will build on this concern via a focused engagement with James's 1936 play *The Black Jacobins*⁵ and Edouard Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint: A play*. Glissant's essay "Theater, Consciousness of the People" from his collection *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1989) will be discussed along with Glissant's revisal of a Jamesian engagement with the events and actors of the Haitian Revolution in the form of his own Haitian revolutionary play intervention. Wherein, James in his play that prefigures and frames the way he thinks about his subject in his study *The Black Jacobins* draws the main theme of Toussaint as individual protagonist mediating the demands of the Haitian masses as chorus, Glissant explodes such a concern by thinking and staging the binary individual/base to its logical extreme and dissolution. Glissant dissolves the opposition through his fidelity to the concept of *depasser*—the Nation [in this case a free, independent Haiti] cannot exist without the dissolution of the individual revolutionary leader into the whole. This is further complicated by the fact that how Glissant is received in English is often mired by inaccuracies of translation. This commitment for Glissant is enacted in his drama of the Haitian Revolution. By radically affirming and expanding James's Marxian fidelity to totality, Glissant enacts a mechanism of *du d passement qu'on en realise* and achieving revolutionary unity between leader and bases through his philosophy of the Tout: "the dissolution of individual in the Whole". The aforementioned phrase in French literally means "of the moving beyond that is realized by it." The complexities of the various mistranslations of Glissant will be addressed later

⁵ Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Reader*, 423-424: "*The Black Jacobins*: the play (1936). James originally wrote his play about the 1791 slave revolution under the title *Toussaint L'Ouverture*. It was produced by Peter Godfrey of the State Society at the Westminster Theatre, London in March 1936. Later, the drama was revised and re-titled, *The Black Jacobins*. This is the version published here. It was produced by Dexter Lyndersay at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 1967; by the BBC, in the radio series Monday Play; and in 1986, by Yvonne Brewster of the Talawa Theatre Company at the Riverside Studios, London."

in this chapter. Glissant radically updates James's concern with a tragic disarticulation between Toussaint and his base by severing the chasm between the two, wherein both are subsumed in the greater totality of the national polity:

Although the people become nation through Toussaint, the process is complete only with the sacrificial dissolution of their "medium". Glissant's Toussaint understands that his country "needs his absence" and that he "must go up into the woods for the sake of the general liberty".⁶

The way in which the narrative architecture of James's play subverts the focus on the leader tipping the scales more towards the subtle independence between leader and base is the main focus of this chapter.

Bringing Robeson Back into the frame Organization on James's Haitian Revolutionary Stage:

From 1932-1938, C.L.R. James agitated and organized in London around a Pan-Africanist and socialist theoretical nexus and produced a prodigious body of scholarship: *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* (1933), the novel *Minty Alley* (1936), *World Revolution, 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937), an English translation from the French of Boris Souvarine's biography, *Stalin* (1938), *The Black Jacobins*, and *A History of Negro Revolt* (1939)⁷. James's "London period" is marked by a pronounced rigor and activist agitation around the fascist Italian invasion of Abyssinia, a practice crystallized in his collaboration with Amy Ashwood Garvey et al in the formation of the International African Friends of Ethiopia which sustained its Pan-Africanist agitation from 1935-1937. In 1937, under the leadership of Pan-Africanist

⁶ Peter Hallward. "Edouard Glissant between the Singular and the Specific". *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 11.2 (1998) pp. 449-450. I'm borrowing, with qualifications Hallward's translation of *du d'opassement qu'on en realise* from Glissant's *Le Discours antillais* Paris: Seuil, 1981 and the philosophy of tout from Edouard Glissant's *Poetique de la Relation* Paris: Callimard, 1993.

⁷ Robert A. Hill "In England, 1932-1938", 62.

militant George Padmore, the International African Service Bureau formed out of the IAFE. James acted as editor in 1938 of their official organ, *International African Opinion*.⁸ It was in this scholarly, agitprop milieu that James wrote his play *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (renamed by James *The Black Jacobins*), in which Paul Robeson played the leading role in London, 1936. The play chronicled the successful Haitian Revolution initiated under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture and completed by one of Toussaint's trusted lieutenants, Dessalines.

The Stage Society ran the production under the condition that Robeson be cast in the leading role. Following its opening at London's Westminster Theatre in 1936, a majority of the reviews criticized the play's overburdening and cumbersome dialogue. However, Robeson's skill as a performer acted as the saving grace of the show. In an essay James wrote about Robeson for *The Black World* in 1970, James notes two telling examples. Writing in *The Times*, Charles Darwin criticizes the play's dialogue for being "informative rather than suggestive", and lacking "suppleness." The saving grace for the critic is "Mr. Robeson's individuality," which "binds its episodes together." Robeson's appearance and voice, according to the critic, "brings him out of the frame" and reduces his associates to the background." English drama critic, Ivor Brown notes in the pages of *The Observer*: "Probably poetry would better have honoured the great and magnanimous figure of ebony which Mr. Paul Robeson presented like some tremendous tree defying hurricanes and finally overwhelmed by the small, mean blade of French dishonesty."⁹

⁸ *International African Opinion* is discussed at some length in Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 299-305.

⁹ All theater reviews excerpted are compiled in C.L.R. James "Paul Robeson: Black Star" 1970. in *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings*. (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co, 1980): 258-9.

This chapter examines the theatrical representation of the Haitian revolution as an aesthetics of staging. In the aforementioned original preface of *The Black Jacobins*, James draws on the staging metaphor from the opening of Marx's *18th Brumaire*, concerning the roles "men" play in history, to raise the historiographic issue on how to effectively write a collective history, which is also a biography. The play version tries hard to frame its depiction of Toussaint; within a revolutionary collectivity; this seems to be the reason why James changed the title of the play from "Toussaint L'Ouverture" to "The Black Jacobins". Both critics take great pains to point out the individuality of Robeson's performance as its grace-saving merit. Robeson's acting abilities, bold charisma, and awesome presence as an organizer both in intellectual depth and corporal stature will be discussed later. Here, I want to use the reception of the play as a springboard to look at the work itself and how it negotiates the leader versus base tension. Scholars do not have the benefit of having the performance archived to examine directly this characteristic of individual performance bravado. However, I want to look at the structuring of the text in order to assess how the play constantly wavers between focus on Toussaint, the revolutionary leader, and the masses of Haitian people. I want to read the play against the grain of the sampling of critics' reception of Robeson in order to show how the leader and masses interdependence is much more subtle in the play's representation and works against what can only be imagined as Robeson's awesome display of virtuoso in stage-craft. The formal structure of the play works to temper both Robeson's individual magnitude and the strategic brilliance and courage of Toussaint, ensuring that both only make sense as part of a larger mass articulation. What is at stake in this focus for discussion of James's dramatic work is a grappling with the fact that the

author has penned and staged a profoundly philosophical meditation on the status of leadership in the revolutionary process in a brief three-act play. The play works against Robeson's bravado and enacts this subtle interdependence between revolutionary leader and base through the following means—I) The interdependence of the Raynal episode with the larger *Prologue*, II) The overarching rapid fire timeline of the play's dramatic action as it relates to revolutionary strategy specifically captured in *Act I Scene II*, III) The function of music in the play IV) The reflections on Toussaint's execution of his nephew Mose, and V) The qualitative and quantitative shift in the play's representation of the status of Black labor both prior and post-Revolution.

For the purposes of this exposition, it will be helpful to provide a brief description of the plot and chronological progression of the play. Chronological progression is key considering the text condenses so much of a time period and shift in alignments in rapid bursts: *Act I Scene 1*: 1791 [Living Room of M. Bullet]: The Blacks of French San Domingo are in revolt and Toussaint saves the owners of his plantation from his soon-to-be lieutenant, Dessaline's wrath. *Act I Scene 2*: 1794 [Military Headquarters of General Toussaint]: The revolutionary forces switch allegiances from the Spanish to the French, after the Convention abolishes slavery in the French colonies. Toussaint places the Spanish General under arrest. *Act I Scene 3*: 1798 [Living Room of Tobias Lear, American Consul]: After rejecting British and American commercial and military support to make him a King, Toussaint re-pledges his oath to France. *Act I Scene 4*: 1798 [Toussaint's Headquarters, [British] General Maitland's Headquarters]: Toussaint and Maitland in their separate environs pen letters to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France and Britain respectively, declaring the British offer of Kingship to Toussaint as a

way to create a rift between between San Domingo and the French Government. *Act II Scene 1*: 1800 [Bedroom of Marie-Jeanne]: Marie-Jeanne, love interest of Dessalines, feigns romantic interest in General H douville of the French Army in order to disclose a plot to align French with the mulattos against Toussaint. *Act II Scene 2*: 1800 [Headquarters of Toussaint]: Toussaint dismisses the French general for intrigue and inciting rebellion and commands a white Frenchman loyal to him to dispatch a letter to Napoleon. *Act II Scene 3*: 1800 [Office of General Bonaparte, Tulleries, Paris]: Napoleon rejects Toussaint’s letter and proposal for a Constitution and declares that he will not allow for San Domingo’s independence. *Act II Scene 4*: 1802 [Headquarters of Toussaint]: Toussaint signs a death warrant for his nephew M  se for treason and orders a scorched earth policy to counteract an imminent French invasion. *Act III Scene 1*: 1802 [Headquarters of Dessalines]: Dessalines arranges for the capture of Toussaint. *Act III Scene 2*: 1803 [Headquarters of Dessalines]: Dessalines declares himself Emperor after the defeat of the French. Informed of Toussaint’s death in a French Prison. It is significant to note that Toussaint disappears completely from the action of the play after *Act III Scene 1*.

In the play and the historical study, Toussaint L’Ouverture’s encounter with the abolitionist priest, Abbe Raynal’s “revolutionary doctrine” in Raynal’s treatise, *Philosophical and Political History of the Establishments and Commerce of the Europeans in the Indies* is a pivotal moment in the molding Toussaint’s consciousness and revolutionary desires. However, they are handled quite differently in both genres. In the play, the scene is juxtaposed with scenes of collective action and Toussaint is provided an interlocutor (his wife) to discuss Raynal’s text. In the book, James is

confined by the generic differences between drama and history; primarily, in the fact that in performance one can bring multiple bodies on stage. In the history, James scripts Toussaint's encounter with Raynal as an act of individual self-actualizing consciousness. Toussaint finds in Raynal's portent the impetus for his revolutionary desire to act as a leader to herald his people to freedom. It is a curious moment in James's historical study, in that it privileges the scene of reading as the catalyst for Toussaint's revolutionary transformation. James writes pertaining to this much-needed "courageous chief" that, "It is the tragedy of mass movements that they need and can only too rarely find adequate leadership". Curious, in that this moment for James demonstrates a reliance on individual leadership whereas one might think of James's investment in the self-organization of the working class as a hedge against such assessments of the centrality of individual leadership in a revolutionary process. He even goes as far as to describe this lack of leadership as tragic. This discussion in the full length *The Black Jacobins* directly precedes and is balanced by the whole discussion of men making their own history but not in conditions chosen by them. Such a moment in *The Black Jacobins* exists, "as a source of considerable leverage for James's endeavor to hold the tension between the claims of agency and the claims of structure"(CONSCRIPTS, 74). Speaking on the Raynal and Toussaint encounter as it relates to James's historical study, David Scott eloquently writes, "Indeed, the encounter between Toussaint and Raynal's *Philosophical and Political History* is one of the most decisive moments in the overall architecture and narrative economy of the *Black Jacobins* because it helps James to establish Toussaint as a figure of enlightened sensibility and modern—indeed, modernist—political desire"(CONSCRIPTS, 98). James, according to Scott, "allows us to imagine a classic

pedagogical scene of modernist self-fashioning drawn almost straight out of Rousseau's *Emile*" (Ibid. 100). The placement of the Raynal episode in the play works with an equal if not superior subtlety. James's *Prologue* works as a primer dictating both a reading strategy for what I am arguing as most profound in the work's mediation on the revolutionary process. It is a powerful distillation of his main interest in leader and base interdependence. Raymond Williams notes that in classical tragedy the prologus constitutes "the scene preceding the entry of the chorus."¹⁰ Again, we see James's departure from the convention: in his prologue, the chorus is already on stage.

The Raynal episode in the play works by its very incorporation and structuring in relation to the short burst action sequences in the *Prologue* to call into question and complicate its individualistic fashioning and implications. An individualistic fashion encouraged by Robeson's awesome individual talent and captured in the James altering his play's title from *Toussaint L'Ouverture* to *The Black Jacobins*. The intimate scene containing Toussaint sharing his reading experience of Raynal with Madame L'Ouverture is coupled by a series of episodes involving various alterations between scenes of resistance and scenes of subjugation. The following episodes are indicated in all capital letters in the text and labeled by its actors' roles or locale. They work as the prefatory material prefiguring Toussaint engaging with Raynal's words, referred to as the "mise-en-scene of modernist self-fashioning" by David Scott (*CONSCRIPTS*, 130): Here, I am reading the literary qualities of the play as a written text. James utilizes the formalized qualities of a play (above all stage directions and headings) to imply a supplement to the performance. The effect of capitalization implies a certain allegorical quality that can only be read with the text in hand. THE SLAVES (in which five slaves chained together

¹⁰ Raymond Williams, *Drama in Performance*. 1954. (England: Penguin Books, 1968), 12

“mime digging with spades” sing a collective song of resistance), THE BARBER (a scene in which a barber brutalizes a slave for ruining the coiffure of a lady being tended to by the four slaves), THE SLAVES (the return of the five slaves, who now “mime digging with pickaxes”, incorporating the English translation of the song from before—“Eh! Eh! Bomba! Heu! Heu!/White Man—vow to destroy/Take his riches away/Kill them/Every one/Canga Li”), THE THIEF (a slave is whipped and beaten for stealing a chicken), THE SLAVE (“*five silhouetted slaves pass heavy boulders slowly from one to the other*” as an overseer cracks his whip), THE ENTERTAINER (a scene in which a white man is boasting about taking a slave after he dances and filling him up with gunpowder and blowing him up from the inside—a scene of torture recounted in the 1938 study, THE HOTEL (Henri Christophe, who goes on to be one of Toussaint’s main generals serving drinks to three white men complaining about French abolitionist actions and the minimal police presence in San Domingo), THE FOREST (a speaker is shot dead after he articulates a vision of Trans-Atlantic anti-slavery resistance and Dessalines responds to the murder by stating, “We will kill them all. Every one.”), and finally, THE LEADER:

The lights come up on the area stage right. Toussaint L'Ouverture is sitting in a rustic armchair with a book open on his lap. His head is at rest and he stares into the night. His wife enters behind him.

MME. L'OUVERTURE: Old man, why don't you come to bed. It is late.

TOUSSAINT: I can't sleep. There is something frightening in the air. And I have opened my Raynal to read an even more frightening thing. The book just opened and I looked. The Abbe is saying: “A courageous chief only is wanted.” I have read it a thousand times before, but it is as if I had seen it for the first time.

MME. L'OUVERTURE: Toussaint, you still feel this destiny for great things.

TOUSSAINT: Yes, I do. For a long time. Ever since the slave uprisings began. But *what* “great things?”

MME. L’OUVERTURE: Come to bed, Old Toussaint. You’re tired.

TOUSSAINT: In a little while. (Madame L’Ouverture exits. Toussaint looks into the book again, then looks up as the lights fade to a solitary spot on him) “A courageous chief only is wanted.” (The light fades to blackout.) (*JACOBINS-PLAY*, 71)

The ordering of the *Prologue* here is instructive. To borrow James’s terminology from the 1938 historical study, this episode in the play stands alone and is inseparable from the sub-soil (*BLACK JACOBINS*, x) from which it arises, in this case, the sub-soil being the prior bursts of action preceding it. Toussaint acknowledges to his wife that he has read Raynal “a thousand times before” and that the slave uprisings have preceded this particular scene of instruction. In this case, James dramatically shows how the revolution “makes Toussaint”. The start of the slave uprisings infuses new meaning into the Raynal text—the slave uprisings are the condition of possibility for Toussaint’s transformation and crystallization of his sense of duty. However, the coupling with prior moments, plus the status of this scene within a cluster of scenes as concluding gesture also highlights Toussaint’s separateness from his base. However, the Raynal moment is not the solitary experience of instruction captured in James’s latter historical study: The play scripts Toussaint sharing Raynal’s written challenge and provocation with his wife. In this particular dramatic format, James uses a synchronic temporal mechanism--in this case offsetting James’s intimate engagement with Raynal’s text prefaced by a collapsed rapid fire staging of various scenes pertaining to bondage and liberty—to underscore his main problematic, the chasm and interdependence between Toussaint and his base. It is this

rapid-fire temporal movement plus collapsing that highlights the most significant feature of the play. There is in this quick scene succession a presentation of strategic calculus and situational tact, challenging some of the accusations of Romanticist vindicationist tendencies in James's portrayal of Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution. No more is this apparent than in the rapid leaps and turns in historical situation captured in a singular scene of the play—*Act I, Scene II*.

Act I, Scene II transpires in the year 1794 and collapses in one scene the competing national allegiances Toussaint and his men swear to in pursuit of the singular goal: Libert . James utilizes the sometimes truncated, sometimes fully elaborated French Revolutionary anthem—"La Marseillaise" to structure the scene's thematic of strategic, contingent fidelity to different colonial European Nations for the sole purpose of freedom for the Africans of San Domingo. Or, as Toussaint tells Marquis, the Spanish General: "They will join anything, or leave anything, for Libert " (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 77). The scene commences with Marat, aide to Dessalines and Max, aide to Toussaint's nephew Mo se discussing their current lot as Marat laments having to move a piano—labor he chastises as "work for slaves" (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 73). The scene highlights the insecurity of where they stand as "free men" and the fleeting ground of that designation. This furniture-moving motif will be repeated in *Act III Scene I*, in which the soldiers are arranging furniture in Dessalines's "unofficial headquarters" (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 99). Upon initial reflection, the disillusioned Marat and Max think that their lot of toil is the same, with only a shift of the name of their structural status:

MARAT: All this goddamn furniture to be moved. This is work for slaves.

MAX: They ain't got no more slaves.

MARAT: All right. Not slaves, but fellas to do heavy work. I am a soldier. I am free. What is the use of being free and having to move a piano. When I was a slave I had to move the piano. Now I am free I have to move the piano.

MAX: You mused to move the piano for M. Bullet. Now it is for General L'Ouverture.

MARAT: The piano is still a piano and heavy as hell. (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 73-4)

Later in the scene, when Orleans, aide to Christophe asks Max about the success of the Revolution in France, Marat interjects:

MARAT: ...Just like ours. The white slaves in France heard that the black slaves in San Domingo had killed their masters and taken over the houses and the property. They heard that we did it and they follow us. I am sure in France, the slaves do not move pianos anymore. They make the old Counts and Dukes move them...(*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 74)

This dialogue works to foreshadow the tragic degeneration of the revolutionary process in terms of Toussaint's failure to communicate and explain to his base strategic policy as it relates to shifting allegiances. In these few lines, James the playwright with great economy gestures towards troubles ahead in terms of the precarious footing of the newly liberated Africans. He scripts the lines of Marat in a curiously idiomatic tone, in his use of the term "fellas". James condenses a sophisticated discussion of the subtlety of social change and freedom grounded in the quotidian labor of moving a piano. The characters reason in an effort to determine how specifically, their lot has changed with their new-found "freedom". Prior, to this discussion Orleans declares himself a Duke just as later in the scene Toussaint will chastise Dessalines for humming the anthem of the French Republic since he is contingently loyal to the King of Spain. James has Toussaint state

his adherence to an Afrocentric version of monarchy to rationalize fidelity to Spain, the current (for now) stepping-stone for a larger vision of Haitian African liberation:

“We are Africans, and Africans believe in a King. We were slaves and we believe in liberty and equality. But we are not republicans. Do not sing that song again. La Marseillaise is the song of enemies. Our ruler is the king, the King of Spain”(BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY, 75-6).

This episode is immediately followed by a discussion between Marat, Max, Orleans, and Mars Plaisir, Toussaint’s civilian aide on the nature of freedom and the translation of the French mantra of Revolution across the Atlantic as it relates to the Africans of San Domingo. Orleans states: “Everybody says Liberty-Equality-Fraternity. All right, Liberty is when you kill the master; Equality, he’s dead and can’t beat you again; and Fraternity..What is that Fraternity?”(BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY, 75) Fraternity is the contested term in this triad. Plaisir and Orleans infuse this triad of French Revolutionary idealism with reason, a radical actuality and pertinence to the lot and reality of the African Haitians. Mars Plaisir attempts to clarify: “All right. Liberty, slavery abolished; Equality, no dukes...No counts, no marquises, no princes, no lords, everybody equal...And Fraternity, everybody gets together and be friends, nobody taking advantage of anybody, everybody helping everybody else”(BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY, 75).

Lieutenant Moÿse enters with news from France that the former slaves in San Domingo are to be welcomed as citizens and Toussaint puts the Spanish General, Marquis under arrest. Note that at this moment and others in the play: key decisions, as they relate to alignment are dictated by Toussaint as individual leader. He declares allegiance to France in an impassioned speech:

TOUSSAINT: ...Look at these people, General. Some of them understand only one French word—Libert . (*Moise is now gesturing to the crowd of men, who are*

eagerly listening.) They will join anything, or lead anything, for Liberty. That is why I can lead them. But the day that they feel I am not for Liberty, the day they feel I am not telling them everything, I am finished. They are all listening to us now. As soon as you and I have finished speaking, they will know what we have said, because Mogue, my nephew, is translating what we say into Creole. Many discussions have taken place in front of these men while Mogue translated. They know that the Spanish San Domingo Government declared slavery abolished here, that they repeatedly sent to us asking us to join the Republic. But they also understand, Marquis, that when the Government in France abolished slavery, I would be joining them; not before. Now that slavery has been abolished, we go at once. Our soldiers are strategically placed in relation to yours; they have always been. Marquis, your sword please... (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 77)

Here there is a crystallization of the tragic dispensation of a Black Radical tradition casting its net of strategic allegiances wide. Yet, the underlying cohesive glue holding together a constantly shifting strategy is solely the desire for Liberty. The actual historical conditions of the Africans demanding and struggling for freedom in Haiti warranted such a wide spread strategy of resistance and shifting alliance. James dramatizes the exact opposite of a Romantic vindication story here. It is revolutionary real-politick and a dramatic rendition of the qualitative and quantitative differences between bondage in the old and new world. The speech works also to foreshadow Toussaint's immanent doom and strategic stumble into irrelevancy and death: "...the day they feel I am not telling them everything, I am finished." The fact that Mogue is designated in this scene as the translator articulating in Creole Toussaint's exposition to the men is crucial here and will be recalled later when we look further at Toussaint's order to execute Mogue later in the play. Toussaint's speech to the Spanish General Marquis, after he places him under arrest is the moment of performance that focuses all attention on him. It is the music at the conclusion of the monologue that grounds Toussaint's actions in his mass base demonstrating their true anchor as Toussaint's condition of possibility:

(Mogse takes the Spanish flag and the Spanish General off. Toussaint exits followed by Dessalines and Christophe. One slave returns the chair to its place behind the table. Another follows Christophe to the exit to ensure that the officers are gone. He returns to the crowd of slaves who are excitedly conferring among themselves. Other ex-slaves converge from all sides to hear the news. A shout goes up, out of which comes a joyous “La Marseillaise”. Drummers enter to accompany the rocking anthem as the men begin to jump up ad lib. Offstage men start a chant that cuts through the repeat of “La Marseillaise”. The chant eventually drowns out “La Marseillaise” completely as more sing the former and less the latter.

(When all the men are chanting “Enfin les FranHais ont donn  libert ”, a priestess enters with a voodoo container which has three compartments—to hold small jars—and a central lighted candle. She kneels facing the audience in front of the drummers who are seated on a bench. Then three women dancers enter with a new chant, “La Liberte”, in counterpoint to the men’s chant. Each woman brings in a jar with which they appear to sprinkle the floor. They converge on the priestess and deposit their jars in her container. The drums and chanting stop suddenly. A new rhythm starts immediately (BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY, 78)...

The direct reference to musical compositions and the employment of music as a structuring agent in the action of the drama work to further elaborate James’s philosophy of revolutionary leadership as a precarious balancing act between individual and base. The “new rhythm” cuts and augments the singing of “La Marseillaise”. It is that lyricism explored by Fred Moten, via Cedric Robinson that cannot be reduced to nor existent solely dependent upon its genesis. The kernel of “La Marseillaise”—“La Libert ” is what matters in the song and emphasized in the dance performance. *Act I Scene 2* concludes with Toussaint’s fiery oration directed to Marquis coupled with the concluding Dionysian scene of mass celebratory revelation. It incorporates what can only be imagined as Robeson’s awe inspiring solitary oration into a collective scene. The music and dance combination works to trump the contingent partially translated French musical anthem housing a limited ideation of liberation. *La Marseillaise* is cut and augmented to a more site-specific interpretation. Again, it is the collapsing and coupling of scenes of

individual performance bravado with mass-driven carnivalesque celebration that underlines the deep philosophical work of James's play. The celebration both affirms African rituals and structures of feelings as a tool of resistance for the Haitian masses and also foreshadows the coronation of Dessalines as priest/emperor/liberator.

Along with *La Marseillaise*, the play alludes to the European operatic tradition, particularly Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Il dissoluto punito, ossia Il Don Giovanni*—*The Dissolute Man Punished, or Don Giovanni*¹¹, specifically the *Act I* aria: "Vendetta ti chieggio, la chiede il tuo cuore". James uses the music to underlie the specific nature of Toussaint's error through the comparison with Don Giovanni. Allusion to the play helps underscore the revisionist bend of James's entire historical project of bringing into focus the forces and actors marginalized by bourgeois "victors" accounts of history, the violence of the oppressed verses the violence of the oppressors, and a meditation on the concept of vengeance. Mozart helps James to further along his goal of "Bring in the Chorus". A brief engagement with Liane Curtis's article "The Sexual Politics of Teaching Mozart's Don Giovanni"¹² helps us to make such parallels in contemplating

¹¹ *Don Giovanni* in two acts by Mozart adapted from the text written by Lorenzo da Ponte.

¹² Liane Curtis, "The Sexual Politics of Teaching Mozart's *Don Giovanni*," *NWSA Journal* 12.1 (2001): 119-142. The Italian text of the Donna Anna aria in question as utilized in Curtis (p. 140) is as follows:

(Aria)
 Or sai chi l'onore
 rapire a me volse,
 chi fu il traditore
 che il padre mi tolse.
 Vendetta ti chieggio,
 la chiede il tuo cor.
 Rammenta la piaga
 del misero seno,
 rimira di sangue
 coperto il terreno,
 se l'ira in te langue
 d'un giusto furor,
 Or sai chi l'onore (ecc.)

James's usage of the opera in his work. Reminding oneself of the full title of Mozart's work, as opposed to the common place truncated title helps to foreground the oppressive violence, brutal objectification, and inevitable punishment central to Mozart's/Da Ponte's opera. These are the same elements according to Curtis that are neglected and wished away in the dominant critical reception and teaching of the work. The "dissolute man punished" gets eclipsed and only Don Giovanni, the rugged individualist and master of his passions, survives in the sample of work Curtis challenges.

Curtis's argument is with a trend in critical reception of the opera that lionizes the title character as a rugged individual and marginalizes the women protagonists. The three women in the opera are scripted as complex characters yet are treated in the critical literature with the same one-sided objectification parallel to Don Giovanni's rapacious perspective. Curtis identifies a canon of music criticism—Grout and Palisca, Kamien, Levy, and Kerman-- for lauding the male rapist hero and failing to grasp the complexities of women's resistance as well as their class status. Zerlina's peasant status is exemplary in this case. In this regard, Curtis's intervention in Mozart studies works in the same regard as DuBois's "The Propaganda of History"(1935) and James's play and full length study of the Haitian Revolution, in that both works' end-game is to "Bring in the Chorus" and reposition the marginalized as center.¹³The "stifling of women's voices" in dominant trends of Mozart scholarship parallels the sort of critical obfuscation of the agency and resolve of ex-enslaved Africans in both DuBois and James.

Mozart's and Da Ponte's one of a series of collaborations addresses the issue of rape and sexual violence and retribution. The work is based on the Don Juan legend and begins with a masked Don Giovanni fleeing from Donna Anna in pursuit, who has just

¹³ W.E.B DuBois, Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880. 1935. (NY: Touch Stone, 1995).

fended off his attempt at sexual assault. Donna Anna's prime motivation is to attempt and disclose the identity of her attacker. Her father, the nobleman Don Commendatore confronts Don Giovanni with the accusation of attempted rape, they duel, and Don Giovanni cuts him down. Donna Anna swears revenge for her father's death and enlists her fiancé Don Ottavio in the project. Donna Elvira is an abandoned lover of Don Giovanni, who desperately wants him back. Don Giovanni attempts to interrupt the wedding of the peasant Donna Zerlina. She is rescued via the combined efforts of Don Ottavio, Donna Anna, and Donna Elvira. Following another attempt at seduction and brutality, Don Giovanni and his servant Leporello are confronted by Commendatore's ghost statue. Don Giovanni invites him to dinner and the statue shows up and demands that Don Giovanni repents. He scoffs at this request and is promptly dragged by the statue to the depths of hell accompanied by the chorus singing—"Thus is the end of all evil doers." Edward Said in his chapter on Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, in his posthumous study *On Late Style*, states "the terrifying Commendatore in *Don Giovanni* embodies the stern, judgmental aspect of Leopold's relationship with his son (discussed by Maynard Solomon so illuminatingly as an obsessive desired master/bondsman relationship in Mozart's thought)".¹⁴ This emphasis in Mozart reverberates for James as well: weaving Mozart into the drama works not only to parallel themes of master/bondsman but also the themes of revenge and justice.

In the course of the plot unfolding, the arias work to highlight key themes as they relate to sexual violence, objectification and revenge. Don Giovanni's servant Leporello's "Catalogue Aria" outlines his lord's various sexual conquests in the most

¹⁴ Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain*. (NY: Pantheon Books, 2006), 69.

crass, objectified terms—“Leporello’s Catalogue includes no details of the circumstances of the listed incidents. An encounter, from the perspective of Don Giovanni and his assistant, is not assessed according to the type of involvement or whether or not the female was willing, but rather solely on the physical qualities of the merchandise of the moment: size, shape, age, and nationality, not situation”(Curtis, 123). Curtis’s article challenges another trend in Mozart scholarship on *Don Giovanni*, that downplays the seriousness of Donna Anna’s attack or completely dismisses the veracity of her claims. For our purposes in this chapter, on the revenge aria that James weaves into his play, Curtis opines:

The omission of the intense and powerful arias sung by both Donna Anna and Donna Elvira from the textbooks’ discussion is part of the stifling of the women’s voices. “Or sai chi l’onore,” the aria that follows the recitative, is Anna’s expression of anger and indomitable determination. It begins with a pulsing tremolo in the upper strings, above which the soprano carves a broad, strong arc, in three phrases, each spanning an octave and ascending a step higher than its predecessor. Between these, the double reeds interject an emphatic ascent, adding to the momentum and energy. Wide leaps, especially of a sixth, add to the athletic power of the voice part and emphasize words like “vendetta.”

The central section, beginning with “Remember the wound,” employs smoother, descending phrases in the vocal lines; the string accompaniment is hushed but even more agitated, with a syncopated, repeated-note pattern. The end of this passage, with its flourish of string chords and the voice alone for four notes (emphasizing “righteous anger”) recalls the earlier intensity of the accompanied recitative. The aria then returns to its opening section and builds to a conclusion. The vocal phrases are now shorter and faster, with their upward sweep now spanning an even larger range. The last few measures are white-hot with the intensity of the soprano’s high g’s and a’s.

You now know who sought
to steal my honor,
the name of the scoundrel
who murdered my father.
I ask you to avenge me,
your heart seconds my plea.

Remember the wound
 in the old man's breast,
 recall the ground
 running red with his blood,
 should your righteous anger
 ever weaken.
 You now know who sought (etc.)
 (Curtis, 130)

James introduces the aria in *Act I Scene I* of his play via M. Bullet, owner of the slave plantation in which Toussaint L'Ouverture labors. The scene begins with her playing the aria on the piano alongside Marie-Jeanne, a "mulatto slave" who figures centrally as the plot progresses. James's translation of the aria in the mouth of MME. Bullet foregrounds through repetition the revenge theme of the work:

I demand revenge of you, your heart demands it,
 Your heart demands it.
 Remember the wounds in that poor breast,
 Recall the ground, covered, covered with blood,
 Should the fury of a just anger, of a just anger
 Wane in you...
 I demand revenge of you, your heart demands it,
 Your heart demands it. (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 71)

MME Bullet (whom Toussaint will help flee from her revolting ex-slaves and thwart Dessalines's plan for immediate revenge as execution) conveys to Marie-Jeanne the occasion for her viewing the opera. She sees Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* with her husband in Prague, they go to Paris and get word that *Don Giovanni* will be performed in Vienna and set sail for the performance. Her piano recital is followed by M. Bullet's entrance into the room with whip in hand. This follows Dessalines's declaration of rebellion: "Kill Master. Burn down plantation", the English translation in James's play of the Creole rallying call—"Coupe tete Boule kay!" From the onset of the action in *The*

Prologue, James in his play makes a statement about the international character of this local revolutionary uprising—

SPEAKER: My brothers, I have been running all night to tell you. The slaves of the French Islands of Guadaloupe and Martinique are fighting their masters. The white slaves in France are fighting their masters. You here in Fort Dauphin, you have toiled in the fields and got no rewards except lashes with the whip; the land belongs to you, your blood and sweat is mixed up in the earth. You must join your brothers in revolt we must fight... (BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY, 70-71)

Marie-Jeanne repeats the humming of the “Vendetta ti chieggio” aria after she has a consultation with Hedouville, General of the French army. In a scene similar to Curtis’s project, James resists the impulse to portray Marie-Jeanne in the over-determined role of submissive woman, who collaborates with the enemy due to a weakness of character. He portrays her as a valuable strategist [a sort of exemplary model of a Brechtian *Measures Taken* character] and utilizes the Mozart lines to further along the point. She pretends to cower to the charms of General Hedouville in order to learn from him of a plot involving General Petion and the mulattoes and gains valuable information for the revolution, transcending Dessalines’s expectations of her treachery. She hums the aria after deceiving Hedouville prior in the scene to disclosing to a jealous, suspicious Dessalines her true intentions.

The Mozart aria is reintroduced in the play upon Marie-Jeanne’s discovery of Dessalines’ plot to set up Toussaint and get him captured (after the midpoint of *Act III, Scene I* Toussaint disappears completely out of the action in the play). When Marie-Jeanne declares to Dessalines her intent of spending time with Madame L’Ouverture and her family the stage directions state—“Dessalines turns to her with fury. The orchestra quietly but clearly begins to play “Vendetta ti Chieggio la Chiedo il tuo cor.” (BLACK

JACOBINS-PLAY, 103) He chastises harshly Marie-Jeanne in the final use of Mozart as a structuring agent in the play. As with much of what constitutes the argument of this chapter, a great deal of this work is accomplished by James, via the stage directions:

Sit down, woman, and listen to me. (*Marie-Jeanne continues to stare at him but makes no move. Dessalines strikes her twice across the face and forces her down into the chair. The orchestra plays the Mozart aria more strongly than ever. However, as Dessalines speaks it gradually declines until by the time he is finished it has died away.*) Sit down, I tell you: I have arranged for Toussaint to be captured, not killed. He will not be killed. General Leclerc has been wanting to put his hands on Toussaint since his surrender. I always told him them that if they did without my consent an insurrection would break out at once, all over the island. Now the insurrection is near. The man who stands in the way, Marie-Jeanne, is Toussaint. Don't say a word, woman. It is Toussaint who stands in the way. He will never give the signal the people are waiting for. He still believes in liberty and equality and a whole lot of nonsense that he had learned from the French. All I have learnt from the French is that without arms in my hand there is no freedom. The people still believe that Toussaint is their leader; but I am their leader and when he goes they will know that. From the time he had to kill Moge he has not been the same man. Moge was right. But he had to be shot then. Now the whole thing is changed. Moge's ideas are flourishing in new soil. You see Samedi Smith out there and his men. There are thousands more. When Toussaint is removed they will look to me. And I will lead them. We will drive every Frenchman into the sea. Now you can talk. These last months you were often puzzled at what I was doing. Now you know. (*Marie-Jeanne looks up at Dessalines as if she is seeing him for the first time.*) Toussaint has to go. And it is the French who have to take him. (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 104)

This is the final iteration of Mozart in the play and precedes the last example of music used as a structuring agent conveying James's thematic points. In the concluding scene in which the masses of people receive word of Toussaint's death, Dessalines declares himself Emperor and demands that the orchestra play a minuet. A minuet in this instance signifies a sterile, farcical repetition of the liberating force found in the retranslated, refracted Mozart aria. Its sort of artificial plasticity contrasts starkly with the very poignantly situated echoes of the aria signifying a pessimistic conclusion to the revolutionary epoch unraveled on the stage. The minuet performs a similar sort of ironic

bitterness that the late disclosure in the play that Dessalines' order to execute the whites is prompted by Cathcart, the representative of British trading interests. The minuet is in effect a musical analogue to Fanon's Europe, "where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them".¹⁵ The Mozart aria recedes as the above monologue progresses signifying the distortion of Toussaint's vision of liberation as well as the necessary and contradictory truth in Dessalines' words. James's use of Mozart revises and reframes the composer in the same radical context against the sort of related critical revisionism that affronts Curtis in her essay. Music in the play parallels the push and the pull of competing tactics on taking freedom as well as competing pulls and ideological directions towards that end goal. The series of site-specific iterations of its notes and words in the course of the play challenges the audience to register those moments and distinguish the qualitative and quantitative difference between each moment acted out in the revolutionary process on stage. Like the triumvirate of principles announcing the French Revolution, music represents a global import of liberatory culture as material force shaped and utilized by the Haitian masses. It represents that wide, calculating net of influence and contingency that constitutes the Black Radical tragic. It is a formal mechanism that James utilizes to further along the goal of crafting his play as a format to explore his meditation on the revolutionary process and the tragic degeneration and errors partially marking such a process. Nothing captures this failure dramatically more than Toussaint's ill-fated execution of his nephew Mogue. We already noted that James scripts Mogue in the words of Toussaint as the populist agent of translation to the masses. He interprets Toussaint's directives into Creole so that the majority of fighting

¹⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. (NY: Grove Press, 1963), 311

men and women can comprehend. In the full-length version of *The Black Jacobins*, James couples the execution of Moïse with this degeneration in revolutionary communication between leader and base—Toussaint “was now afraid of the contact between the revolutionary army and the people, an infallible sign of revolutionary degeneration” (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 279). In the historical study, the execution of Moïse is related to both the degeneration of revolutionary communication between leader and base and a complicated nexus of class and race and a fidelity embodied in Moïse to the revolution that has to be purged.

Tensions between Moïse and Toussaint are introduced early on in the play. In *Act I Scene 2*, Moïse brings news of France’s declaration of emancipation and full citizenship to the Blacks of Haiti. James’s stage notes read: “His enthusiasm is momentarily checked by Toussaint’s glance.” (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 76) James dramatizes what he will pen later in his study, making explicit the relationship between the masses fidelity to Moïse and how it threatens Toussaint’s authority: “They shout ‘Long live Moïse!’ What they mean is ‘Down with Toussaint.’” (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 97) In this line, “they” refers to the mass of Haitian people fed up with trying to decipher Toussaint’s decisions. James dramatizes Moïse’s policy goals and has him argue with Toussaint voicing competing interpretations of fidelity to the revolution—the error in trying to appease the whites at the expense of the Black masses, the necessity of land distribution are all grist for the mill.¹⁶ In the play, James centers MME Bullet as another decisive force signaling

¹⁶ MOYSE: Maybe you wrote to him and threatened him. But this brutality against the former slaves goes on all over San Domingo. I will have no part of it, I will speak against it and act wherever I see it or hear it. The person responsible for it, Governor L’Ouverture is you. I have said it and I shall continue to say it, court-martial or no court-martial. The country does not know where it stands. Is slavery abolished forever? Or is a French expedition coming to resolve slavery? The ex-slaves don’t know, the ex-slave owners don’t know. I told you to declare the island independent. Expel all those who do not want to accept it. Break up

Mogse's death. She alerts Toussaint of a rumor that he will place Mogse as his successor and all the white will flee the island. James has Toussaint delay his action of signing Mogse's death warrant until the final hour. In response to the French invasion, Toussaint and Dessalines pursue a scorched earth policy and Toussaint signs the order. This mediating voice of the wife of the ex-Master of Toussaint and Dessalines is omitted from the study. In the play she states, "Mogse is a very dangerous man; he is dangerous because he believes everything he says" (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 98).

Mogse's threat to Toussaint is bound up here in questions of ideological struggle as relating to a power block's effort to achieve dominance and hegemonic oneness. Regardless of her character's dubious intent, Bullet's pronouncement on Mogse as it works in the play is not a statement about fanaticism or the danger of too much revolutionary confidence. It is not a sort of tyrant-to-be foreshadowing, rather an entirely another matter. Mogse's sincerity for the revolution--"the fact that he believes everything he says"-- is in excess of the sort of strategic balancing act that Toussaint falters in, that of his failed attempt to secure and prolong his legitimacy in the eyes of the Haitian masses. For Toussaint compromise is not short hand for class collaboration, it is a sort of strategic bending in order to achieve the end goal of Liberty. For Mogse, such compromise strikes at the heart of everything he believes and represents a capitulation to the same end goal.

David Scott's study on James and tragedy announces the lynchpin of his analysis as a question of temporality from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "The time is out of joint. O,

those accursed big plantations. As long as they remain, freedom is a mockery. Distribute the lands carefully among the best cultivators in the country. Let everybody see that there is a new regime. This is what I have said and that is what I will stand or fail by (*BLACK JACOBINS-PLAY*, 96).

cursed spite,/That ever I was born to set it right!”(qt. in *CONSCRIPTS*, 162). Dessalines is correct in the prior quoted monologue: Moge was just and precise in his sentiment but despite that fact necessarily had to be shot. The question of temporality as it relates to revolutionary strategy’s goal of securing a hegemonic block of influence could not afford to assimilate his uncompromising fidelity to justice. To repeat the prior examined account of the reviewer Darwin on the Toussaint character in James’s play: “one feels that he has been mistaken in his calculations but not in his ultimate purpose”... as well as the critic’s emphasis on Toussaint’s “cautious eye for the political reality as he understands it”. Moge represents the true believer whose fidelity to the revolution, a fidelity that cannot accommodate for timeliness as a strategic concern in waging hegemonic struggle for support from various social bases, makes him a liability for the revolution and his murder a tragic loss. His timeliness is necessarily “out of joint” since the sort of revolutionary fidelity the character embodies does not yield to political expediency or contingent circumstance, all of which are material markers for a political notion of timelines.

Switching Lead Roles in James’s *The Black Jacobins*:

Some Notes on Robeson as “Sporting Hero” and Edouard Glissant

I want to conclude the discussion of the aesthetic organization of James’s Haitian Revolutionary play and how its philosophical work gets expanded on by Glissant by taking some time to engage James’s meditations on the centrality of Robeson in molding the aesthetics of his politics and the politics of his aesthetics. In this regard, Robert A. Hill’s “In England 1932-1938” is most illuminating. Hill’s essay on James boldly states:

“Thus, it is the contention of the present writer that *The Black Jacobins* would have been significantly different in quality in the absence of James’s relationship to Robeson”(Hill, 74).¹⁷ Via a quick detour through a fragment in Brecht’s *Stories of Mr. Keuner*¹⁸, I want to attempt to think through Hill’s insight by contrasting two pieces of writing by James on his exemplar of Black heroism: a private letter dated January 5, 1944 to Constance Webb and the aforementioned tribute published in *Black World* in November 1970 entitled “Paul Robeson: Black Star”.

This is one of the aphoristic, didactic *Geschichten* (stories) in the Brecht collection:

If Mr. K Loved Someone.

“What do you do,” Mr. K was asked, “if you love someone?”
 “I make a sketch of the person,” said Mr. K.,

¹⁷ Furthermore, Hill writes:

What was important however was not so much the play itself nor the fact of Robeson’s acceptance of the lead. More important was the context which the production of the play provided for James to get to know the person whom he considers to be one of the greatest political figures of the twentieth century. Indeed, James looks upon Robeson along with Franklin D. Roosevelt as being the two most important American political personalities of the age. The fact that at the time Robeson was in support of Moscow and the Stalinist parties and James was firmly wedded to the Fourth International of Trotsky was no hindrance to their mutual appreciation.

That in itself, however would not have been sufficient to make Robeson a decisive personality that he was for James. At a very profound and fundamental level, Robeson as a man *shattered* James’s colonial conception of the Black Physique. In its place the magnificent stature of Robeson gave to him a new appreciation of the powerful and extraordinary capacities which the African possessed, in both head and body. Robeson broke the mould in which the West Indian conception of physical personality in James had been formed. That was a time when Black West Indians grew up with an unconscious prototype of the white Englishman and white Englishwoman as their absolute standards of physical perfection and development. James’s encounter with Robeson was nowhere more profound than in its forcing him to abandon these inherited values.(Ibid, 73)

¹⁸ Bertolt Brecht. *Stories of Mr. Keuner*. Trans. Martin Chalmers. (1966. San Francisco: City Lights, 2001). In the afterward, Chalmers writes:

“The fictional character of Mr. Keuner, ‘the thinking man,’ and the stories told by him, originated in the second half of the 1920s. A number of the theater projects that Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was working on at this time included a figure who comments on the motives of other protagonists or on the action. Some of the projects were not completed, and Brecht detached a number of those brief commentary fragments from the dramatic context, reworked them so that they could stand independently, and wrote new pieces of a similar kind. These became the *Stories of Mr. Keuner*, the first eleven of which were published in 1930. Although they were now autonomous pieces of prose, they shared the (Marxist) didactic purpose that had come to shape Brecht’s plays and were cast, explicitly or implicitly, as dialogues.”(97)

“and make sure that one comes to resemble the other.”
 “Which? The sketch?” “No,” said Mr. K., “the person.”

Brecht’s insight works well to introduce a discussion of the discrepancy in judgment witnessed when contrasting James’s semi-private criticisms of Robeson (in his letter to Constance Webb) with the open and above board appreciation penned for *The Black World*. At stake here is not only a representative revolutionary masculinity couched in James’s description of his friend, but also a matter of emblematic representation. To apply Brecht’s insights to James and Robeson also raises the question of romantic love as it exists in the fragment. This is not to imply some sort of physical intimacy between the two men, only to note that there is a certain productive erotics scripted into James’s remarks. Brecht is commenting on ideal types and how one should take idealizations of a desired love object seriously as a material force in one’s perception of the actuality of that figure and molding of thus. The sketch for Brecht (in what on the surface seems like a counter-intuitive reversal) holds the weight of transformation here. I will take this premise seriously when examining James’s Robeson sketch, in which the author declares, “Paul Robeson was and remains the most marvelous human being I have ever known or seen”(SPHERES, 256). Hill is wise to stress the fact that “Robeson as a man shattered James’s colonial conception of the Black physique.” James commences his appreciation with a testimonial to the magnitude of the man. James lauds this “sporting hero” in the sketch for the wide range of his professional pursuits, his immense strength and stature, and his active listening ability. He underscores Robeson’s “immense power and great gentleness”(SPHERES, 256). James places emphasis on the fact that Robeson always listened attentively to the criticisms and suggestions voiced by he and Stage Society producer, Peter Godfrey. His active listening skills did not however detract from his

ability for asserting leadership. James once again underscores its centrality by introducing the Raynal speech (quoted in his article at length) to recall when Robeson actively suggests where to cut the monologue. His prose in recounting this episode lapses into his scholarly, school philosophy teacher matter of fact cadence when he states, “He was testing his ideas and he had come to a conclusion” coupled with his awe inspiring admiration for Robeson’s magnitude: “When so quiet a man made a definite decision you automatically agreed.”(*SPHERES*, 258) Robeson becomes B la James the new “absolute standard[s] of physical perfection and development”. I want to highlight how the appreciation lauds Robeson as idealized sketch and reproduces indirectly James’s main point on Toussaint’s tragic degeneration. The Robeson of James’s essay is scripted as the exact opposite of a Toussaint who no longer “would leave the front and ride through the night to enquire into the grievances of the labourers, and though, protecting the whites, make the labourers see that he was their leader”(*BLACK JACOBINS*, 276). Recall that James uses the emphatic “Gone were the days...” to drum home this point. James’s gushing, quite touching focus on Robeson’s physical stature and repetitive emphasis on his subject’s combination of humility, self-effacement and assertion¹⁹, coupled with his

¹⁹ A pregnant example of this self-effacement/assertion mode I am getting at here from James’s essay is its concluding anecdote involving Paul Robeson and a British press scandal involving the singer Leslie Hutchinson. Allegedly, “Hutch” carried on an intimate relationship with a member of the Royal family and there was some confusion in the press in which Hutch was thought to be Robeson. James’s last paragraph of his essay:

One day I was walking up the street to the British Museum. I saw Paul’s magnificent figure coming down the street and, as usual, I stopped to talk to him: it was always a pleasure to be in his company and talk to him. He was a man not only of great gentleness but of great command; he was never upset about anything. But this day Paul was bothered. “James,” he said, “you hear what all the people are saying about a coloured singer and a member of the British Royal Family? It’s not me, James,” he said passionately “It’s not me.” I started to laugh. Paul looked at me somewhat surprised and he said: “What is there to laugh at? I don’t see anything to laugh at.” I told him: “Paul, you are a Negro from the United States; you are living in England and you say that people are linking your name to a member of the British Royal Family. That, my dear Paul, for you is not a scandal, it is not a disgrace. I laugh because you seem so upset about it. That is very funny.” He said, “Well maybe there is something to

ability to engage with the thought processes of others is the sort of Brechtian sketch that outlines the idealized promise and potential of the desired object, in this case Robeson. Both Robeson and Toussaint work as a subtle synecdoche for the promise and potential of a liberated Black Nation. The appreciation in its gushing, flattering tone is out of sync with other appreciations James penned on comparable leaders of the Black liberation movement. Aforementioned essays on Stokely Carmichael/Kwame Touré, Walter Rodney, and Kwame Nkrumah exist are written with quite the different prose style. Compare the public appreciation with the semi-private musings in his James's modality as *Il Postino* (the amorous letter writer as political educator), via a letter to Constance Webb, an actress he courted for a decade in a series of correspondence ripe with political and aesthetic insights.

The occasion for this letter from James to Webb is the actress's interest in pursuing the role of Desdemona. Again, James resorts to the sort of older gentleman/school teacher tone when counseling Webb on the aesthetic and political implications of Shakespeare: "...I think I understand something about Sh. I want you to know what I think."(*LETTERS*, 89) For James, confident in his mastery of Shakespeare, the bard is often misunderstood by bourgeois society. The mastery of rhythmic discipline as well as tonal discipline and the innovation demonstrated by the aesthetics for of both

what you say, but you know who it is." I said, "Yes, I know who it is, and I know it isn't you, Paul, but nevertheless it is very funny," and we parted. That is many many years ago and I have seen and read about Paul and heard about him in many circumstances and in very different and more serious situations. But for some reason or other there remains in my mind this passionate denial that he was the person who was being written about in the papers and talked about as having an illicit relationship with a member of the British Royal Family. Most men whom I know, nearly all, might have denied it but in all probability, would have given the impression that they were not displeased, certainly not bothered one way or the other. But for some reason or other, which I cannot go into here but which I think should be remembered about Paul, is his passionate statement: "*James, it isn't me*"(*SPHERES*, 263-4).

Beethoven and Shakespeare are subject to the insult of attempts by the novice. Compared to the public sketch, the letter's tone referring to Robeson's performance of *Othello* opposite Uta Hagen is uncompromisingly hostile:

You see, I saw the Othello. It created a tremendous stir here. In my opinion in, particularly Paul R, was lousy. Not one of them, except at odd moments, had the Shakespearean rhythm—not one. I was shocked because Margaret Webster and Uta Hagen were both trained in England. To hear John Gielgud or Edith Evans is to hear a miracle of rhythmic beauty *and* naturalness. Without the first, there is no Shakespeare. Robeson was rotten. He is a magnificent figure, a superb voice, and as usual with him, at moments he is overwhelming. But in between his lack of training, his lack of imagination, were awful. For long periods of stood in one spot and *said* the lines, just said them. Dynamic development of the part, there was none except the crudest. And Shakespeare is dangerous for the amateur. Without strong feeling you slip immediately into melodrama. A great actor gives a standing sweeping performance in effect, but every line means something. Every phrase can stand for itself. It is built up into a whole. For long periods Robeson lacked grip. I knew he was just going on, to shout at the climax. I wish I could see it with you two or three times. How I would love to. Then I'd tell you what I think and you'd help put me right(*LETTERS*, 90).

James proceeds to laud the political import of the play in its bold depiction of love between a Black man and a white woman: “*Politically* it is a great event. It was also very interesting, I could see it often again. It was a distinguished performance, and Robeson's remarkable gifts and personality were very much worth watching. But the play on the whole fell short”(Ibid.) In the private correspondence, James's language of course betrays a certain intention that this is more about his courting with Webb. How else to make sense of the combination of such a bold declaration of his knowledge of the subject and advice to the young actor coupled with this throw-away line about how if she was able to view the production with him perhaps she might “help put me straight”? That is pure flirtation, rather than the request for an intellectual interlocutor. His entire tone of the piece is not of a thinker looking for further clarification. The letter's momentum turns on

a notion of expertise; the mastery of rhythm for the Shakespearean actor, an expertise according to James desperately lacking in Robeson. In the public appreciation sketch, Robeson's magnitude is built up via reflections on his stature, awesome intelligence and engagement with others, wherein the semi-private rumination a narrow assessment of skill rules the day. In this regard, coupling these two meditations on Paul Robeson work to help illuminate a sort of indirect insight to his thesis in both "tragic" iterations on the liberation of San Domingo. The awesome potential in the appreciation pushed up against the lament of failed technical mastery balances the sort of precarious footing occupied by Toussaint (or Nkrumah for that matter²⁰). Both are implicated in a contradictory need to assert their independence. In Toussaint's case from the French and the planter class on the island, yet still being dependent on their technical skill. It is this same dilemma that will be dramatized in film in Gillo Pontecorvo's 1969 film *Queimada!*, which is, arguably, the filmic version of *The Black Jacobins*. For the James that sees the conditions of socialism already in the factory, one might concur that whatever mastery needed to succeed is within the grasp of the ex-enslaved Africans and can expand infinitely once the fetters of colonialism are forced off and liberation is seized. It is odd to witness James pen a sort of rigid projection about the specific skill set needed to accomplish a given task—whether Revolution or Shakespeare, especially since this skill set as conceived by James is so dependent upon Europe. He is shocked at Webster's and Hagen's mediocre performance since they were both trained in England. I am not trying to argue a facile dismissal of James semi-private writing on the grounds of a rigid, Eurocentricism. I only want to show how the aesthetic ruminations on Robeson specifically and the

²⁰ Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization*. 1964. (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1970) In this volume, Nkrumah discusses how an independent Ghana still maintained a certain dependence on the technocratic skills of the former British metropole.

Shakespearean acting craft in general act as sort of doubling for the thematic concerns constituting James's Haiti period. Instead of synthesis, it is more precise to state that the gap between the two perceptions might be read as a stand in for the sort of tragic gesture captured in both the historical study and play version of *The Black Jacobins*. Instead of trying to resolve this issue, it seems more productive to see how for James it always hangs in the balance when reflecting on the revolutionary process.

To conclude, it is helpful to take a look at the different representation of collectivity as captured in Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint*.²¹ Whereas, James tries to integrate Toussaint within the collective scenes of his drama, Glissant, by showing Toussaint haunted by a group of figures, demonstrates that [as for Malcolm X] Toussaint's most private, isolated moments are "haunted by" a constitutive collective. However, this realization is still problematically individualistic, since Toussaint cannot make the other people in the play see his visions. In Glissant's play, the dead constitute a very different chorus than in James's dramatic rendition of the Haitian struggle.

Martinique writer and revolutionary Edouard Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint* was staged first at the Theatre International of the Cit  Universitaire in Paris on October 21, 1977 by the company Theatre Noir. Georges Hillarion and Darling Legitimous held the leading roles under the direction of Benjamin Jules-Rosette. It would be again performed on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the death of Toussaint (July 7-9, 2003), in a courtyard at Fort de Joux, near Pontarlier in the French Juras where an imprisoned Toussaint froze to death. Glissant's play builds upon his impressive and dense body of scholarship on language, collective memory, depersonalization and the revolutionary

²¹ Edouard Glissant, *Monsieur Toussaint: A Play*. 1961. Translated by J. Michael Dash, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers 2005) Subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically as *MONSIEUR TOUSSAINT*.

demand for national recognition²². Wherein, James prefigures and frames the way he thinks about his subject of study in *The Black Jacobins* drawing upon the theme of Toussaint as individual protagonist mediated by the Haitian masses as chorus, Glissant explodes such a concern by thinking and staging the binary individual/base to its logical extreme and dissolution.

In the two author's plays, stage directions and headings carry a great deal of the conceptual and thematic labor. The acts of Glissant's play are framed by titles that work to constitute its vision of a totality in which all binaries are finally exploded: leader/base, past/present, secular/sacred, metropole/periphery and most poignantly dead/alive. Act I is entitled "The Gods", Act II "The Dead", Act III "The People", and the concluding act Act IV "The Heroes". In lieu of a Jamesian *Prologue* that sets up the complicated opposition between Toussaint "The Leader" and the mass base chorus, Glissant uses stage direction to further explode oppositions blocking the conception of a total comprehension of past in the service of the present:

The play is set in Saint-Domingue and at the same time in a cell at the Fort de Joux where Toussaint is being held prisoner; he wears the uniform of a general of the Republic, a scarf knotted around his head, a plumed hat resting on his knees.

Around him will appear: Maman Dio, in a long gray dress and scarf; Makandal, in sackcloth pants and a torn-up shirt, with one sleeve tied to the waist because he has lost an arm; Macaça, the same, but with an unsheathed cutlass stuck in his belt; Bayon-Libertat, in boots and a large straw hat; Moyse, dressed as a general, with a patch over one eye; and Delgrès, in a commander's uniform. These are the dead who haunt Toussaint alone; they are unseen by the other characters.

²² For further reading see: Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. [Le Discours Antillais] 1981. trans J. Michael Dash, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989). Celia M Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory Strategies of Language and Resistance*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999). Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Each time the action takes place in Saint-Domingue and requires Toussaint's presence, the latter moves into the space at the front of the cell, but it is understood that he never escapes from this ultimate prison, even as he relives his triumphant past. There is no clearly defined frontier between the world of the prison in France and the lands of the Caribbean island (MONSIEUR TOUSSAINT, 21).

The realization of connectedness across the Atlantic linking metropole with colony, the inseparability of Toussaint's commencement of the revolution and Dessalines's completion, what Moten with great economy of prose captures as "Toussaint's expansive vision and practical failure and, on the other hand, Lieutenant Dessalines's limited vision and practical success"(Moten, 131), are ultimately surpassed by a sort of theatrical synchrony in Glissant. The play is "*a prophetic vision of the past*. For those whose history has been reduced by others to darkness and despair, the recovery of the near or distant past is imperative"—his stated goal is "to renew acquaintance with one's history, obscured or obliterated by others, is to relish fully the present, for the experience of the present, stripped of its roots in time, yields only hollow delights"(*Monsieur Toussaint*, 15-16). Glissant's explosion of the chasm separating Dessalines and Toussaint in popular memory and scholarship becomes apparent in the *Preface* to 2005 edition of the play:

The 200th anniversary of the declaration of Haitian independence (in 1804, a few months after Toussaint's death) will perhaps witness the revival of the debate between those who consider Emperor Dessalines the true founder of the new nation and those who consider Toussaint its initiator and indisputable prophet. The whole movement of *Monsieur Toussaint*, the action and the driving force as it were, is unleashed and sustained by the struggle that Toussaint undertakes in the icy solitude of his cell—a struggle against the dead who visit him, and against the living who are powerfully summoned to witness his final agony. In truth, Toussaint and Dessalines, and all the actors in this epic, are inseparable. The realization of such a historical event (the first successful resistance against all forms of colonialism; the first black state in the Americas; the advent of Africa, source of inspiration, on the New World scene) could not have rested on the will of a single individual. The grandeur of Toussaint's vision and the decisive actions of Dessalines completes each other (*MONSIEUR TOUSSAINT*, 11-12).

In an author's note penned in 1978, Glissant expresses the point that in 1961 the author could not imagine the present state of theatre, as it exists in the Antilles, "with regard to the experimental popular theatre which now brings forth a critical view of Antillean reality and authentic use of the Creole tongue" (*MONSIEUR TOUSSAINT*, 13). The work rather was imagined as an aesthetic and historical intervention, which "proposed the presentation of a historical datum in its totality." However, its innovative contribution in 1961 still was exemplary. As Glissant notes of the peculiar cast of characters in his 1961 preface, "It may be useful to point out that Toussaint's relations with his deceased companions arise from a tradition, perhaps particular to the Antilles, of casual communication with the dead" (*MONSIEUR TOUSSAINT*, 16). Glissant is gesturing at concepts here explored in the *Caribbean Discourse* chapter "Theater, Consciousness of the People". The essay as well as the play desire a "total" constituting of the nation, an ameliorative thrust out of the state of depersonalization that is an imperialist tactic and legacy of colonialism. A transcendence that can only occur via the plunge into the gully, the grand rupture that is the African slave trade. From "Section II. ALIENATION AND REPRESENTATION (Unperceived and unassumed in our unexpressed history)":

(Let us leave History and go down into the gully course that is our future—our difficult becoming. Hegel does not enter with us.) The rupture of the slave trade, then the experience of slavery, introduces between blind belief and clear consciousness a gap that we have never finished filling. The absence of representation, of echo, of any sign, makes this emptiness forever yawn under our feet. Along with our realization of the process of exploitation (along with any action we take), we must articulate the unexpressed while moving beyond it: expressions of "popular beliefs" are a nonpossession that we must confirm; to the point where, recognizing them as a nonpossession, we will deal with them by abandoning them. (*CARIBBEAN DISCOURSE*, 201)

“Creolization” in this regard would be patronizing, a false strike against non-possession. It is a way for the elite and colonial agendas to arrest the people into a state of paralysis manipulating their intention via a false concern for and lauding of indigenous expression. In 2005 however, the technical mastery and conditions of production of Caribbean theater have elevated so now it can perform the complicated reflective type of theater in Creole desired by Glissant so the author can finally write “at last a language *as one hears it*”(MONSIEUR TOUSSAINT, 14). Glissant’s statement on theater traces the journey from the merely “folkloric” capitulation of the street scene in popular theater to an advanced stage in which theater is offered to critically engage spectators in a further apprehension and comprehension of the problematic along the road of securing an endgame of total liberation.

Glissant stakes his position on tragedy in his essay, “Note Concerning modern tragedy that no longer requires the sacrifice of the hero”. Glissant’s “Note” interestingly converges with Brazilian, Freirean theorist practioner of the *Theater of the Oppressed* Augusto Boal’s notion that tragedy cannot exist in a time of revolution, only before or after. “The structure of the system may vary in a thousand ways, making it difficult at times to find all the elements of its structure, but the system will always be there, working to carry out its basic task: the purgation of all antisocial elements. Precisely for that reason, the system cannot be utilized by revolutionary groups *during* revolutionary periods. That is, while the social ethos is not clearly defined, the tragic scheme cannot be used, for the simple reason that the character’s ethos will not find a clear social ethos it can confront.”²³

²³ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. 1974 *Teatro do Primido*. Trans Charles A. & Maria-Odila Leal McBride. (NY: Theatre Communications Group, 1985): 46.

In order to tease out the stakes of the disappearance and death of the tragic hero, it is helpful to spend some time highlighting the problems in translation in the aforementioned Hallward article and Dash's Glissant translations. The passage from Glissant in the original French:

Le motif central de cet ouvrage est précisément que, de même que le réel martiniquais ne se comprend qu'à partir de tous les possibles, avortés ou non, de cette Relation, et du dépassement du'on en réalise, de même les poétiques multipliées du monde ne se proposent qu'à ceux-là seuls qui tentent de les ramasser dans des équivalences qui *n'unifent pas*. Que ces poétiques sont inséparables du devenir des peuples, de leur loisir de prendre part et d'imaginer.²⁴

It is problematically translated by Dash as:

The central focus of this work is precisely that, just as Martinican reality can only be understood from the perspective of all the possible implications, abortive or not, of this cultural relationship, and the ability to transcend them, so the proliferation of visions of the world is meant only for those who try to make sense of them in terms of similarities that *are not to be standardized*. That these poetics are inseparable from the growth of a people, from their time for belonging and imagining. (*Caribbean Discourse*, 254)

Hallward follows suit and erroneously translates “du dépassement du'on en realize” as “moving beyond a realization”; whereas, Edwards clarifies that its meaning is quite different: “of the moving beyond that is realized by it” [the it part of the sentence not being clear]. Here is the entire corrective from Edwards:

The central motif of this work is precisely that, just as the Martinican real can only be understood from the perspective of all the possible implications, aborted or not, of this Relation, and the moving beyond that is realized with it, so too the multiplied poetics of the world only offer themselves to those few who try to gather them among equivalencies that **do not unify**. These poetics are inseparable from the becoming of peoples, from their pleasure in taking part and in imagining.

²⁴ Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 465-466. I am grateful to Brent Edwards for providing me with the original French and a corrective English translation.

This modified translation makes all the difference in terms of how Glissant fits in the larger argument of this chapter. Toussaint has to be sacrificed in the play, but his death does not signify transcendence, since the dead speak as well in Glissant's imaginative landscape. For Glissant, there is a certain unwanted loss that occurs when one tries to ultimately transcend such oppositions, as opposed to maintaining their sense of relation. This is wrapped up in his desire for the Caribbean to harness its past in service of a revolutionary future, without conflating the two temporalities in some sort of easy unity. A poetics of relation is a hallmark concept in Glissant's analysis. "Equivalences that do not unify" complicate an effort to enact an easy synthesis between revolutionary leader and masses. A moving beyond is brought about by the dissolution of the medium (the death of Toussaint), which resolves a condition of mediation. For Glissant, relation is a desired and constitutive phenomena in the world, not a methodological tool or conceptual apparatus to be done away with. In the corrected translation, Glissant is calling for the gathering together of the "different poetics of the world" and signaling the productive gains for those pursuing such an endeavor. However, such differences do not in the last instance "unify". In Glissant, there is an expanding of the tragic gap in James to think the dead with the living, exorcising the need to unify such opposite states. As indicated prior, the dead are a very different kind of "chorus" than the masses in James's play.

Glissant's essay and play attempt to further the goal of a people to know itself. The mandate for a totalizing account of a historical process of liberation is necessary due to the racist covering and distortion of revisionist accounts of the history of Africans in the New World. The sort of strategic mastery embodied in Toussaint coupled with the

constant need to communicate one's goals can often suffer a tragic downside reflected in Toussaint's observation in the conclusion of Glissant's *Act IV, Scene 5*:

TOUSSAINT (*laughing in his delirium*): Bad strategy, soldier!...I can barely write, your captain was well aware. I write the word "Toussaint," Macaia spells out "traitor." I write the word "discipline" and Moyse without even a glance at the page shouts "tyranny." I write "prosperity"; Dessalines backs away, he thinks in his heart "weakness." No, I do not know how to write, Manuel.

MANUEL: He's delirious, Jura fever. Those people don't exist, Toussaint, they don't exist.

TOUSSAINT: Go behind the wall. You will find them, the living and the dead. Those waiting impatiently for me, and those who can wait no longer. If your eyes are open, you will see them. Go, Manuel, go. You will come upon Toussaint's first defeat...Protect yourself from the daed, they are trickier than we are! (*MONSIEUR TOUSSAINT*, 115-116)

This is not an episode in either delirium or the difficulties and ambiguities surrounding transcription. It works as a way for my purposes to conclude by connecting what I have attempted to argue here about the tragic turn captured in this sampling of cultural works concerned with liberation in this cross-section of the Black radical tradition. It is related to James's notion articulated in his appendix of the latter edition of *The Black Jacobins* in which he states, "Within a West Indian island the old colonial system and democracy are incompatible" (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 406). Just as the aesthetic mandate to answer revisionist obscurantism and distortion of the Black revolutionary continuum with totality is a tall order, the strategic net cast in order to bring about nothing less than democracy is equally broad. That exclusionary system of governance impacts the colonized African people in the broadest, albeit uneven fashion demanding a strategy equally expansive. Such a strategic widening runs the risk of tragic failures in transcription, translation, and realization. In such a contingent struggle, the tragic possibilities can render discipline as

tyranny and prosperity as weakness. Through James's drama of mediation and Glissant's effort to explode such mediation, the Black radical tragic is explored as both a condition of possibility and mandate corresponding to the material conditions of a colonized people. It constitutes both its greatest strength and greatest potential for unraveling. It is nothing less than the precarious balance between the necessity of the particular and the universal as it relates to a complete project of Black liberation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Tshembe's Choice:

Lorraine Hansberry's Pan-Africanist Dramas¹

Negroes must concern themselves with every single means of struggle: legal, illegal, passive, active, violent and nonviolent...they must harass, debate, petition, give money to court struggles, sit-in, lie-down, strike, boycott, sing hymns, pray on steps,--and shoot from their windows when the racists come cruising through their communities.²

-Lorraine Hansberry

Rallying Against Abstraction

Lorraine Hansberry's late works break from the US-centric focus of much of the African American drama during her time period. Hansberry reaches towards Africa and the Caribbean island of Haiti to dramatically represent a useful, historically resonant vision of Black revolutionary politics. Both Africa and the Caribbean function for Lorraine Hansberry as sites of expansion: a widening of the stage constituting her radical

¹ For a useful critical overview of Lorraine Hansberry's life work consult the following: Steven Carter, Hansberry's Drama: Commitment amid Complexity, (Urbana: U. of Illinois Press, 1991) Ben Keppel, The Work of Democracy: Ralph Bunche, Kenneth B. Clark, Lorraine Hansberry, and the Cultural Politics of Race, (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1995) Lorraine Hansberry, A Raisin in the Sun/The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) Lorraine Hansberry, The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964) Samuel S. Hay, African-American Theatre: A Historical and Critical Analysis, (Cambridge, England/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) Lorraine Hansberry, *Lorraine Hansberry Speaks Out: Art and the Black Revolution*, Caedmon Records, 1972. Lorraine Hansberry, "The Negro Writer and His Roots: Toward a New Romanticism." Black Scholar 12.2 (1981): 2-12.

² Lorraine Hansberry, To Be Young, Gifted, and Black: An Informal Autobiography of Lorraine Hansberry, ed. Robert Nemiroff. 1969. (NY: New American Library, 1970), 222 Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *YGB*.

African American vision. This global reach also offers an opportunity to examine how the leader and mass problematic, what this project is calling the Black radical tragic gets worked through in Hansberry's drama. She stages her own meditation on the relationship between individual leadership and the masses of people, foregrounding different social forces than the previous authors examined. Like C.L.R. James's efforts, she uses the Haitian revolution and African decolonization to further along such a problematic. Hansberry injects an internationalist dynamic into the representative landscape of Black radicalism in theater and in the arts in the United States. She casts her explorative net wide, which contributes to her being unfairly criticized for her alleged reformist politics. "The Marketplace of Empire", a term this chapter borrows from the Hansberry drama *Les Blancs*, is in its structuring an all-expansive, all-inclusive system. Hansberry's drama is radical precisely in its acknowledgment of this all-inclusive economic and political domination that impacts individual leaders and groups alike. By taking the premise seriously that peoples' actions are framed and limited by economy and circumstances not chosen by themselves, "but rather circumstances encountered, given and transmitted from the past", her work builds on the prior thematic of the Black radical tragic. The marketplace is a totality impacting everyone [albeit unevenly] in a society structured in dominance: leaders and masses, "rulers" and "ruled". It is tempting to recall Aijaz Ahmad's spirited corrective to Frederic Jameson's concept of Third World "National Allegory":

But one could start with a radically different premise: namely, the proposition that we live not in three worlds but in one; that this world includes the experience of colonialism and imperialism on both sides of Jameson's global divide (the 'experience' of imperialism is a central fact of all aspects of life inside the USA, from ideological formation to the utilization of the social surplus in military-industrial complexes); that societies in formations of

backward capitalism are as much constituted by the division of classes as are societies in the advanced capitalist countries; that socialism is not restricted to something called ‘the Second World’ but is simply the name of a resistance that saturates the globe today, as capitalism itself does; that the different parts of the capitalist system are to be known not in terms of a binary opposition but as a contradictory unity—with differences, yes, but also with profound overlaps...³

Hansberry’s “Third World” plays reflect and mediate her concerns about developments taking place in the “First World” burgeoning Civil-Rights and Black Power Movements. There is an explicit international inter-textual dynamic to these works: Hansberry’s *Les Blancs*⁴ chides the use of abstraction in Genet’s *The Blacks*, much along the same line as this project’s prior engagement with Eugene O’Neill. The artist-activist milieu in which Hansberry thrived, included such figures as Paul Robeson, and W.E.B. DuBois and she was surely familiar with C.L.R. James’s dramatic attempts to think the Haitian revolution. Her play *Les Blancs* responds to French playwright Jean Genet’s *Les Negres* (1958), received in the United States as *The Blacks* (1960) which though the use of masks illustrates what was interpreted as the author’s concern for the arbitrariness of racism and the corrupting effects of power.

Like Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*, Genet’s play is an exercise in abstraction. As a general meditation on power (the capital P “Power” rallied against by Romanticist poets), oppressive relationships between specific actors in a racist society structured in dominance in the play are problematically generalized as a symptom of the human condition. It utilizes a black versus white North American racialist context to

³ Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” in *Marxist Literary Theory*. Eds. Terry Eagleton. Drew Milne. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 392

⁴ Further along in expanding this project to book, it will be imperative to visit the Lorraine Hansberry papers in Minnesota and attempt to tease together the various notes and drafts that constitute *Les Blancs*, in an effort to determine whether or not the Nemiroff version is accurate. Lorraine Hansberry, *Les Blancs The Collected Last Plays* 1972 ed. by Robert Nemiroff, (NY: Vintage Books, 1994)

comment on French imperial policy in Algeria. This slippage between the contexts of the play's commentary conflicting with the contextual medium utilized by Genet marks the fundamental use of abstraction in the play. It lacks the clarity of James's move of dipping back into time to explore the Haitian Revolution as a way to comment on the state of African de-colonization in the late nineteen thirties. There is also a sort of slippage between the white audience Genet self-proclaims for his play and the fact that, like O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, Genet's *The Blacks* exists in the "theatrical cauldron" of Black radical performance. Like O'Neill, Genet's work offered numerous opportunities for a coterie of Black actors, committed to a radical solution to ameliorate the suffering of African people in the diaspora. Genet purposely uses the struggle against racism and Black national oppression in the United States as a medium to explore French imperial policy in North Africa and crafts a theatrical work with an American audience in mind. Genet notes in the introduction of his play's text: "This play, written, I repeat by a white man, is intended for a white audience, but if, which is unlikely, it is ever performed before a black audience, then a white person, male or female, should be invited every evening...A spotlight should be focused upon the symbolic white throughout the performance. But what if no white person accepted? Then let white masks be distributed to the black spectators as they enter the theater".⁵

Hansberry did not tolerate Genet's use of abstraction. She referred to Genet's play as "a conversation between white men about themselves" and vowed to correct its flaws by positing a drama in which dialogue serves as "neither procrastination nor ego fulfillment but clarity, and whose culminating point is action" (*LB*, 32-33). Since this

⁵Philip Eko Effiong, "History, Myth, and Revolt in Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs*", *African American Review*. 32.2 (1998): 283. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *EFF*.

study argues that the Black radical tragic is fundamentally an aesthetic device, it will be helpful to allow for a brief digression to comment on Genet's aesthetic as it relates to Black radical struggle and the paradoxical relationship of this aesthetic to his more sympathetic and consistent praxis of political solidarity. For Genet, Black radical praxis itself is an aesthetic.

Genet credits Black radical praxis for innovating a sterile, European literary aesthetic. In his masterfully composed Introduction to *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, Genet credits Jackson for revising the epistolary form utilized in such works as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* (1748), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753): "Many people would be amazed to hear that the epistolary narrative was still capable of affording us a resolutely modern mode of expression; yet if we merely juxtapose (one after another) a certain number of George Jackson's letters, we obtain a striking poem of love and of combat".⁶ For Genet, the Maoist politics of the Black Panther Party of Self-Defense (an organization he consistently supported⁷) constitutes nothing less than a form of poetics:

I think reflection is integral to poetic comprehension and vice-versa...I wonder if President Mao Tse-Tung would have successfully completed his Long March, the revolution, and the cultural revolution if he hadn't been a great poet. I wonder if it isn't because the black people are a Poet that they they have been able to work so well toward finding a road to liberation in almost the same way that President Mao found that road.⁸

⁶ Introduction by Jean Genet in George Jackson, *Soledad Brother The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, (NY: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970), i.

⁷ Robert Sandarg, "Jean Genet and the Black Panther Party", *Journal of Black Studies* 16, no. 3 (March 1986): 269-282.

⁸ M. Feinstein, "Genet calls Black Panthers comrades." *CCNY Observation Post Newspaper*, (10 April 1970), 3.

In the same article, Genet affirms that, “the discoveries black have made about how to struggle politically lean curiously on a poetic sentiment about the world”(Feinstein 1). Like O’Neill, Genet looks towards the African diaspora for inspiration injecting new life into his aesthetic. But unlike his modernist predecessor, Genet demonstrates an integral pattern of political solidarity on behalf of The Black Panthers as well as Palestinian revolutionaries⁹ captured in his memoir about his time spent with both groups of anti-systemic forces: *Prisoner of Love*, published initially in the French as *Un Captif amoureux* (1986). My study looks at the Black radical tragic as an aesthetic innovation continuous over a stretch of time in a sampling of Black radical drama and prose that attempts to think and stage Black radical collectivity. For Genet, Black radical collectivity is itself an aesthetic. There is also a strange temporal dynamic constitutive of Genet’s politics of solidarity as it relates to both the Palestinian and Black struggles. Nostalgia as it works in the Palestinian revolution for Genet is a complicated negotiation of present and past:

The present is always tough. The future is supposed to be more so. The past, or rather what is absent, can be adored, and we live in the present. In this world lived in the present, the Palestinian revolution brought a sweetness that seemed to belong to the past, to distance and perhaps to absence, for the adjectives that sought to describe it are words like chivalrous, courageous, heroic, romantic, solemn. In Europe we talk of nothing but figures. There are 3 pages of financial information in the 31 October 1985 edition of *Le Monde*. The *fida’iyyin* don’t even count their dead. (Translation from *Un captive amoureux* by Hisham Sharabai)

Genet’s acts of political solidarity are exemplary compared to the wavering, often hostile, racist attitudes exhibited at times by Eugene O’Neill. However, he problematically frames in his writing both Black radical and Palestinian revolutionary strivings as an aestheticized romance. Hansberry’s corrective to Genet’s abstractions posits one world

⁹ Jean Genet, “Four Hours in Shatila”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 12. no. 3, (Spring 1983), 3-22. Hisham Sharabi “Review: From Ajlun to Shatila”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 16 no. 4 (Summer 1987), 129-132.

occupied by both oppressors and oppressed. She responds to Genet's abstractions with the radical specificity exhibited in her dramatic works. I want to look at three moments in *Les Blancs* as a way of introducing our main discussion of *Toussaint*, Hansberry's Haitian Revolution work.

Negotiating "The Market Place of Empire"

Tshembe, Hansberry's protagonist in her anti-imperialist play *Les Blancs*, rallies against "the marketplace of Empire" (LB, 61). For Tshembe, this phrase constitutes the way in which identity can be bought, sold, and bartered, a byproduct of an expansive capitalism, draping the globe. He uses the phrase to chastise his brother for replacing his family African name with the title Father Paul Augustus. Hansberry had her own version of such a marketplace to negotiate. She consistently struggled to secure a space to voice her work in "a theater apparatus commercial and capitalist in the extreme".¹⁰ Hansberry's subtle negotiation of this highly commercialized landscape coupled with the latent and manifest sexism of her critics opened her up to attacks of her misperceived liberalism and equivocation in terms of a fully formed commitment to Black liberation. As Rich indicates, Hansberry was "charged by critics, on the one hand, with having created a reactionary Black 'mammy' in Lena Younger and, on the other, with advocating the genocide of whites" (RICH, 20). This refers to the incommensurate, critical judgments when you couple together the reception of *Raisin in the Sun* and *Les Blancs*. Amiri Baraka writing in the preface of the twenty-fifth anniversary addition of *A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* modifies his earlier critical view of *A*

¹⁰ Adrienne Rich, "The Problem of Lorraine Hansberry". *Blood, Bread and Poetry Selected Prose 1979-1985*. 1986. (London: Virago Press, 1987). Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as RICH. This essay originally appeared in a *Freedomways* special issue on Hansberry entitled "Lorraine Hansberry, Art of Thunder, Vision of Light" *Freedomways: A Quarterly Review of the Freedom Movement* 19.4 (1979).

Raisin in the Sun. The play stages the tensions arising when a Black working class family in Chicago has to decide how to spend insurance money after their father's death. Baraka revises his earlier interpretation that hastily dismissed Hansberry's work as liberal betrayal:

The concerns I once dismissed as "middle class"—buying a house and moving into "white folks' neighborhoods"—are actually reflective of the essence of black people's striving and the will to defeat segregation, discrimination, and national oppression. There is no such thing as a "white folks' neighborhood" except to racists *and to those submitting to racism*. The Younger family is the incarnation—*before* they burst from the bloody Southern backroads and the burning streets of Watts and Newark onto TV screens and the world stage—of our common ghetto-variety Fanny Lou Hamers, Malcolm X's and Angela Davises. And their burden surely will be lifted or one day it certainly will "explode."¹¹

Les Blancs's African context echoed an earlier representation in Hansberry's most famous work: her character Asagai from *Raisin in the Sun*, an African revolutionary intellectual that inspires militant reflection in Walter Lee Younger, Jr. Asagai was both undermined and finally dismissed in the critical reception of the drama. *Les Blancs*, a meditation on the return of Tshembe to his fictional homeland Zatembe to bury his father constitutes one of the first plays written by an African American to raise the question of African independence by any means necessary. Act One, Scene Three was staged first in 1963 for Actors Studio Writers Workshop by Arthur Penn, with Roscoe Lee Browne as Tshembe, Arthur Hill as the American white liberal Charlie, and Pearl Primus as the Woman Dancer who haunts Tshembe into action on behalf of the anti-colonialist revolutionaries. (*LB*, 33) Hansberry appropriates a scene from Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing*

¹¹ Amiri Baraka "A Critical Reevaluation: *A Raisin in the Sun*'s Enduring Passion", Introduction. Lorraine Hansberry and Robert Nemiroff, *A Raisin in the Sun (Expanded Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition and The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. (New York: New American Library, 1987)

Mt. Kenya (1962) to reflect on the Hamlet-esque decision her protagonist is faced with in terms of reconciling the competing allegiance to the two places he calls home. Tshembe is presented with the dilemma of participating in the revolution to secure independence for Zatembe or return to his wife and children in London. In a discussion with Madame Nielsen (the knowing, sympathetic wife of the racist missionary who runs Zatembe and who eventually sides with the revolutionists and is killed), Tshembe rehearses the consequences of his choice:

What will I do? Madame, I know what I'd like to do. I'd like to become an expert at diapering my son...to sit in Hyde Park with a faded volume of Shakespeare and come home to a dinner of fried bananas with kidney pie and—(*He is fighting the tears now as a terrible anguish rises within him*)—turn the phonograph up loud, loud until the congo drums throb with unbearable sweetness-and then hold my wife in my arms and bury my face in her hair and hear no more cries in the night except those of my boy because he is cold and hungry or terribly wet. (*He hesitates*) I'd like—I'd like my brothers with me. Eric—and Abioseh. Do you remember when we were boys, Abioseh and I? How many times we...(*He cannot go on*) I want to go *home*. IT seems your mountains have become mine, Madame. (*LB*, 125-126)

Earlier in the play, Tshembe designates his dilemma whether or not to join in the revolt Shakespearean, alluding to *Hamlet*:

It's an old problem, really....Orestes...Hamlet...the rest of them...We've really got so many things we'd rather be doing...(*LB*, 80)

And lastly, Tshembe has one of a series of arguments with the white liberal Charlie on the tactics employed by the revolutionists:

Oh, dear God, why?...Why do you all *need* it s?! This absolute *lo-o-onging* for my hatred! I shall be honest with you, Mr. Morris. I do not “hate” all white men—but I desperately wish that I did. It would make everything infinitely easier! But I am afraid that, among other things, I have *seen* the slums of Liverpool and Dublin and the caves above Naples. I have *seen* Dachau and Anne Frank's attic in Amsterdam. I have seen too many raw-knuckled Frenchman coming out of the Metro at dawn and too many hungry Italian children to believe that those who raided Africa for three centuries eer “loved” the white race either. I would like to be simple-minded for you, but—(*Turning*

these eyes that have 'seen' up to the other with a smile)—I cannot. I have...seen. (LB, 78)

Effiong argues that, “Tshembe is ultimately ideologically unrestrained by his linkage to Europe signifies that entering into another culture does not presuppose self-rejection and neglect of one’s cardinal cultural demands. Tshembe succeeds in finding a middle way: His attention is primarily redirected to his homeland, but he does not dismiss his pertinent European affiliations. He is, in a sense, the conceptual equivalent of the play’s form, an intricate synthesizing of European and African-centered creative and cultural values and paragons”(EFF, 277). Like C.L.R. James’s Haiti reflections, Hansberry talks about someplace and somewhere else to elaborate on the complexities of the present and the tasks of the future. More poignantly for my concerns, the two plays examined in this chapter take as their central challenge a presentation of a dramatic landscape wide enough to demonstrate consequences for oppressor and oppressed alike. Everyone is indicted in a Hansberry landscape. A drama populated by heroes and victims gets transformed into a drama populated by classed, racialized, and gendered individuals, all set with the task of negotiating a hostile landscape. It is her ecumenical presentation of the impact of oppressive structures that led her work to be so hastily dismissed as liberal compromise. In the above passages, Hansberry via Tshembe challenges the very trope of deliberative, Hamlet-esque tragic weighing of options as a hindrance to action. Effiong is shrewd in his judgment but his assessment needs to be slightly modified. In the complicated world of Hansberry’s drama, Tshembe’s homelands are both London and Africa. His complicated seeing links his struggle in Zatembe to the struggle of the European poor without collapsing such struggles under the auspice of the same. In a drama that privileges the way in which the world structures all its inhabitants in

dominance, it is not that Tshembe as a thinking subject is not a warrior, it is to evoke a term used by Assata Shakur in some of her communication from exile in Cuba: he is a “reluctant warrior”¹².

Hansberry in the way she constructs the world of her plays’ action, as we shall see in our discussion of her Haiti play challenges a notion of Romance posited by David Scott in his astounding, yet flawed reflection on James’s “tragic” additions to *The Black Jacobins*. Scott borrows from Hayden White:

Romance...is fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it...It is a drama of the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness, and of the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall. Roman in short, is a drama of redemption...In tragedy, by contrast [to comedy] there are no festive occasions, except false or illusory ones; rather there are limitations of states of division among men more terrible than that which incited the tragic agon at the beginning of the drama. Still, the fall of the protagonist and the shaking of the world he inhabits at the end of the Tragic play are not regarded as totally threatening to those who survive the agonistic test. There has been a gain in consciousness for the spectators of the contest. And this gain is thought to consist in the epiphany of the law governing human existence which the protagonist’s exertions against the world have brought to pass. (*CONSCRIPTS*, 47-48)

Scott goes on to show how for White there is “no epistemological privilege among [interpretive strategies]”. We are all according to White, “indentured to choice”. Hansberry resists the lure of Romance in her drama and materializes White’s observation in the world of her stage, in which everyone shares stake and culpability. Choices carry the baggage of their emplotted assumptions and frameworks. Hansberry provides her own version of Marx’s thesis from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* in a WNET “Playwright at Work” where she discusses a scene from her work-in-progress *Toussaint*:

¹² This term comes from a Fred Ho recording of Assata Shakur speaking.

“...As I study history, that virtually all of us are what circumstances allow us to be and it really doesn’t matter whether you are talking about the oppressed or the oppressor. An oppressive society will dehumanize and degenerate everyone involved—and in certain very poetic and very true ways at the same time it will tend to make if anything the oppressed have more stature—because at least they are arbitrarily placed in the situation of overwhelming that which is degenerate—in this instance the slave society so that—it doesn’t become an abstraction. It has to do with what really happens to all of us in a certain context.”¹³

Hansberry’s drama represents its own complicated take on the relationship between individual and collective. Her play focuses more on the over-determination of social and economic contexts than on the individual leader but there is still a focus on the individual that remains in Hansberry. The above quoted “what really happens to all of us in a certain context”, can be compared to Raymond Williams’s analysis of what he calls the mature Brecht¹⁴.

In this mapping of Brecht’s theater development, the radical German playwright moves from a cynical rejection of a morally impoverished bourgeois world, to a positing of the way out via transformation, to finally showing the way in which the world acts on individuals and frames the availability of their choices. This latter mature focus is best captured for Williams in Brecht’s *The Good Woman of Sezuan*¹⁵ and developed further in *Mother Courage* and *The Life of Galileo*:

Brecht’s mature drama works continually around this question. In *The Good Woman of Sezuan* goodness, under pressure, turns into its opposite, and then back again, and then both coexist. For the individual person, the dilemma is beyond solution. And this is conveyed with simplicity and power in Shen Te’s transformation of herself into her tough male cousin, Shui Ta, who is first a disguise but then in effect takes on an independent existence. Thus the

¹³ Steven R. Carter, “Lorraine Hansberry’s Toussaint”. *Black American Literature Forum* 23.1 (1989): 143-144. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *CAR*.

¹⁴ Both the work of Brecht and Sean O’Casey were key figures influencing Hansberry’s choices as it relates to her dramatic aesthetic.

¹⁵ This spelling is Williams’s.

experience is generalized within an individual. It is not the good person against the bad, but goodness and badness as alternative expressions of a single being. This is complex seeing, and it is deeply integrated with the dramatic form: the character who lives this way and then that, enacting choice and requiring decision. No resolution is imposed. The tension is there to the end, and we are formally invited to consider it...

It is in *Mother Courage and her Children* that he finds a new kind of dramatic action which creates a substance comparable in intensity with the moral inquiry...Criticism of the play has usually got off on the wrong track by starting with the question whether Mother Courage, as a person, is meant to be admired or despised. But the point is not what we feel about her hard lively opportunism: it is what we see, in the action, of its results. By enacting a genuine consequence, Brecht raises his central question to a new level, both dramatically and intellectually...The question then is no longer 'are they good people?' (the decision taken before or after the play). Nor is it, really, 'what should they have done?' It is, brilliantly, both 'what are they doing?' and 'what is this doing to them?' (MT, 234-236)

Focus on [usually exclusively male] heroes ceases and in Hansberry becomes an inquiry on an environment and structure in which every one is accountable and indicted. The forms of social and economic organization¹⁶ are both given priority in Hansberry's drama; yet, the relationship between individual and collective maintains its constitutive tension. For example, the plantation economy in her *Toussaint* scene houses a combined articulation of slaves, absentee land owners, plantation managers who rather be spending time in Paris, Creole wives of aforementioned plantation managers, and clerks sent to supervise the management of the managers. Such an expansive cast and shift in emphasis from individual action to structural determinants allow Hansberry's work to ask the two questions outlined in Williams's commentary on Brecht: Both, 'what are they doing?'

¹⁶ I realize that these two forms—social and economic structures are not the same. A model that thinks the economic structure as primary contrasted with the more general formulation "social organization" reaches different conclusions in terms of what forces they prioritize as revolutionary and worthy of attention as well as what needs to be done in terms of transformation. It is the difference between a classical Marxist analysis offered by Marx and Engels versus the type of analysis offered by Omi and Winant in both privileging key actors and processes. It is my contention that Hansberry's thinks both analyses together in her plays. Michael Omi. Howard Winant, Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s. 1985. (New York and London: Routledge, 1994)

and ‘what is this doing to them?’ This opens up space in the work to concentrate on historically neglected experiences in drama—for example, the role of women protagonists, however buttressed by the posthumous published end products that are offered up as her latter work. This expanding of the field worries the line¹⁷ between individual and masses by shifting ground so that the serious dramatic work of her plays posits a sort of grand scheme of inter-connectedness that in its materialist focus worries such a separation. Her tendency in her work to expand the field generously to dramatize the impact of oppressive structures on the oppressors as well as the oppressed contributed to her critics’ unfair reception of the plays.¹⁸ However, nowhere in her dramatic work or critical essays does this widening of focus equal collaboration or submission to such an oppressive order or its beneficiaries. As Margaret B. Wilkerson argues, “few had recognized the strains of militance in the earlier voice of Lorraine Hansberry”¹⁹. Her dramatic works’ expansive vision as it relates to this chapter’s opening epigraph’s call for a widening of resistance strategies for the Black liberation struggle connects succinctly with the broader political point animating my project and will be in constant play throughout the following investigation.

Waging a War and Winning It: Lorraine Hansberry’s *Toussaint*

¹⁷ I borrow this language from: Cheryl A. Wall, Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005)

¹⁸ “Harold Cruse’s criticism, in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), proved, even by his own caustic standards, particularly harsh, smearing Hansberry as a dilettante who worshipped white gods of integration and as a mediocre talent to boot”. Peniel E. Joseph, WAITING ‘TIL THE MIDNIGHT HOUR A NARRATIVE HISTORY OF BLACK POWER IN AMERICA, (New York; Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 27

¹⁹ Margaret B. Wilkerson, “The Sighted Eyes and Feeling Heart of Lorraine Hansberry”. Black American Literature Forum 17.1 (1983): 8.

As Hansberry scholar Steven R. Carter notes, among the author's files there is a manila folder labeled "Toussaint: A Musical Drama in 7 Scenes", dated May 1958.

Included in her posthumously published autobiography is a note written in 1960, in which she lists future artistic projects:

PROPOSED WORK—September, 1960:

The Sign in Jenny Reed's Window, musical drama
A Revolt of Lemmings, a novel
The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft, full length drama
 (Thesis: Strong-minded woman of rationality; & a creature of history; nonetheless, a human being, destroyed many times over by "life as she is lived")
The Marrow of Tradition, a full length drama
Les Blancs (The Holy Ones)
The Drinking Gourd, TV play—into stage play (?)
 some short stories
 The Musical
Toussaint, an opera...(YGB, 137)

Excerpts of the first scene and a series of Toussaint monologues are included in *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* and Margaret B. Wilkerson includes the initial scene in her anthology *9 Plays by Black Women*.²⁰ Hansberry's interest in Toussaint commenced at an early age. In a list she composed as a child, Hansberry under the heading "MY FAVORITE" designates her heroes as Toussaint L'Ouverture and Hannibal (YGB 61). Her work on the play commenced in May 1958 and continues until her death in 1965. Carter sketches how the work was always conceived as musical theater: "It is also clear that she thought of it in essentially musical terms at the beginning, somewhat later

²⁰ Lorraine Hansberry, "Toussaint". 1969. *9 Plays by Black Woman*. ed. Margaret B. Wilkerson, (NY: New American Library, 1986), 47-67. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *TOU*. There is a handicap in my study of having to rely on anthologized excerpts constituting the parts of Hansberry's *Toussaint* examined here. Further development of this project will necessitate visiting the Hansberry papers housed at the U. of Minnesota to examine her notes in full.

speaking of it as an ‘opera,’ and intended it to have the huge cast, elaborate sets, pageantry, and sweeping epic, larger-than-life confrontations generally associated with grand opera, though not all the dialogue would have been set to music”(CAR, 140). Building on the musicality of James’s play on Haiti, there is a way in which constituting her work as opera allows for more of the collectivity constituting the Haitian masses room on the stage. Foregrounding musicality in the label musical drama and opera shows a Hansberry struggling with dramatic forms in order to cast the widest net in staging such a struggle of social transformation. Speaking on the scenes unprinted and uncollected from Hansberry’s archive, Carter describes: “a group of ‘blacks and mulattoes,’ including Prince Gaouguinou and his wife Pauline (soon to be parents of Toussaint), exit singing from a church where they encounter Pelagia, “wise women of the Bambara,” who prophesies that Pauline will soon bear “a male child” who “Will be a great chief, like the father of Gaouguinou!” (CAR, 140-1) He further outlines scenes including the public execution of the liberator Macandal that preceded Toussaint, a “view of the rebel camp”, battles between Toussaint’s men and the Napoleonic officers, and the final treachery and death of Toussaint in a French jail. In 1961, she presented a work-in-progress scene for a National Education Television Broadcasting System. Wilkerson’s text includes “A Note to Readers” by Hansberry dated December, 1958:

I was obsessed with the idea of writing a play (or at that time even a novel) about the Haitian liberator Toussaint L’Ouverture when I was still an adolescent and had first come across his adventure with freedom. I thought then, with that magical sense of perception that sometimes lights up our younger years, that this was surely one of the most extraordinary personalities to pass through history. I think so now.

Since then I have discovered that it was a wide-spread obsession. Neither the Haitian Revolution nor the figures of Toussaint L’Ouverture or Christophe or Dessalines has gone wanting in dramatic or other fictional materials. Those I

have troubled to read have offended my early dream. The exotic, the voodoo mysticism, the overrich sensuality which springs to mind traditionally with regard to Caribbean peoples has outlandishly been allowed to outweigh and, to my mind, distort the entire significance and genuine romance of the incredibly magnificent essence of the Haitian Revolution and its heroes.

The people of Haiti waged a war and won it. They created a nation out of a savagely dazzling colonial jewel in the mighty French empire. The fact of their achievement—of the wresting of national freedom from one of the most powerful nations on the face of the earth by lowly, illiterate and cruelly divided black slaves—has, aside from almost immeasurable historical importance, its own core of monumental drama. One need not bow to the impulse to embellish it with romantic racism.

What the Haitian slaves accomplished under the leadership of the Steward of Breda is testimony to purpose and struggle in life. They who were slaves made themselves free. That is not, to argue with current vogues, a tired cliché of romanticism. It is a marvelous recognition of the only possible manner of life on this planet. L'Ouverture was not a God; he was a man. And by the will of one man in union with a multitude, Santo Domingo was transformed; aye—the French empire, the western hemisphere, the history of the United States—therefore: the world. Such then is the will and the power of man. Perhaps that is the secret of the greatness of humankind. (*TOU*, 52-3)

There is an insistent, repetitive need to distance her project from the “tired cliché of romanticism”. She is committed to the kernel of “genuine romance” exemplified in the Haitian Revolution. Teasing out these two romances apart is instructive. She reproaches Romanticism as the kind of racialist dehumanizing scholarly lens, the “romantic racism”, that C.L.R. James provided a corrective for in his study of the revolution. Past efforts to represent Haiti and the larger Caribbean in art are over-determined by its focus on the exotic, mysticism, and stereotypical hyper-sensuality that for Hansberry all eclipse the most important facet of that struggle: the seizure of power by “one man in union with a multitude.” In the scene this chapter offers up for analysis, that formulation is complicated by the fact that Toussaint is for the duration of the action off stage and only referenced to by the other actors. However, there is also a subtle challenge implicit here

to the framing of revolution as the type of Romance vindication drama David Scott criticizes. Hansberry's *Toussaint* scene portrays a world in which the systemic context frames and limits all its actors in key differentiated fashions that produce different levels of awareness in all parties involved. No one is exempt in her schematization.

Margaret B. Wilkerson includes *Act One: Scene One* to offer up for analysis. It will be helpful to provide a brief overview of the scene's action. The scene takes place prior to the Revolution in the dressing room of Bayon De Bergier, a plantation manager in his middle fifties. The scene consists of a discussion between Bayon De Bergier and his wife on their miserable marriage and whether or not the African slaves of Haiti will successfully revolt. Toussaint is off stage during the entire scene and only enters the action the couple overhear him whipping a slave, part of his duties as an overseer. The scene ends when a moment of intimacy between Bayon's wife Lucie and her slave Destine is interrupted by Bayon's intrusion into Lucie's dressing room. In Hansberry's initial framing of the scene we revisit the sterile minuet, examined in the James play. In Hansberry, such a minuet "tinkles":

The Great House of a sugar plantation on Santo Domingo in the 1780s – immediately before the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution.

The massed voices of field slaves can be heard, welling up in the distance in a song of fatigue. Their music is an organ-toned plaint yet awaits a Haitian Moussorgsky. It is, of course, punctuated by the now distinctive rhythms of the island.

Oh, when will the sun go down!
Oh, when will the shadows come?
Shadows of night!
Shadows of rest!

Oh, when will the night hide the cane?
Oh, when will the dark hide the sun?
Night, the friend!

Friend, the night!

As this strong music fades it is promptly replaced by the fragile tinkle of an 18th-century French minuet being played somewhere in the house on a delicate harpsicord. Exposed to us is the double boudoir of the plantation manager, BAYON DE BERGIER, and his wife. The décor suggests the lush, even vulgar overstatement of too luxurious appointment: thick floor coverings; excessive statuary; extravagant color; cushions and ornate furnishings chosen indiscriminately from prior and contemporary French periods. (*TOU*, 55)

The competing music idioms mediate not only two opposing forces locked in struggle, it also houses two separate philosophical idioms on what constitutes “freedom”. The “fragile tinkle” of the minuet is appropriate background music setting up Bayon’s pecuniary tastes as over-compensation for the fact that he much rather be in Paris. As Hansberry makes clear, Bayon is stuck in his managerial position; however, his dependence and alignment to the plantation economy is not the same as the positioning of either the slaves, the free man Toussaint, or Lucie, his Creole wife. Hence, the contrast with the music of the field slaves. The anticipation of a Haitian Moussorgsky refers to the Russian piano composer Modest Petrovich Moussorgsky (1839-1881), important for Hansberry because he is considered one of the first composers to promote a distinctive Russian national style of composition and performance. This challenge relates to her first experience of the possibilities of dramatic theater, when as a young college student at the University of Wisconsin she stumbles into a rehearsal of Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* and became overwhelmed with O’Casey’s combination of Irish particularity and universal concerns for freedom. “One of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing...is that in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific. Universality, I think, emerges from truthful identity of what is...In other words, I think people, to the extent we accept them and believe them as who they’re supposed to be, to

that extent they can become everybody”(LB, 6).²¹ The overstatement of luxury characteristic of Bayon’s dressing chambers is an attempt to cover up his shaky footing in the social stratosphere that is Haitian plantation society. The main action of the scene involves the preparation for a dinner party in which he and his wife Lucie will entertain Marcel Petion, the courier of Noe, Bayon’s employers/absentee owner of the plantation. As Bayon pleads to Lucie, “many years her husband’s junior, in her late twenties or early thirties”(TOU, 56) protesting the fact that she has to entertain his guests:

“He has come to survey the plantation, return to France and give his personal estimation to Noe. That is all that matters and need matter. Except that he is to be well entertained. (*Almost pleading*) I am placing a great deal of hope in his report. If I am to continue for another year I must have a good report. (Through his teeth, to himself.) Just one more year...”(TOU, 60).

This discussion between husband and wife houses a profound meditation on the complexities of power and rank in the context of a Santo Domingo plantation. In Hansberry’s sketch, there is enough misery to go around. Lucie, whose Creole status renders Bayon’s assessment of his marriage to her as “settling”, in the act of complaining about the burden to entertain unwanted guests performs a biting critique of the gendered and racialized division separating the couple while she simultaneously oppresses her own attendant house slave and resists her oppressive husband. Hansberry’s sketch exists as one extended meditation on the power dynamics and resistance to such “as is the fashion of the wives of Santo Domingo”(TOU, 58).

LUCIE. (*With dismissive laughter from the depths of the cushions where she absently fingers her long dark hair.*) Oh, Bayon, Bayon, Bayon. The point remains that I am in no mood to hear your dull, tiresome talk of acreage and harvest or an equally dull, discussion of the present political state of affairs of France. The current palpitations of the Directory don’t interest me. Napoleon himself doesn’t interest me...I am not interested in one single word your

²¹ Sean O’Casey, Three Plays. 1957. (London: Macmillian and Company Limited, 1966)

guests will have to say and I won't wish to hear one single word that they have said when they are gone. (*TOU*, 56).

Bayon casually dismisses what he refers to as his wife's "considerable theatrical talents" and insists that she participate in the buttering up of the man who will give his managerial duties the stamp of approval. The successful continuation of such duties, off the back of the indentured and enslaved labor of the plantation will help secure his end goal of flight to Paris. For Lucie, both her marriage and her partner have morphed into "one long sigh" (*TOU*, 57), repeating the above lament against stifling boredom. Bayon responds to her jibe with an accompanying lament: "if I could only tell you about my agonies". Bayon's self-indulgent cry provokes and enrages Lucie, who reminds her husband of the fact that he in the past referred to her Creole status as "buccaneer flesh" (*TOU*, 59) and her ancestors described as "the baggage of the Paris gutters" and "prostitutes and refuse of the prisons of France dumped in that Bay out there". Hansberry captures the class, race, and gender divisions permeating the mixed economy of slave and free labor in the complexities of dramatic language and emotional warfare between characters. In reply to her husband's request for forgiveness, she replies: "Oh, but tell me, how *does* one forgive hearing how one's own grandmother was—'spawned'? And my father—the whelp of the discharge of an incoherent panting buccaneer!" (*TOU*, 61) Immediately following Bayon's complaint of agony, Lucie reminds him of his prior infidelity with one of the female slaves:

Oh, Bayon, don't! It's too dreadful when you are feeling—'agonized.'...It is the measure of our marriage, Bayon, that you wear the clay from her grave right into our bedroom now. Remember when you still cared enough to at least have the mud meticulously cleaned before you came home to me after your visits up there? As late as last year we still had such a fine pretense about it all. I had, I think, a shred of love left for you because of that. For the effort. (*She is holding the boots facing his back; he has bowed his head again.*) Do you still

take wild orange blossoms? I have often wondered about the specialness of orange blossoms. Did she used to wear them in her hair?

And when you put them on her grave, does she cry out to you in the haunting patois? *‘Oh, mon petit, my strong one! My ivory God! How good that you come to visit me! Do you still love me, my love, my master!’—*

(He wheels and comes across her with fierce violence and tears the boots from her hand and hurls them the length of the room. She watches, unmoved, and then saunters to the balcony herself and looks up to the mountains, continuing her taunting.)

What made you bury her up there, Bayon? It’s so far for your visits. Was it some special romantic plea on the deathbed perhaps? Ah yes. *(Bitterly affecting the mannerisms of an imaginary dying woman, eyes half closed and suffering.)* Did she look at you with those great dark eyes and say as she lay in your arms—*(She points.) ‘Up there, my master! Up there on the leeward side of Mont Croix! I would like to be buried up there, facing out to the sea which brought you to me and near where your God is said to live—’* Was it something like that, Bayon? (TOU, 57-58)

Hansberry foregrounds both the gendered violence and sexual brutality integral to a world made up of a mix of free and enslaved labor. The main rhythm of the scene consists of sequence of such eruptions coupled with Bayon’s temporarily successful attempt to quell such conflict as well as Lucie’s conflicted resignation to her lot. The entire scene proceeds along this arc of eruption, pacification, eruption, and appeasement. Bayon’s first attempt to put out the fire is in his query on why his wife wishes to torture herself. He also presumptuously claims “We will forget all of it—when we are home—in France”, to which Lucie replies, “I AM home, Bayon...I am Creole. This is my home”(TOU, 58). This points to an ongoing concern for the concept of home and belongingness in Hansberry. Bayon, the main beneficiary of the plantation structure is still dependent upon a stellar report from M. Petion. Lucie claims a contradictory belongingness to the Santo Domingo society while asserting her separateness from its Black inhabitants. She decries her husband as a “poor little petit bourgeois who likes to

sit astride his horse out there in the fields play-acting at being master not merely manager of a great plantation, while his so highly esteemed employer esteems nothing at all except the favors of the currently fashionable courtesans of Paris!” In a mock ventriloquism of her husband’s dismissive voice, she berates herself as a “poor little Creole pig who lacks all sense of refinements of style which should accompany the playing of a minuet” (*TOU*, 61). Earlier she chides him for not being a true gentleman, since a true gentleman would have a slave to help him with his dressing. All the individuals in her drama house in their differentiated positions in relation to the drama’s structure in dominance differentiated repositories of insider and outsider knowledge. Divisions calculated along the plane of race, class and gender status, and vocational lot all are accompanied by a crisis in perception. This is made clear in the concluding discussion on Toussaint and the concluding scene in which the servant Destine helps Lucie to dress for the guests.

Lucie responds to her husband’s claim that not even among the slaves he does not see such self-hatred that “A creature purchased is a creature purchased” (*TOU*, 62). This flattening out of the difference between enslaved labor and domestic servitude is interrupted by the sound of an off-stage Toussaint punishing a slave with the crack of his whip. Bayon is convinced that Toussaint is a loyal worker who would never run away. He misreads Toussaint’s performance of disinterest in the talk of rebellion and revolt amongst the slaves. Their conversation between husband and wife on whether or not Toussaint is a “brute” and if he enjoys his task of punishing the slaves morphs into a complicated discussion on the slippery nature of the designation of “free man”:

LUCIE. Yes, I think so. How strange the two of you are together in the fields. You, in your wide-brimmed hat astride your horse, *seeming to command*. And he, the slave, beside you, barefoot in that yellow handkerchief and hideous face—commanding.

BAYON. I have tried to explain to you again and again that he is not a slave.

LUCIE. Well, is he free?

BAYON. No, he is not free either.

LUCIE. Then he must be a slave. If you are not one then you must be the other.

BAYON. It is a special situation. You are a woman, you cannot understand it.

LUCIE. (*With deliberate wide-eyed innocence.*) Oh, but explain it to me, Bayon. I will try very hard to understand it. And explain about yourself. Are you a free man, Bayon?

BAYON. Of course I am a free man.

LUCIE. Then why haven't you left Santo Domingo long ago? That is what you have wanted more than anything else for a long time—to be running about Paris. What is it that keeps a *free* man where he does not wish to be? Tell me, what is freedom, Bayon de Bergier?

BAYON. As an abstraction that is something that no one can answer least of all, these days, a Frenchman. (*TOU, 62-63*)

This penultimate action consolidates the main philosophical work of Hansberry's drama. Bayon gets tripped up in the slippage of distinction between free and un-free. Bayon responds to Lucie's questioning of the language he employs when declaring his confidence that in the figure of Toussaint he retains "a steward who knows how to drive men." This slippage between man and slave is what is at stake here. He responds to her corrective by modifying his statement to having a "steward who knows how to drive slaves." To this Lucie replies, "Could it be possible, Bayon that if Toussaint knows how to command men, not merely slaves—since you use the words the same—that he may command even you?" (*TOU, 63-64*) In Hansberry's scene, an out is never realized, but still on the horizon of possibility. In a society that has to constantly calibrate its

hierarchical organization in an attempt to make illegible the complicated way in which its subjects both are oppressed and act oppressive to others occupying the lower rung of the ladder, the illusory cultural coherence of such a society's categories is imperative. This is clear in the appendix of "Key Speeches" Wilkerson includes in the publication of the scene. Napoleon's recognition of the force of the men he attempts to subjugate back into slavery is both a force for inspiration and trepidation for Toussaint:

TOUSSAINT. We have something in our favor, Biassou. The Europeans will always *underestimate* us. They will believe again and gain that they have come to fight *slaves*. (*He smiles at Biassou.*) They will be fighting free men thinking they are fighting slaves, and again and again—that will be their undoing....

TOUSSAINT. (To Christophe) You see, Henri, I am a very wise man and we wise men, ha!—we don't make the same mistakes that ordinary men make. Take this, this Napoleon Bonaparte, for instance, this Napoleon Bonaparte and myself; we recognize one another. He is different from the others. He is the first of the Europeans to know who I am; and who the blacks of Santo Domingo are. He is that wise; he is therefore the first enemy of scale I will have matched wits with. This Bonaparte, Henri, he deserves his reputation.

TOUSSAINT. Destine, I am frightened. For the first time. I am frightened. I saw them in the harbor today. He has sent all of France for us and we are doomed. For the first time we have been measured for our worth and he has sent all of France. All the guns of France; all the soldiers, all the generals, surely. We are doomed, Destine. They have come to make war on *men*, not slaves, and we are doomed...(TOU, 67)

A calculus, determining enemies of scale is a tricky operation. In the speeches, Hansberry builds on James's concerns and offers us competing viewpoints on the complexity and flexibility of recognition. Again, so much of the scene and these proposed key speeches have to do with a crisis of perception afflicting all sharing the same landscape. The calculus is so slippery because as we see in *Toussaint*, the categorical boundaries separating free from un-free are subject to change. Subjugation and subordination occur due to oppressive structures that benefit the men that construct

them. Therefore, such structures are alterable as well as their accompanying cultural categories. After this discussion, Lucie gets attended to and dressed by her servant Destine. She expresses her attraction to her slave and claims that Destine really truly despises Lucie, as a reminder of her subordinate role. Lucie responds to Destine's effort to appease her mistress by again claiming insider knowledge based on a sense of place and belongingness:

You do not think I am either kind or beautiful. You fool the others with your grins and silences, but I am not Monsieur Bergier, Destine! I can look into those little black eyes of yours and know all there is to know. You hate me. You hate my flesh and the sent and it repels you to touch me—you would like to put those strong fingers around my neck and choke me until there is no more life left! You despise me, you despise my children...all of us.

Be still, or I shall have you whipped! You do not think I am beautiful at all. Above all you do not think I am as beautiful as you are with your chiseled cheekbones and panther eyes! *(She strikes the slave across the face. The woman sits perfectly still with her eyes lowered.)* You savage! Don't you know that I am not some ignorant Frenchwoman—I am a Creole and I know the blacks! I know you! You dream of murdering me in my bed. I was born knowing. It is the curse of the Creole that we *all* know...I cannot bear your sullen impertinence day after day! Why, dear God, have I been so good to you...knowing that you are only waiting—waiting...that you are only waiting...(TOU, 65)

This eruption is quelled when Destine commences her massage of Lucie. This erotically charged display is arrested by Bayon's interruption. Lucie shouts back to her husband's disapproving gaze: "My pleasures are my own—monster! Monster!"(TOU, 66) Even the act of tenderness and sensual expression is over-determined by the oppressive social structuring of the plantation economy. In such a place, no ones pleasures are truly their own. The world of the Bayons, aptly described by Lucie as "suffocating" (TOU, 58) houses actors that can as quickly flip the scripts of their designated roles in a hierarchy.

Hansberry's Haiti play is named for an individual hero-leader relatively absent in the course of the action of the anthologized scene. Solely Toussaint's gesture, the cracking of the whip, invades the action of the scene. James, on the other hand renames his drama from *Toussaint L'Ouverture* to the collectivist *The Black Jacobins*, yet the individual hero Toussaint figures throughout most of the play's action. Glissant names his work after the individual leader, yet such a leader occupies a world where temporality itself is blurred as well as the line separating the living and the dead and discrete geographic locales. Both James and Hansberry include the Madame of the plantation on their stage; yet, Hansberry does more to develop the complexity of the position she occupies in the Haitian plantation and slave economy. Her scene's momentum is propelled more by its tense, masterfully woven dialog, in contrast to James's play that turns so much on use of stage direction. Due to the fact that the reader receives both *Les Blancs* and *Toussaint* through the filtering of the editorial judgment of Nemiroff and Wilkerson respectively, it is hard to chronologically map the relation between *Les Blancs* and *Toussaint* as it relates to this development of the relationship between individual and mass in Hansberry's drama progressively from one play to another. In order to determine how one dramatic work amplifies or departs from the concern of the other, it is necessary to spend time in the Hansberry archive to tease out this progression. This is beyond the capacities of this study, but certainly signals essential work to be done to further advance this project.

As Lucie is quick to point out in her meditation on freedom, this constant evoking of possibility corresponds to the rickety foundation of the concepts and language used to describe such organization. The potential for revolt, rebellion, and revolution is

crystallized in the very precariousness of stability in language used by the play's actors. Such precarious footing demands a strategic openness that can accommodate sitting, lying down, praying, singing and shooting from windows when the racists come cruising. In his framing notes for *Les Blancs*, Nemiroff describes Hansberry's wish to craft a dramatic aesthetic "multileveled" in structure" yet "taut enough to contain and focus the complexity of personalities, social forces and ideas in the world she had created"(LB, 34). Her dramatic work successfully meets this challenge and further develops the tragic opposition between leader and masses since her short lived career managed to produce a work to contain both with equal weight of focus. Extending my concerns outside of the world of dramatic performance, I will conclude this study by extending a discussion of the Black radical tragic as an aesthetic strategy reflecting the interdependence between leaders and masses of people to other genres.

CONCLUSION

When Oedipus, Post Colonus, /Reached the West/ He had become more
sophisticated/ He swore he would never again/Have sexual relations with his
mother/But even before he started raping/Everybody's else's, The slaves called
him/That "Lame Motherfucker!"

-Amiri Baraka "Tragedy's Ol Nickname"¹

What a tragedy it would be, if the groups of intellectuals who come to the
working class and in whom the working class places its trust, do not feel
themselves the same flesh and blood as the most humble, the most backward,
and the least aware of our workers and peasants. All our work would be
useless and we would obtain no result.

-Antonio Gramsci²

I want to conclude by signaling works that chart some directions where my inquiry into the saliency of the Black radical tragic in a post-independence/post-Black Arts contemporary moment will proceed. It is not my intention to provide exhaustive readings of the works referenced, only to gesture towards some paths for future investigation. I want to mark points of further study to develop this investigation of dramatic and painterly representations of the Haitian Revolution in the Black Radical Tradition.

An explicit theorization of the impact of different contexts of production, as it relates to artists occupying spaces in discrete parts of the African diaspora, is imperative for this project. A future chapter will offer an extended engagement with French language sources in the work of Martinique poet, dramatist, and statesman Aimé Césaire. My project will offer a critical readings of his Haitian revolutionary drama "La tragédie du

¹ Amiri Baraka "Tragedy's Ol Nickname", *New Letters: A Magazine of Art and Writing*, 63.1 (1997): 162

²J. Karabel, "Revolutionary Contradictions: Antonio Gramsci and the problem of the intellectuals." *Politics and Society*, 6.2 (1976): 123

roi Christophe”, his full-length historical study, *Toussaint-Louverture, la Révolution française et le problème colonial*, and the presence of Toussaint L’Ouverture in his epoch poem, “Notebook of a Return to the Native Land.” Another chapter will examine St. Lucia poet and dramatist Derek Walcott’s *The Haitian Trilogy*, which offers an alternative reading of the Haitian leader Christophe. An engagement with Jacob Lawrence’s *Toussaint L’Ouverture Series* (41 pieces of oil paintings and silk screens that chronicle the Haitian Revolution in serial form) and Pontecorvo’s *Queimada!//Burn!* will extend our discussion and foreground the importance of genre in tracing twentieth century interpretations of the Haitian Revolution.

Gillo Pontecorvo film *Queimada!//Burn!* (1969) represents Black revolutionary process as a tension between individuals and groups. The plot of his film demonstrates the transformation from a colonial period, such as one depicted in James’s *The Black Jacobins* to a post-colonial, or neo-colonial period in which financial markets plus guns rule the day. Pontecorvo subsequently referred to colonialism as the “matrix of our entire civilization”.³ This first major Hollywood venture for Pontecorvo was written with Franco Solinas and produced by Alberto Grimaldi. It is based on the life of American adventurer William Walker (1824-1860), a Tennessee doctor and lawyer who as an adventurer invaded Baja California and was inaugurated president of Nicaragua in 1856.⁴ Their version casts Marlon Brando as a British Sir William Walker who lands on the shores of the Portuguese colony Queimada first as an agent of the British Foreign Office, then years later as an agent for the transnational Royal Sugar Company. His first trip to Queimada is for the purpose of helping to spark an effective rebellion to break the hold of Portuguese colonialism on the island in an effort to secure Britain’s future as a trading partner. His second visit is to squash the rebellion of Africans he initially participates in, so as to secure post-colonial domination of their sugar exports. Further investigation into this work’s representation of the

³ Joan Mellen, *Film guide to “The Battle of Algiers”* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 13.

⁴ Carlo Celli, *Gillo Pontecorvo: From Resistance to Terrorism*, (Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.: 2005), 71.

individual/mass interdependence would prove fruitful in future endeavors. Pontecorvo is certainly not part of the Black radical tradition. However, his film occupied a central focus for Black radical anti-systemic forces. Amiri Baraka's Congress of African People studied it extensively during retreats and Brando's character rehearses arguments directly out of C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*. The way African Columbian actors negotiate the landscape of a major European film venture updates our discussion of Robeson and O'Neill and provides a fruitful platform to investigate further this problematic. For now, I want to challenge the below formulation from Shohat and Stamm, in which the authors assert that Pontecorvo's choice to pit Marlon Brando against Evaristo Marques, an inexperienced Columbian peasant in the film, "disastrously tips the scale of spectral fascination in favor of the colonizer". A close reading of this post-colonial film version of *The Black Jacobins*, most certainly would interrogate the notion of "unprofessional actors" as framed by Shohat and Stamm:

The importance of the participation of colonized or formerly colonized people in the process of production becomes obvious when we compare Gillo Pontecorvo's *La Battaglia di Algeria* (Battle of Algiers, 1966) to his later *Burn* (1970). In the former film, a relatively low-budget (\$800,000) Italian-Algerian production, Algerian non-professional actors represent themselves in a staged reconstruction of the Algerian war of independence. The Algerians were intimately involved in every aspect of the production, with actors often playing their own historical roles at the very sites where the events took place. They collaborated closely with screenwriter Franco Solanas, who rewrote the scenario numerous times in response to their critiques and observations. As a result, the Algerians exist as socially complex people, and as agents of national struggle. Pontecorvo's multimillion dollar *Burn*, on the other hand, involved no such collaboration. An Italo-French co-production, the film casts Marlon Brando as a British colonial agent against Evaristo Marques, a non-professional actor of peasant background. By pitting one of the First World's most charismatic actors against a completely inexperienced Third World non-professional actor, chosen only for his physiognomy, Pontecorvo, while on one level subverting the star system, on another disastrously tips the scale of spectral fascination in favor of the colonizer, in a film whose didactic intention, ironically, was to support anticolonial struggle. The lack of Caribbean participation in the film's production leads to a one-dimensional

portrayal of the colonized, seen as shadowy figures devoid of cultural definition.⁵

Pontecorvo casts Marquez as José Delores after he finds him horse riding in the interior of Columbia. He utilizes the same judgment in Shohat's and Stamm's more fruitful counter-example, *The Battle of Algiers*. Brahim Haggiag, who played Ali Le Pointe in *The Battle of Algiers* also was randomly "found" by the director. This consistent practice in Pontecorvo's film-work is in accord with his aesthetic and film school of preference: Italian neo-realism. As the critic Celli asserts: "Thus, on the surface the cast for *Burn!* allowed Pontecorvo the best of both worlds. He cast an absolute unprofessional in a leading role, in the tradition of Vittorio De Sica's casting of Lamberto Maggiorani in *Ladri di biciclette/The Bicycle Thief*. But he also had on of the premier actors of Hollywood cinema in Marlon Brando. The character of José Dolores, like that of Ali Le Pointe in *The Battle of Algiers*, would be a vehicle for the message that Pontecorvo and Solinas intended for the film—their Marxist and edeterministic theory that historical processes are more dominant than individual initiative"(Celli, 73).

The employment of unprofessional actors is constitutive of Pontecorvo's consistent film practice and neo-realist aesthetic orientation. It is not some aberration specific to his "Third World" film work. The whole notion of unprofessional versus professional begs a reading in conjuncture with the Jamesian concept of "Bringing in the Chorus", in that it highlights the problematic of coupling expertise and aptitude to some sort of regimented training as a prerequisite determining success. Often in the film, pan shots and photographic stills of the masses of inhabitants of the island signal imminent revolt (and victory). Shohat's and Stamm's argument of tipping the scale on behalf of the

⁵ Ella Shohat, Robert Stamm, *Unthinking Eurocentricism Multiculturalism and the Media*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 188

colonizer falls apart upon close-reading of such shots. It minimizes the necessary hurdles of artistic process when employing “unprofessionals” (Pontecorvo struggled hard in shooting with Marquez, often frustrating an impatient and obnoxious Brando) and conflates such a constitutive process with the end results of the final product. Marquez’s character conveys as much if not more presence in scenes shot with Brando. Tales of short cuts employed in order to assist Marquez in conveying emotions on command⁶ say more about the antagonistic relationship between Brando’s own school of method acting versus neo-realism, than they do about the final film product. Not only does Marquez repeatedly outshine Brando as far as spectral weight, Pontecorvo through still photography, musical score, and juxtaposing cuts between individual actors and large groups of people works tirelessly to foreground a revolutionary chorus in *Queimada/Burn!*. A close reading of its scenes and formal construction alongside *The Black Jacobins* marks a worthwhile future endeavor as well as looking at this notion of unprofessional actors as it relates to ideas about technical competency and the privileging of certain classes as more revolutionary than others.

Further development of this project will have to wrestle with the question of genre and the trans-historical development of specific literary modes employed to interpret a specific historical event, in this case, The Haitian Revolution. I will further explore the consequences of what one might argue to be C.L.R. James’s willful misreading of the Greek chorus as a radical force. The individual and mass tension constitutive of the Black radical tragic maintains its urgency in a post-Independence, post-Black Arts era as both aesthetic strategy and political problematic. James’s observation for the Caribbean in his appendix to *The Black Jacobins* that “within a West Indian island the old colonial system

⁶ See Celli, 74.

and democracy are incompatible” (*BLACK JACOBINS*, 406) rings true in both a post-colonial context as it relates to the Caribbean and the internal colonialism characteristic of working class Black life in North America. The repressive police apparatus, combined with the structural reality of super-exploitation and double-oppression (triple oppression for Black working class women) consistently denies the basic protections afforded by bourgeois democracy to such communities. Socialist revolution, while always on the horizon, needs to reconcile the fact that democracy, as framed at least in the narrow bourgeois sense does not exist for the majority of men and women in the African Diaspora. This is one of the reasons to encourage Black united front politics that embrace wide panoply of ideologies, voices, and strategies constituting such a freedom struggle. A wide strategic net constituting Black United Front politics corresponds to the fact that the basic protections provided by bourgeois democracy are denied.

An aesthetic representational strategy staging such a revolutionary process that keeps the individual and mass base constantly in tension honestly recognizes the following political actuality: From a phenomenological stand-point, oppressed nationalities often feel their losses on an individual level. The state represses individuals through legal and extra-legal methods (including murder), an underdeveloped material infrastructure actively takes the lives of individual family members, individual leaders are marked for death as potential “rising messiahs” by various counterintelligence initiatives. Individual family members are mourned not as groups or members of some sort of mass construct, sociological classification, or as a character in some emplotted narrative, but as individual women and men. In a revolutionary imagination, individual representation acts as a launching pad to mediate international and local mass based concerns often through

such themes of tragic loss. Effective revolutionary struggle must be waged collectively; yet, the setbacks and losses along the way register themselves as impacting the lot of individuals. In the last instance, focus on heroic individuals might lose some of the Romantic appeal problematized by the intellectual labors of David Scott at the moment when the state stops wantonly killing such individuals. As the representative labor of the works in these pages attest to and lament, such a moment has yet to be realized but is always on the horizon.

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