

DISTRIBUTION AGREEMENT

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of medial, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Caroline Lee Schwenz

The Empire Laughs Back: Toward a Theory of Postcolonial Comedy in the Literatures of the
Caribbean and South Asian Diaspora

By
Caroline Lee Schwenz
Doctor of Philosophy
English

Deepika Bahri, Ph.D.
Advisor

Valerie Loichot, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Laura Otis, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Cynthia Willett, Ph.D.
Committee Member

ACCEPTED:

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____ Date

**The Empire Laughs Back: Toward a Theory of Postcolonial Comedy in the
Literature of the Caribbean and South Asian Diaspora**

By

Caroline Lee Schwenz

M.A., University of Sussex, 2011

B.A., University of Washington, 2009

Advisor: Deepika Bahri, Ph.D.

An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In English

2017

Abstract

The Empire Laughs Back: Toward a Theory of Postcolonial Comedy in the Literatures of the Caribbean and South Asian Diaspora

By Caroline Lee Schwenz

The role of comedy in postcolonial literature is a topic that has only begun to be explored extensively among scholars. By introducing new themes and key terms into the debate, this dissertation works toward broadening discussions that bring together postcolonial theory and literature with comic theory and philosophy. My dissertation makes use of primarily Caribbean and South Asian diasporic literature, although the themes and terms I articulate have broader significance to the field of postcolonial studies as a whole. This project uses a wide range of comic and postcolonial thinkers such as comic theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin, Brian Boyd, and Robert Provine, and postcolonial scholars Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Edouard Glissant. However, the aim here is to generate a provisional “postcolonial comic theory” that other scholars might engage with to better deepen ongoing conversations. The thrust of my argument comes from my consideration of how authors make use of comedy, humor and laughter in order to imagine new or utopic spaces, what I call “comic spaces of non-reality,” that “play with” and rearticulate approaches to identity politics, national and international traumas, and the use of language. In particular, this dissertation is interested in the ways that these comic spaces of non-reality manifest in the physical space of the laughing body, the gestural or linguistic space of wordplay, and the spiritual space of satire. These comic spaces of non-reality redraw the boundaries of identity, community, and knowledge in ways that sophisticatedly engage anti-colonial or anti-globalization thought.

**The Empire Laughs Back: Toward a Theory of Postcolonial Comedy in the
Literatures of the Caribbean and South Asian Diaspora**

By

Caroline Lee Schwenz
Master's of Arts

Deepika Bahri, Ph.D

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
Laney T. School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in
English
2017

Acknowledgements

Any large accomplishment is not done in isolation, without any help from anyone. My dissertation is no different. I would not have finished without the intellectual and financial support of Emory University. In particular I want to thank the Center for Women whose dissertation boot camp, run by Chanel Tanner, kept me going when I didn't want to write, and Sandra Still who invited me to take part in her contemporary women novelists reading group, a space where I got to remember why I loved reading. I want to thank Dean Lisa Tedesco for working tirelessly on behalf of humanities graduate students, making sure we have the funds and resources we need to complete our programs of study. In my 6 years, she made it possible, through persistence, for all graduate students to have 12-month funding. This is an important accomplishment. I want to thank the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for partnering with Emory and Dillard University to create the graduate teaching fellowship that supported me this last year as I made those final frantic edits. Thank you to Ben Reiss, Falguni Sheth, Mona Lisa Saloy and Nancy Dixon for mentoring me as I crossed the finish line.

I also want to thank the Emory Writing Program—Dave Fisher, David Morgen, Lex Hackney, Joonna Trapp, and Mandy Suhr-Sytsma—for inspiring me when I lost faith in my graduate work. You made me a better writer, thinker, and teacher. Your program showed me the power of collaborative work.

To my committee-- Valerie Loichot, Laura Otis and Cindy Willett-- I extend my deepest gratitude. I was so fortunate to find strong female academics who were willing to mentor me, as a scholar and person. I am grateful for my time working as Valerie's research assistant, for the independent study with Laura my first year, and for the undergrad course Cindy let me audit (and occasionally teach) on comedy. You made space for me in your lives in ways that extended beyond your responsibilities to me as committee members.

In Deepika Bahri, I found not only an advisor and intellectual mentor, but also a friend. You were my advocate, pushing me to learn digital humanities skills, to get over my fear of public speaking by asking me to share my work, and to think clearly. You pushed me to assert myself in my writing and in person, to recognize my contribution to scholarship. You supported me as I struggled in my first year of graduate school and through multiple family deaths. You were there on my wedding day.

I want to recognize past mentors, my master's advisor, Denise DeCaires Narain, and my honors thesis supervisor, John Webster. You encouraged me to pursue this life and I am forever grateful to you for that.

To my friends, I hope you know how much your kind words, trips to microbreweries, hours spent watching movies, endless ice cream, and laughter kept me cheerful when the more "monastic" parts of graduate work got me down. Thank you especially to Adam Newman, Mandi Richards, Rebecca Anderson, Desa Conniff, Dori Coblenz, Blair Watson, Darren Standiford, and Laura Hester.

Thank you to my brother, Robert Schwenz, and Thida Aung for your love, for sharing your cell phone plan with a poor graduate student, and for endless laughter at Christmas playing *Bang*, eating tea leaf salad, and annoying Mom and Dad.

I am grateful for my family who are a continuing comfort and presence in my life. Most especially, I want to remember the lives of two very special women, Mary-Louise Clary and Laurie Geiger, who passed away while I was writing. These vivacious women were forces to be reckoned with. They inspire me to not go down without a fight.

To my parents, I attribute every ounce of determination that I have. My mother told me I was a willful child, but that she never corrected me because "I would need it when I got older." Thank you for keeping me determined.

Finally, I want to thank Ben Clary for knowing the proper dose of Suno for hangry episodes, saying "Awesome!" a lot, and letting me take in a cat that lived under our porch.

Dissertation Table of Contents

Introduction...	<i>What's laughter got to do with it?: A Case for a Postcolonial Theory of Comedy</i>	1
Chapter 1.....	<i>The Laugh in Slaughter: Figures of Laughter in Postcolonial Texts</i>	29
Chapter 2.....	<i>Comic gestures, comic language?: A Study of Language and Logic in G.V. Desani's <u>All About H. Hatterr</u> and Salman Rushdie's <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u></i>	69
Chapter 3.....	<i>Keep Smiling Through Like You Always Do: Satire and Spiritual Utopias in Anthony Winkler's <u>The Duppy</u> and Maryse Condé's <u>Tituba, Black Witch of Salem</u></i>	111
Coda.....	<i>A Look at What Comic Spaces of Non-Reality Can Say to the Question of Gender</i>	160
Works Cited...		181

What's laughter got to do with it?: A Case for a Postcolonial Theory of Comedy

Introduction

Since its emergence in the late 20th century, postcolonial studies has concerned itself with questions regarding the ethics of representation in the wake of colonialism. At the root of postcolonial scholarship is, as Leela Gandhi puts it, “a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering, and crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (4). It is, moreover, as Robert Young articulates, a way of reading that “seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledges into the power structures of the west as well as the non-west. It seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between the different peoples of the world” (7). The discipline articulates the intricate relationships between cultural artifacts and the historical and contemporary legacies of colonialism through an attention to how language is harnessed to filter lived experiences into hegemonic narratives that privileged an often Western, white, and heteronormative understanding of the globe. Postcolonial studies, then, is a critical discourse whose object is subverting the singular histories of the globe articulated by the *winner*s and instead looking for, as Edward Said would put it, counterpoints to the dominant melodies of our discourse.

To that end, Said's work on *Culture and Imperialism* and his idea of contrapuntal reading loom largely over this project. Said argues, “contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded” (66-67). Like its musical counterpart, contrapuntal reading is about recognizing layers of influences in texts that harmonize together and create networks of meaning. Yet Said's

concept of contrapuntal reading has a larger significance in terms of tone and register in a literary work. In this dissertation, my reading of a corpus of postcolonial texts will watch for not only the ways in which dominant narratives of coloniality are modified by more subversive narratives but also how dominant understandings of the appropriateness of a tragic register and tone in postcolonial works are undermined by comedy. Yes, Salman Rushdie's or Maryse Condé's novels contain moments of great tragedy and violence, but that violence is heavily bolstered by a hearty dose of comedy. Accordingly, this dissertation continues the work of re-visiting the legacies of colonialism through an exploration of the role of laughter and comedy.

Why the turn to comedy in postcolonial literature rather than other concerns?

First, I see similarities between the concerns that both comedy and postcolonialism raise. Comedy is akin to postcolonial studies in that both are interested in the ways that expression subverts or conforms to the status quo. They both privilege an attention to the evasive articulation, manifest in a comic tone or one of the other voices in a Saidian counterpoint. These evasive articulations revel in the ironies of power and society. They see the ways that comic or postcolonial evasion resists hegemonic control of ideas, fragmenting them by fusing them with other strains of thought. Although the postcolonial discipline might be attached in our scholarly imaginary to tragedy in its exploration of the traumas of genocide, rape, poverty and cultural destruction; postcolonial studies stands to benefit from a closer consideration of the tonal differences that arise from a comic tone and the rupture of laughter. Moreover, the excess of comic characters and plots knit together by postcolonial studies' canon of characters—Derek Walcott's *the Plunketts*, Zakes Mda's *Toloki*, Sam Selvon's *Moses*, and Salman Rushdie's *Saleem Sinai* to name

just a few—demands a closer attention to the complex ways that authors use comedy to comment on political situations.¹ If postcolonial literature favors comedy, so too should scholars.²

This dissertation approaches the question of comedy and laughter through what I am calling “comic spaces of non-reality” or for brevity “spaces of non-reality.” My decision to articulate comedy and laughter through spatial parameters highlights the importance of imagination and its ability to create alternate realities. Accordingly, my term “space of non-reality” follows in the footsteps of literary and philosophical traditions that attempt to imagine something else or alter a subject's perspective.

However, the particular approach to space that I take is indebted to postcolonial debates surrounding a specific kind of space: utopia. Here I am thinking of Deepika Bahri's work on Adorno, aesthetics, and utopia. She states, “This sense of utopia (from the Greek, *ou*, not, no plus *topos*, place), cast within the scheme of memory and remembrance, is not so much one that must be recovered anamnesticly, but which is conceived of as the remembrance (*Gedächtnis*) of ‘the not-yet-existing’” (Adorno as cited in Bahri 242).

¹ Toloki and characters like him such as Derek Walcott's the Plunketts or Sam Selvon's Moses point to absences and disruptions of the (post)colonial experience through comedy. Their indirection and incongruity play a powerful part in the subversive and critical potential of these literary works, destabilizing dominant ideologies through the affective experience of laughter or amusement, and thus, asserting a new boundary between the now-flawed ideology and the laughing subject *who knows better*. So why the lack of scholarship on the seemingly powerful literary tool that is comedy? Unfortunately, scholarship on postcolonial literature and comedy remains marginal to the broader discussions of the field. There are a couple of reasons why this might be so. Comedy has a historical disadvantage to tragedy as a “serious” genre in many disciplines. John Morreall takes up this issue in his monograph *Taking Laughter Seriously*. He suggests that the relationship between psychology and mental health has overemphasized “fear and anger and anxiety” while ignoring “positive phenomena like laughter” (xi). He also notes that laughter is often seen as “frivolous” and thus, “anyone proclaiming an interest in studying laughter probably just wants to goof off” (xi). See in particular his “Preface.” Morreall, John. *Taking Laughter Seriously*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983). Both fields stand to benefit, however, from such a project. Theories of comedy and humor are often overgeneralized in such a fashion that meditations on the particularity of race, gender, or national identity are left out as important factors for the generation of jokes, laughter and comic tone. An attention to the contexts of postcolonial writers would then drive those theories toward a focus on those aspects. Further, postcolonial studies could find in comedy some helpful models for thinking through complicated concepts like imagining new postcolonial utopias, understanding identity, alternative modes of communication, or relationships to the non-concrete.

Such an understanding of the utopic which is grounded in a sense nostalgia and futurity dovetails with an understanding of the comic which in order to successfully incite laughter or amusement must be recognizable by the audience of a comic situation while also introducing something new to them.³ To that end, I would add that comic spaces of non-reality are utopic in the sense outlined above with the added revision of “soon” to “not-yet-existing.” Spaces of non-reality affirm to the audience that the realities critiqued in its joke mechanism can be changed, maybe not yet but *soon*. This *soon* functions as a call to the audience to harness the critique of the joke in a effort to enact change. It is hopefully in its modeling a future for which one might long.

The history of the concept of utopia is long. However, the term as we know it, began with the publication of Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* in the 16th century.⁴ Utopia is often associated with the critique of the subjugation of the common (Marx, Engels).⁵ It is known for forwarding arguments about education, allocation of resources (Winstanly, Harrington),⁶ morality (More) and religion,⁷ nation building (Wegner),⁸ transnational

³ And, moreover, the idea of utopic possibility is even more foregrounded when one considers the role of comedy in drama. The comic drama often features, as Northrop Frye would remind us, a transitional “green space” where characters address the conflicts set up at the beginning of the play and through their passage out of that space come to a solution for the original conflict—usually through marriage.

⁴ Following More, during the Renaissance in Europe, several other versions of utopia emerged, such as Antonio Doni’s *I mondi* (1552), Francesco Patrizi’s *La citta felice* (1553), Tommaso Campanella’s *La citta del sole* (1602), and then Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627).

⁵ Here I am thinking of the utopic idea of “WORKINGMEN OF ALL COUNTRIES [UNITING]” (116). I recognize Marx and Engels spoke out against utopian socialists who they saw as unable to articulate how a socialist revolution would occur. However, my thinking is concerned more with imagining ideal societies, which it would be hard to argue that Marx and Engels were not interested in.

⁶ Gerrard Winstanely wrote about an egalitarian society that shared resources in *The Law of Freedom* (1652). James Harrington wrote about universal land-ownership in *Common-Wealth of Oceana* (1665).

⁷ Some popular Christian Utopias during the Reformation include *Antangil* (1616), *Christianopolis* by Johann Valetin Andrae (1619), and *Novae Solymae libri sex* by Samuel Gott (1648).

⁸ The American, French, and Russian revolutions arguably are utopian experiments in a different kind of government that is more democratic, egalitarian, and attuned to the people’s voice, however fraught the realities of these revolutions were. Some scholars will contend that Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right* are a caution against such revolutionary ideas. See for example the work of Mario Wenning.

movements (Schabio),⁹ and the influences of technology. It is closely linked to notions of dystopia, which argue often on the same grounds but from a place much less amenable due to its extreme government or environmental devastation (consider for example George Orwell's *1984*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or William Butler's *Erewhon*).¹⁰ In a more contemporary moment, the scholarship of Michel Foucault and the formulation of "heterotopias" rather than "utopias" have led to a more complicated understanding of the utopic as mirroring an otherness that is non-hegemonic. Such thinking has led scholarship away from an aesthetic of realist perfection and more to a space of extreme difference, of the potential of partial or textural knowing (Glissant) or unintelligibility (Hardt and Negri, Sara Ahmed). Scholarship has also formulated utopia in ways such as scholar and writer Wilson Harris does, positioning utopia in terms of "cross-cultural comparison" (as argued in Pordzik) or as postcolonial thinker Homi Bhabha's investigations of hybridity and the beyond does.¹¹

Deepika Bahri and Frederic Jameson assert that the utopic lingers in the postcolonial or in spaces of totality precisely because of our desire to imagine newness (Bahri 9, Jameson 70). Ralph Pordzik's argument in *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopias* that literature and "the word" becomes the site for utopic visions in postcolonial works,

⁹ Schabio writes of transnationalism, "The epistemology of cartographic space figures prominently in those recent emanations of the utopian spirit. Exile, migration and the diaspora are identified with the figuration of something new that is coming into being and that displaces the cartographic domination of physical space" (301). He further connects utopic understandings of transnationalism with the Caribbean space, which he sees as resisting the over use of topographic space connected to the rise of Black Atlantic Studies.

¹⁰ These literary texts show the perversion of certain utopic idea such as a government that has more control of the distribution of jobs and wealth (*1984*), advances in technology (*Erewhon*), or a close attention and investment in Reason (*Gulliver's Travels*). Such texts in imaginatively playing with the negative outcomes of utopic thinking seem to me to still aspire to some sort of "solution" to inequalities in society, if only through the negative example.

¹¹ Saskia Schabio notes, "Bhabha's rhetoric—the finality of the infinitive construction—insinuates, occurs (almost) purposefully, as if following a hidden utopian agenda" (307). This agenda is supported through Bhabha's regular return to spatial and temporal dimensions that "temporalize the spatially conceived notion of (homogenous) 'contemporaneity' and inscribe into it a perspective of lack" (307), which Schabio argues is celebrated.

rather than realist or idealistic imagining (133), follows Bahri and Jameson in valuing aesthetics. Such a maneuver is informed by other considerations of the role of utopias in aesthetics explored by the Frankfurt school, particularly Theodore Adorno. Adorno discusses the role of truth content in art as related to challenging the status quo, all the while providing suggestions for change without actually changing anything (132). Bahri notes that Adorno's focus on the introduction of newness in his discussion of art provides the real crux of art's potential for gesturing toward "a vision of what to long for" (198).

For my project, this idea of remembrance which revels in the not-yet-existing emerges because of the function of broken assumptions in comedy, humor, and laughter that expose the realities of a future yet unknown. Thus like utopic projects generally and the work of many of the scholars mentioned here, my project is essentially reparative in looking toward the literary arts for more ethical spaces. The "spaces of non-reality" that occur in the texts I investigate do not accurately represent reality or even aspire to do so. And yet, their revision of the present is often compelling in its "realness." For example, Grace Nichols's triumphant fat black woman in "The Assertion"—which I explore in chapter 1—or Anthony Winkler's pleasurable heaven in *The Duppy*—which I explore in chapter 3—point not only to the liberatory potential of the literary space in representing them, but also the lived potential of self-affirmation in Nichols's case and a politics of pleasure and structural change in Winkler. Far from being unattainable or fantastic, these works, in fact, imply that the moments that are so inherently funny or comic are radical precisely because they serve as a model for altering lived experience. Such a formulation resists what Jameson asserts is impossible with regard to utopia, complicating his argument that, "our constitutional inability to imagine utopia itself, and this, not owing to

any individual failure of imagination but as a result of the systemic cultural, and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoner” (1984 247). The comic gesture in its exposure of the logical fallacies of our world inherently resists Jameson’s prison, making small but meaningful contributions to another way of being in the world. The comic works I explore here, particularly Rushdie and Desani in chapter 2, resist the idea that systems of culture, ideology, and language foreclose the possibility of imagining something new.

To that end, it is essential to articulate why I choose the word “non-reality” to modify the comic spaces I will explore here. “Non-reality” as a phrase is strange. The opposite of reality is often figured as unreal or described through a series of words that exclude the word “real”: imaginary, fictitious, non-existence, made-up, or false. The fact that the opposite of reality is figured as a series of signifiers that oscillate between neutral to dismissive is telling. While “imaginary,” “fictitious” or “non-existence” might be more connected with the creative process; “made-up” or “false” falls into the realm of the lie. Such an association with the lie implies that the prefix “un” or “non” are neither productive nor moral. So why the prefix “non” instead of “un”? The answer to such a question returns us to the idea of what is realizable. For something to be unreal, it must necessarily be so unrecognizable as to not be possible. “Non” as a prefix functions as a “not” gesture, as in *not* being of something or *not* participating in something.¹²

Accordingly, comic spaces of non-reality are “not” real: thus they do not participate in

¹² The OED distinguishes between five different understandings of the prefix “non” in the English language. The first couple usages use the word like its borrowed counterparts in Latin and French meaning “no” (OED Online 1,2,4). It also was used as a short reference to the “non-intrusionists” in English politics (OED Online 3). As it is currently used, it simply signals negation (OED Online 5). However, negation in “non” is not the same as absence in “un,” which is associated with not just negation but also reversal and deprivation (OED 5,6). In some ways the choice of prefix is a question of splitting hairs, but my thinking comes down to the root of the prefix “non” in Latin and French languages as signifying defiance—saying “no” through negation.

the oppressions of reality. In the way that Bahri points out “not” in utopia, the “not” or “no” exists, for me, in “non-reality.” Moreover, Thomas More’s original coining of the term to mean “nowhere” is relevant. What is the nowhere space? Is it a real space? Is it an imagined space? If it is not real, then can we make it real—perhaps through the use of comedy? The choice of prefix visually signals this project’s close attention to these questions. Does the comic suggest what might be possible through its refusal to participate in reality? The “non-reality” I seek to articulate also incorporates the surreal aspects of the “unreal.” It captures the ways in which the “unreal” is unexpected, imaginative, and incredible. Yet in changing the prefix the word gains more force as a utopic, not quite yet real world, but in suggesting “not quite” the word presumes that with a little buy-in from the audience, “soon” the future will be changed.

Beyond my consideration of utopia, the spatial relationship of “spaces of non-reality” is a loose one. When I say “space,” I am imagining an expansive definition that is attentive to the spaces of the laughing body. What is the experience of laughter? What is its relationship to communication? The laughing body, discussed in more depth in my first chapter, will show that the violence of a full-bodied or consuming laugh ruptures boundaries between our understanding of corporeality (the body) and cognition (the mind). Thus, the spatial dynamics inherent in the laughing body articulate the vulnerability and “dysfunction” of laughter while allowing for an understanding of how bodily response is connected to the conceptual work which follows the physiological experience of the comic—Why is something funny? How do I react? Am I surprised by how I react? Comedy, most extremely when someone laughs, is felt in the body *and* the mind. Yet parallel to this physical feeling, comedy makes us imagine something else

even if, as Adorno points out, there isn't a clear sense of what that something else is. This "something else" is what I mark as the utopic spatial quality of comedy. The dual experience of the body and the imagination together ensure that the boundaries of the real and the imagined are porous, potentially surmountable, and one hopes, transitory.

The idea that spaces are not just of the body but also of the imagination, particularly in the ways that perspective—whether individual or community-generated—makes meaning in space, is not new. Here my work is indebted to scholarship in phenomenology, particularly as it is manifested in the work of Sara Ahmed on encounters with strangeness and queerness. First and foremost what phenomenology provides is an argument for perspective and directionality. Ahmed augments this understanding by emphasizing a phenomenology of queerness in terms of trajectories and orientations and a phenomenology of strangeness that does not attempt to describe the stranger but rather the encounter with strangeness.¹³ Both strangeness and queerness in Ahmed focus on the ways that otherness becomes "a species" which involves "the translation of 'direction' into identity" (69). In arguing for directionality and a move away from perspective as that which is gazed upon, Ahmed suggests a more dynamic understanding of space and perspective that focuses on journeying and process, rather than fixity. For comedy such thinking privileges the movement through comic spaces of non-reality, particularly from the physiological experience of laughter, and the psychological experience of incongruity and imagining something new. Or broadly, such an idea of direction, rather than species,

¹³ It should be said that I see a lot of parallels between Ahmed's formulation of queer journeying/directionality and Glissant's concept of circular nomadism/errantry or purposeful, lost walking (See Glissant's discussions in "Errantry, Exile" in *Poetics of Relation*). Both understandings of the ethics of movement shift toward a more embodied kind of knowledge that seem, to me, more tactile rather than visual. Both move away from a formulation of knowing that asserts, "I see you and know what you are," to one that might rather say, "I sense my relationship to you, even if I cannot or will not fully articulate it."

might articulate a more a dynamic understanding of utopia, which too becomes unmoored from static understanding.¹⁴

Thus, inherent in the question of space and perspective is how boundaries are imagined, crossed, or straddled. Cindy Willett, in her article “Going to Bed, and Waking Up Arab” and in her book *Irony in the Age of Empire*, argues that comedy makes porous the boundaries between communities, particularly those divided by race, ethnicity, religion or gender. In “Going to Bed and Waking Up Arab” she uses the example of a white suburbanite watching the “Axis of Evil” comedy tour and laughing at the jokes regarding anti-Muslim sentiments in America as a moment where boundaries are crossed (2). The white suburbanite recognizes the incongruity and absurdity of anti-Muslim sentiment post-9/11 and thus the oppositional relationship between the two communities relaxes. She states,

Rather than a salute to an elite style of political discourse, which calm appeals to reason often serve, a progressive strain of mocking humor demonstrates how we might dissipate fear, soothe raw nerves, and generate the laughter that makes xenophobic postures uncool. Contagious laughter is a serious force for solidarity. (3)¹⁵

Willett’s thinking articulates how moments of boundary crossing can result in new group solidarities-- a white American with potentially anti-Muslim thoughts finds a way to gain solidarity with Muslims in the United States. Thus, what comedy does that is so powerful is shift in-group alliances and out-group alliances dynamically. In fact, the power of

¹⁴ A dynamic utopia seems particularly important given that utopia is often equated with fixity and uniformity, which many might see as counterproductive to the heterogeneity of lived experience.

¹⁵ Important to this discussion of comedy is the way that Willett invokes class. The dichotomy of the “elite” vs. the “progressive” implies that the idea of the rational political discourse is coded as exclusionary to those who are not of the “elite.” This perspective is in keeping with much of the postcolonial critique of the Enlightenment as a movement which purported to embrace rational thinking, but in fact bound their understanding of the rational in a Western understanding that was unwilling to recognize other modes of thought. According to Willett, it is fair to see comedy as an equalizing force that is interested in the inclusion of voices in political thinking, rather than the exclusion of those who do not hold status as an elite.

shifting alliances, which in my view often coalesce against an *outmoded* idea like xenophobia, seem to work in this vein as moments where people become superior to the boundaries that formally restrained them.

Such a position links comedy to postcolonial studies, which is equally interested in the political uses (and abuses) of culture for colonial, capitalist, national, or educational gains. Comedy has the potential to create and destroy communities through its incongruous assertions. Thus, the enduring experience of the comic unifies and rallies individuals around a topic, forming new boundaries between groups of people that might otherwise have been grouped differently, say by national, ethnic, religious, or gendered boundaries. The broken boundary between the body and mind extends to include other recipients of comedy who escape the boundaries of the present. Thus, it is my contention that through the juxtaposition of theories of comedy and postcolonial literature it is possible to see how comedy provides the ability to re-make boundaries between communities, concepts, and ways of being, taking them into what I term “comic spaces of non-reality” that are dynamic and oriented toward the utopic.

In order to make such a large claim about how laughter and comedy function in literary works, I will move through texts by way of *units* of comedy, the smallest of which is the experience of reading about a character’s laugh in a text which I explore in chapter 1. From there I will look at comic language in chapter 2, and finally the idea of the comic literary genre in chapter 3. It is my hope that the completion of this project will allow for a more expansive knowledge of the role of comedy, laughter, and humor in postcolonial literature and the broader recognition of a postcolonial comic canon. In resisting and joking, we as listeners and readers understand, even if ever so slightly, “how

newness enters the world”—to borrow from Rushdie (394). It enters the world in laughter’s dual location in the body and the mind, in the “broken” language of word play and the comic, in the assertion that *I laugh...therefore, I am*, and in the use of spaces like the afterlife in satire to imagine a more comically ethical world.¹⁶

Moreover, besides what comedy, humor, and laughter can do for us in literary works, we must consider pragmatics and the ethos of such a study in our present moment. Comedy has a lot caché as a tool of political critique and intervention in the 21st century. The rise of Stephen Colbert and John Stewart in the United States or the enduring fame of Louise Bennett in Jamaica point to the ways in which the tonal quality of the comic resonates with literary and art consumers who are politically engaged and globally minded. I am not the only scholar interested in such phenomena. The subject has interested scholars in communications (Hmielowski, Holbert, Lee), political science (Amarasingam, Beavers), and cultural studies (Colletta). However, unlike the growing interest in figures on the American stage such as Trevor Noah—John Stewart’s replacement, Stephen Colbert, John Oliver and a host of comedians who perform regularly on *Saturday Night Live*, this project is interested in how reading the texts I explore here have a similar effect to watching televised comic news programs and skit comedies. Is the phenomenon of postcolonial authors using comedy and laughter at all similar to the work that Aziz Ansari has done with *Masters of None* or that Meera Syal’s sketch comedy *Goodness Gracious Me* did in the late 20th century? How do postcolonial

¹⁶ The relationship between laughter and humanity has been a subject of conversation since Aristotle made the assertion that humans are the only laughing animal. More recent developments in animal behavior problematize this assertion, ascribing *laughing* characteristics to mice, dolphins, and other mammals (see for example the 2012 Scientific American article “Rats Laugh, But Not Like Humans”). However, the figure of laughter is used to assert one’s subjectivity by many literary authors. From Bertha Mason’s mad laughter, which takes away her subjectivity, or more contemporary manifestations of laughter and subjectivity in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*, the question of how to interceded in the dehumanizing process is addressed through the destabilizing effects of laughter.

authors make their readers laugh? What does their work define as funny or comic? And, most importantly, what does that tell us about our postcolonial and global moment?¹⁷

Scope of the Project

Although my conceptual arguments are expansive in their aim, my project's scope is more modest. I am working through my postcolonial reading of comedy and how it generates comic spaces of non-reality by way of South Asian and Caribbean diasporic literary texts, both well-known and more obscure. The reasoning behind such a choice is an attempt to balance the necessary contextualization for these literary texts and the ethics of reducing postcolonial spaces to a center/periphery binary or collapsing the local experiences of colonialism and globalization for the sake of generalities. However, the limited examples I have chosen to work from do not suggest that I intend to shy away from the commonalities that cross boundaries of place and identity. The ability to laugh, make jokes, and appreciate comedy is found in numerous cultures and localities, making it reasonable to look for shared characteristics across those boundaries. This is particularly true when considering what motivates the use of a comic tone. Such a gesture is perhaps no different than postcolonial studies' investments in the role of nationality, language, education, and culture which seeps across national and regional lines while attempting to maintain an attention to particularity. I am reminded of Tejumola Olaniyan's 1993 special issue article in *Callaloo* called "On Post-Colonial Discourse" where he asks for a balance between historical specificity and the potential to draw comparisons across boundaries of space and time. He asserts that doing so might

¹⁷ A variety of other disciplines such as feminism, African American studies, and psychoanalysis have developed a conceptual framework for reading laughter in their respective fields, whereas postcolonial studies' engagement with laughter remains in its infancy.

“increase the chances of such usability to attend...to the difficult but necessary and not impossible task of bringing back the diseased enterprise of transcultural translation” (747). Such a call for balance still has relevance 20 years later and furthermore, is the aim of this dissertation.

The texts I explore have a couple of through lines and are clustered according to region. Many of the texts I have chosen are highly successful nationally or internationally. Anthony Winkler and Meera Syal’s novels were incredibly successful in their respective popular culture markets (in the United States and the United Kingdom). Others like Frantz Fanon, Maryse Condé, and Salman Rushdie are internationally well known. Almost all of the texts reference or engage at length with the relationship between their racial and cultural identity and that of a colonial “center,” whether France (Fanon), the United Kingdom (Nichols, Rushdie, Desani, Syal) or the United States (Chancy, Winkler, Condé). Therefore, although disparate, I find the chosen texts are very much linked by topics like (neo) colonialism that their works are invested in exploring and the comic modes through which they address those topics. I also see my investigation of each of these texts as highlighting the units of comedy—from character laughter to comic language, and finally comic genres of writing. Thus, my organization and curation of literary texts attempts to chart a progression from the smallest understanding of the comic to the most systemic.

And furthermore, the disparate nature of the texts and their national and regional affiliations demonstrate the uniqueness of a postcolonial sense of humor, which is defined by its response to colonialism. Each of these texts uses comedy and laughter to respond to a particular kind of power. Thus they are linked by the source of their humor,

even if the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the writers might make one question what they have in common.

Let's Hear Some Chatter: Postcolonial Scholarship on Comedy

Although debates in the nineties about hybridity, particularly in Homi Bhabha's work, have taken into account the roles of parody and irony in the colonizer/colonized mimicking relationship (122), the explicit framing of postcolonial issues with comedy writ large is more or less unexplored in works of the 1990s. Within the last decade, however, postcolonial scholarship has taken up the issue of comedy with increasing interest. These earlier explorations of comedy tended to be regionally specific or focused on a particular figure. For example, scholars have studied calypso poetry in the Caribbean (Jones 1976, Brown 1970, Davis 1999) and the role of magical realism in Latin American and South Asian literature (Antoni 1998, Hart 2005). These works provide the foundation for 21st-century investigations of comedy, although they work very narrowly within their specified literary form. Furthermore, there are certain authors who have more notoriety as comic writers such as Salman Rushdie and Sam Selvon. This has meant that their work garners more attention for its comic components over that of other less well-known writers (Ramchand 1994, Dickenson 1996). Comedy as a genre in theatre seems to attract more attention as well because, perhaps, the consideration of a comic or tragic play has a longstanding significance in the field of drama. Postcolonial studies as a discipline, however, has only recently begun to expand its genre focus outside of its primary focus on the novel, so the work done on postcolonial drama is more limited than that on other genres. Although this dissertation does not deal explicitly with drama, it

does attempt to counterbalance such a heavy emphasis on the novel with some consideration of poetry and the essay. More work would still be necessary to investigate the differences genre makes in our understanding of comedy.

Earlier works such as James English's *Comic Transactions: Literature, Humor and the Politics of Community in Twentieth Century Britain* published in 1994 considers the relationship between diasporic communities and comedy. Equally the anthology *Comedy, Fantasy and Colonialism* published in 2002 begins to provide coverage on postcolonial comedies by including articles on fantasy (Harper, Lilleleht, Lane, Jenkins, Merrington), carnival and the carnivalesque (Cremona and Sant), magical realism (Hartje), the picaresque novel (Watt), the trickster figure (Mackin), and jokes (Salisbury). By the mid-2000s there seems to be a rapid expansion of focus on postcolonial works and humor. Scholars become more interested in the grotesque (Barnard 2004); irony, parody and metafiction (Ridanpaa 2007); verbal humor (Kehinde 2009); the fairy tale (Deszcz 2004) and word play (Emig 2010). Work has often paid more attention to comic figures such as the trickster in African and Afro-diasporic texts, for example in the recent work of Sam Vasquez (2012). Gaining momentum after the publication of *Cheeky Fictions* in 2005, postcolonial scholars now increasingly consider the relationship of comedy to their texts. Most importantly, the scholarship on comedy and laughter has moved beyond large authors in the postcolonial literary canon and begun to consider a broad range of postcolonial literary figures such as Meera Syal and other writers of popular culture fiction (Erichsen 2005). Regardless, the overall presence of comic scholarship on postcolonial texts still demands a broader, more theoretical scope. This scope would connect comic theories and philosophies to postcolonial theories. It would contribute to

the alteration of thinking about comedy within the postcolonial discipline and beyond into philosophy and critical theory. My dissertation seeks to fill that gap in the scholarship, providing a theoretical apparatus with which to approach texts.

As I previously mentioned, postcolonial literary artists have a longstanding relationship and engagement with comedy, even if critical attention to the subject is fairly recent. Some of the earliest postcolonial writers such as V.S. Naipaul and G.V. Desani use comedy both to comment on the inescapable colonial and postcolonial relationships of their characters such as Mr. Biswas and H. Hatter, and to parody deeply the values that the colonizer has attempted to instill in the “native” culture. Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* and later *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Returns* make extensive use of comic structures such as irony, parody, and the carnivalesque to comment on the Afro-diasporic experience in mid-century London. Notably and more contemporarily, Salman Rushdie’s work incorporates clever word play, irony, parody, satire, the carnivalesque, bawdy/vulgar humor, tragicomedy, melodrama, and magical realism. Alongside him are Amitav Ghosh, Hanif Kureishi, Hari Kunzru, Junot Diaz, Derek Walcott, Louise Bennett, and Zakes Mda, all of whom use a variety of jokes, comic structures, forms of parody and metafiction, and satire in their works. Thus my dissertation will make as much use of literary examples to provide a sense of the comic in postcolonial contexts as much as I will scholarly works, since the literature has a more robust engagement with the topic.

Comedy and Postcolonial Ethics

The ethics of comedy and laughter, for this project, derive principally from the ways that the laugh and by extension comedy cannot be pinned down as precisely a

bodily or a cerebral experience. This stickiness of experience facilitates new logics or understandings of the world. If we cannot, for example, pin down where the laugh emerges, can we, then, begin to recognize other places where the fixity of our logic falls apart? Moreover, laughter is not solely an individual or community act. At play with every laugh is a dynamic engagement with the boundaries of the body, subjectivity, and community. So too on a larger scale, comedy operates to dismantle, reassemble, and jostle these boundaries, imagining something else. That something else is the confluence of understanding 1) the experience of the bodily and mental loss of control in a laugh and 2) the cerebral acknowledgement of fallacy. It is the beginning of utopic possibility. Perhaps, as Said proposes with contrapuntal reading, we hear in the laugh or in humor a tonal change underneath the familiar melody of Western or tragic thought.

Inherent in the question of utopia is the question of what is ethical and how we engage and exist with others. Postcolonial scholars have approached such a question in a variety of ways. Glissant argues that the idea of Relation is about integrating oneself into the fabric of a network of communities, not through precise understanding, but rather through a purposeful, dynamic interaction that “gives” and “yields”—what he calls *donner-avec* (xiv). Sara Ahmed encourages us to think about describing encounters of otherness and our experience of those encounters without attempting to interpret the other (*Strange Encounters*). Further, Hardt and Negri, in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari, point toward the complete unintelligibility of a new worldview and the experience of total resistance as a new ethics of engagement unfettered by the dynamics of power and capitalism that rule us currently. Still others like Gayatri Spivak might ask us to think of

ethical engagement as strategic and approximate, and also an attempt to think on a planetary scale, rather than a national or local one.

Laughter and comedy engage with the ethical register through the critical conceptual gesture inherent in a joke mechanism. It should be said, however, that laughter and comedy do not always perform an ethical function. Of course, these tonal registers can be employed to reinforce unethical behavior. Perhaps the most enigmatic example of this is bullying, which relies on pointing out the perceived negative differences in someone or a group of people in order to assert superiority. Bullying is often reinforced by laughter or manifested in cruel humor. Yet it is important not to ignore the ways in which comedy and laughter quickly slip out of those registers and the same mechanisms that perpetuated bullying or violence are re-employed to the effect of generating positive group identities. This can often lead to comedy working as both a subversive and conforming presence in a postcolonial text. In so doing, the comic postcolonial text works in a more troublesome and productive space, asking its reader to recognize the dislocation and disjuncture of the postcolonial experience in the very style of the work. In fact, it is often the laughing or comic response to violence—specifically colonial violence that targets individuals based upon their race or gender-- that the authors in this dissertation use.

To this end, beyond a question of voices and ethics, another parameter that I want to mark as important to the relationship between comedy and postcolonial literature is their association with hybridity. Hybridity is built upon questions of boundary making, crossing, and assertion, but will be a category where comedy becomes the most useful. By way of example, a pun's sentence structure contains two divergent meanings that exist

in a playful and jarring opposition that cannot be resolved. This playful and jarring opposition exists in comedy generally. It allows a postcolonial text to engage with the concepts of simultaneous and yet discontinuous fragments of an identity, a nation or a cultural experience. I already mentioned the complicated relationship that laughter has to the body, but this also works on a larger level. If we define ourselves as subjects because we laugh, then are we defining our identity in a paradox, suspended between the physiological response and conceptual thought? This seems like a particularly useful schematic for understanding subjectivity and culture, as articulated by thinkers of hybridity such as Homi Bhabha who define hybridity as the dynamic and continual slippage between concepts (East/West, Self/Other, local/nation).¹⁸ Yet rooting such an understanding of experience in the viscera of our body is powerful precisely because it moves the abstract into the physical realm. Therefore, what a question of hybridity and laughter will do is foreground a relationship between the particular and the universal that is always fraught in postcolonial scholarship. This dissertation will be attentive to the ways that laughter might function singularly as a mode of contrapuntal reading, as interested in ethics, and performing the work of hybridity in interesting ways.

Drawing on the postcolonial concepts of counterpoint, ethics, and hybridity as influences for my comic spaces of non-reality demonstrates the heart of both fields, which is the politics of communication. What are the politics of laughter? What are the politics of a postcolonial stance? How do we think critically about our world? And, as the texts in this dissertation seem particularly concerned with how do we take that critical

¹⁸ R Graeme Dunphy and Rainer Emig, editors of *Hybrid Humor*, identify Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817" as the most condensed articulation of his understanding of hybridity. I too believe this chapter in *Location of Culture* is a good resource.

thinking and present, effectively, an argument for change? I see comedy and laughter working not only as a stylistic choice but that the authorial move to include comedy expansively in the text is an act of activism. The function of comedy is to reach out into the world, rather than remain confined to a literary space. It does the work of critiquing and presenting new logics in the world.

What does the comic have to say?: Survey of Theories of Comedy and Laughter

Theories of comedy run the gamut when it comes to conceptualizing and attempting to answer the questions: Why do we laugh? What is funny? What is comic? Milan Kundera provisionally defines laughter as “emitted broken, spasmodic sounds in the higher reaches of [the] vocal range” (87). But obviously for him and for many philosophers, literary writers, and critics, the definition of laughter, humor and comedy reaches much further than the physiological experience of it. In fact, the issue of what comedy, laughter and humor *means* has been a constant form of fascination for Western philosophers since Plato. With varying degrees of success, thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Francis Hutcheson, Sigmund Freud and Immanuel Kant have proposed reasons for laughter, for the effectiveness of jokes, and for the psychological merits of laughing. Recently, with the emphasis on cognitive science and the study of the human brain growing both in the sciences and in the humanities, thinkers have begun to consider the evolutionary reasons for laughter and jokes (Provine 2001, Hurley, Dennett, Adams Jr. 2011), and its place as a survival mechanism (Boyd 2004).

Depending on whom you ask, there are 3 to 5 dominant ways of thinking about comedy, humor and laughter. The longest standing theories of laughter tend to fall into

three categories: theories of superiority, incongruity and relief. Superiority theories are the oldest dating back to Plato, who discussed humor in relation to morality, arguing that laughing at others was not very nice (as cited in Morreall 10). He observes, “usually when we abandon ourselves to violent laughter, our condition provokes a violent reaction” (10). Not only does the laughing subject abandon him-/herself to irrationality when s/he laughs, he argues, but s/he also maliciously critiques the person laughed at (10-13). Of course, amusement at another’s folly is always something to be avoided. Thomas Hobbes develops the concept of superiority by arguing that laughers gain a feeling of “sudden glory” (*Law* 54), which elevates them above the person who is ridiculed. For Hobbes, “sudden glory” is a passion, opposite to weeping (54 *Law*, 125-126 *Leviathan*).

Superiority theories are obviously useful in postcolonial contexts because they provide an outlet for the marginalized to “turn the tables” on dominant forces, elevating themselves into a place of “sudden glory” against the ideologies that marginalize them. They also elucidate the ways in which superior/inferior binaries are slippery. Depending on the laugher’s relationship to a dominant ideology, their membership in certain communities, or their political commitment, they may laughingly correct and conform to a dominant ideology or subvert it. One might take Bhabha’s concept of mimicry here. The irony of the colonizer’s aspirations for the native, and the parody that the native performs participate in the slippery and incomplete relationship of superior and inferior racial and cultural subjects.

Incongruity theories are some of the more compelling theories. John Morreall’s incongruity theory argues that laughter comes from a “pleasant psychological shift” (133). Francis Hutcheson’s theory argues that Hobbes is too pessimistic about laughter

and that, in fact, that “which seems generally the cause of laughter is the bringing together of images which have contrary additional ideas, as well as some resemblance in the principal idea” (27). Other theorists such as Henri Bergson might also be described as writing incongruity theories, although with a very specific focus. His theory is interested in the humorous cross-over of assumptions about what makes one human, animal or machine. When a human, animal or machine behaves perplexingly, then laughter occurs. What makes these theories most compelling is that they do not tend to rely on so narrow a reading of laughter—as either malicious, or as will be seen with relief theories, psychologically useful. In a postcolonial context, incongruity theories might prove useful in articulating how (neo-)colonial policy and ideology are conceptually flawed. And with theorists like Kierkegaard, the concept of the “absolute paradox”—Jesus’s place in the trinity as God and also as a man—might help postcolonial critics think through comedy’s relationship to other paradoxes related to identity, forms of knowing, the desire for the pre-colonial and its absence, and subalternity.

Relief theories’ largest proponent is Sigmund Freud, whose theory involves a complicated psychological accounting system. He argues that repressing one’s desires to act on taboos takes psychic energy. Fortunately for us, joking around and laughing provides relief from our taboo desires and saves us the energy of repressing those desires (113). The joke brings forth the desire to act on a taboo and in the punch line resolves the need for that desire to be realized (Freud 113). Freud is not the only theorist of relief. Herbert Spencer sees the body as a hydraulics system, which gains and loses nervous energy through processes like laughing. Both Freud and Spencer drew on their work in psychology, although to different ends. Spencer’s work is highly connected to his

Darwinist thinking, considering the psychology of the individual as racially and species specific. Freud's work is more invested in ordinary traumas and repressions as a result of cultural and familial norms. Both are invested in the situated relationship between laughter and comedy, and its broader contexts.

Using laughter to relieve psychological tension or nervous energy has its merits in a postcolonial context in that the theory might expose moments where characters or postcolonial subjects use laughter to cope with the dominant ideologies that they face. Relief theories might also elucidate moments where laughter is the response to severe trauma. The clichés "to laugh to keep from crying" or laughing because there aren't tears left seem relevant here. It is good to keep in mind that Freud's theory does not as easily elucidate the laugh of one who receives the violent or sexually taboo act from someone else. However, his theory might be of use when thinking about what kind of laughter is necessary to conform to a social order.

The final two predominant theories of laughter and humor have to do with the current turn toward cognitive, evolutionary, and biological reasons for laughter. These theories are roughly divided into two categories: biological or evolutionary theories of laughter. These theories investigate the physiological experience of laughter, what happens in the body when a subject laughs, and why laughter might have evolved to become what it is today. Biological and evolutionary comic theorists posit that laughter and humor evolved as an incentive system for learning (Dennett et. al 2011), a vestige of using play to practice for dangerous encounters (Boyd 2004), or a leftover aggressive trait involving showing one's teeth to an opponent (Provine 2000). Dennett, Boyd and Provine's work primarily synthesizes data and findings of other scientists such as Jaak

Panksepp (who studies laughing rats). Particularly, Provine's work ranges broadly from Victorian discussions of nitrous oxide, to philosophers and cognitive scientists. Where I think these theories might guide a discussion of laughter in a postcolonial text is to provide continuity between the studies of raced bodies in the 19th century and the newer studies of bodies and minds now. These theories continue to articulate the question: What is human? In so doing, they are helpful for texts that are examining the very erasure of humanity by dominating or (neo-)colonial forces.

The theories I will draw upon most heavily in this dissertation are those that engage with the slippery boundaries between bodies and the outside world such as Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and Brian Boyd's thinking about the laughing body. I am also interested in theories of comedy that consider closely the relationship between language, laughter and comedy, in particular with regard to embodiment,¹⁹ and those who recognize the inherent subversive nature of the comic such as Anca Parvulescu. Comic theorists who think through how communities are formed through laughter and comedy such as Cindy Willett, numerous African American scholars such as Glenda Carpio, and French feminist theorists, particularly Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa," will drive much of my thinking on identity. Finally, I am interested in theories of satire, particularly those interested in the history of satire like Robert Elliott, who in theorizing satire gesture explicitly to the ways in which the comic travels outside of reality and into spaces of the spiritual imagination or as my dissertation

¹⁹ Valerie Allen's study of the Middle Ages, trash, language and laughter is instructive in the longstanding understanding of the connection between words, concepts, and the body. She argues, "The 'linguistic turn' articulated in poststructuralist thought, where we speak of language as actively constitutive of reality rather than passively reflective of it... If ideas cannot be completely separated from the words in which they are expressed, if combinations of words really do matter, if even a dactyl is ethical, and if apprehensions—particularly the ones that make us crack up laughing—are truly embodied, then deep thinking ought to make us sit up a little straighter and put our words more carefully in their place" (5).

will call it, spaces of “non-reality.” Thus the key concepts that are explored in my dissertation circulate around 1) boundaries between the body, the world, spiritual spaces, and the lived experience; 2) the construction of imagined utopias; and 3) alternatives to oppressive spaces found in language and marginalization, more generally. As may be evident, I am collapsing theories of comedy with theories of laughter in this project. Such a choice was made consciously. The works I consider make use of laughter and comedy in similar and complementary ways. Thus this dissertation is less interested in dividing up categories of humor, laughter and comedy. Rather, I am interested in the ways that all three aspects—laughter, comedy, humor—engage with the questions of the body, utopia, language and marginalization in similar ways.

Chapter Summaries

My first chapter, “The Laugh in *Slaughter*: Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, Myriam Chancy’s *The Loneliness of Angels*, and Grace Nichol’s *Fat Black Woman Poems*,” will examine the role of laughter in a number of postcolonial texts. It will discuss how laughter is figured as a violent physical reaction that catalyzes change. I recover Fanon’s laughter from his formulation of it as part of a colonial mindset. Then I show how laughter engages with larger concepts in his work such as humanism and violence in ways that show its figurative potential. Chancy will link laughter with her conceptualization of a transnational spiritual network that connects subjects from different times and locations in order to circumvent the traumas of Haiti and Ireland. In so doing, I shows how her employment of laughter as a physical experience mediates between life and death, and thus, encourages an attention to the spiritual realm. Nichols

will use laughter as a tool to affirm her fat black women's subjectivity as intelligent, beautiful, and powerful. Thus, I argue that Nichols embraces the potential of laughter as a liberating physical experience. Although the end result of these authors' engagement with laughter is very different, in each instance it will be clear that embodied laughter plays a role in these texts as a catalyst for change. In this chapter I am beginning to formulate an understanding of comic spaces of non-reality as utopic, embodied, boundary crossing, and boundary straddling.

My second chapter, "Comic gestures, comic language?: A Study of Language and Logic in G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* and Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*," will argue that Desani's articulation of the "gesture" as a form of critique based in misdirection is a key feature of the way that postcolonial works employ comic language. The chapter considers how the illogical sentences of *All About H. Hatterr* are linked to the novel's parody of the spiritual journey and cycles of reincarnation. It argues that the illogic of Hatterr's narrative provides real guidelines for how one might survive in a colonial or postcolonial space. Rushdie's novel will engage with the concept of the gesture through the linking of the style of the novel with its main character, Moraes Zogoiby, a man who ages twice as fast and has asthma. Moraes and his labored language become a symbol of postcolonial India, allowing Rushdie to make an argument for corrupt hybridity in the novel. Both novels use comedy and gestural wordplay to argue for their respective understandings of colonial and postcolonial India.

My final chapter, "Keep Smiling Through Like You Always Do: Satire and Spiritual Utopias in Anthony Winkler's *The Duppy* and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*," takes satire as an exemplar of the comic genre. I use Anthony Winkler's

The Duppy and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* to trace the relationship of satire to utopia. Through tracing how satire interacts with understandings of utopias, I push upon the importance of spaces of non-reality's connection to the spiritual world, whether a riff on a Christian understanding of the afterlife as in Winkler's novel or creolized spiritual practices found in the Caribbean such as *obeah* in Condé's novel. In concluding with the question of the afterlife and the spiritual world, this chapter most clearly articulates what the stakes of imagining comic spaces of non-reality are, and how the comic utopic imaginings of these texts might make minor conceptual changes to the reader's reality that have enduring effects.

The dissertation ultimately hopes to encourage scholars to take comedy and laughter more seriously as tonal choices for the postcolonial author. The significance of comedy and laughter in a postcolonial work is undeniable. Accordingly, having a theoretical language to talk about the role of comedy and laughter is essential. Although I do not expect comic spaces of non-reality to capture all examples of comedy and laughter in a rapidly expanding postcolonial canon, I see the impulse to change and the possibilities of the comic gesture to work reparatively as an essential piece of why so many authors make such a tonal choice. Comedy is critical but it also, in making its critique, points to the ways in which new logics about the world might be harnessed to positive ends. Ignoring such essential pieces of our literary canon robs us of a greater understanding of what is possible and how to move from a space of critique to change.

The Laugh in *Slaughter*: Figures of Laughter in Postcolonial Texts

I wanted to kill myself laughing, but laughter had become out of the question—Frantz Fanon, “The Lived Experience of the Black Man”

Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* is one of the most influential texts for scholars of black identity, race, and postcolonial studies. As Laura Christian reminds us, Fanon’s great intervention in psychoanalysis is his reframing of the original trauma for the black subject. He argues that the original trauma does not occur in the space of the family but rather in the cultural impositions and traumas of “othering” (Christian 224). She writes, “the crucial effect of Fanon’s critical gesture [in *Black Skin, White Masks*] is to displace the family as primary ‘psychic circumstance and object,’ radically broadening the domain of psychoanalytic discourse” (224).²⁰ Emblematically, the scene of Fanon’s original trauma is allegorized through his experience on a train platform when a boy shouts repeatedly, “Look a negro!” and assumes that Fanon intends to eat him.²¹ In this moment, Fanon writes, “I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all the grinning *Ya bon Banania*” (92).²² This

²⁰ For more on Fanon’s intervention in psychoanalysis and his relationship to postcolonialism, see Vaughan 1992, Vergés 1996, Keller 2007, Sekyi-Otu 1996, and Gibson 2003.

²¹ This aggression is particularly clear in the original French. Philcox translates *nègre* as “negro” but the French *nègre* also means “nigger.” Thus the line between aggressive slur and racial category is even more apparent as the child’s intent toward aggression is linguistically unclear. Moreover, as Brent Hayes Edwards makes clear, *nègre* carried the additional meaning of “slave” along with the degenerative connotations associated with “nigger.” Whereas *noir* did not carry the connotation of “slave.” Fanon uses both in *Black Skin, White Masks* so it is clear that he was playing with the distinction between *nègre* and *noir*. For a more sustained discussion, see his book *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism*.

²² Lewis R. Gordon discusses Fanon’s mediations on the black subject’s need to delete his black identity through shifts from the statement, “I am black” to another identity marker such as “I am brown” or “I am Martiniquan.” Gordon proclaims, “The result is tragicomic” (13). Gordon then argues that the attempt to erase markers of blackness also occurs in linguistic utterances—the ability to roll an “r,” for example. Yet, “the black’s effort at transformative linguistic performance is a comedy of errors...[because] he or she becomes linguistically dangerous” (13-14). It seems to me that the boy’s call functions in the same manner. Fanon in this passage is accounting for how “negro” is put upon him, with all its ugly connotations, and it

moment of increasing tension resolves when Fanon swears at the boy's mother, reasserting his identity in the face of her and her son's othering of him.

The fact that he turns to the satirical curse, "*Le beau nègre vous emmerde, madame!*" (114), is significant for the aims of this chapter on laughter. In the same way that the epigraph indicates Fanon's flirtation with the power of laughter, the comic double-speak of asserting a stereotype of black masculinity in his curse while simultaneously undermining it points to the power of comedy and laughter as gestures of resistance. They both revel in the paradoxes of the social realm. Thus, the question of original trauma articulated and resisted through cursing on that French train platform is inevitably entwined with the initial response referenced in my epigraph—the laugh. Racial trauma accordingly can be resisted through a laugh that functions as a source of "enjoyment" (92) but also, a mode of elimination, "killing" those stereotypes confronted within the train's panoptic environment.²³ Therefore, Fanon gestures to the ways in which the ridiculous spectacle of racial stigma can be effectively thwarted by a critical and pleasurable laughter.

The powerful laugh and curse, to that end, are positioned in the train allegory in opposition to the smile of *Ya bon Banania*, a popular figure in French advertising for a banana chocolate drink developed in the early 20th century. Anne Donadey discusses the effects of these ads as part of what Anne McClintock calls "commodity racism" and furthers that "this system [colonial racism] is based on constant repetition and the

matters not how he perceives himself. He is always "dangerous" and marked so through the symbolic use of language.

²³ The word "killing" also signals Fanon's engagement with the role of violence as a means for black individuals and communities to assert themselves in the face of the colonizer. Pramod Nayar argues, "Violence becomes a means of discovering a sense of self" precisely because the colonial system is organized by a system of violence (10). For a more sustained discussion of violence in Fanon, see Arendt 1970, Taylor 1994, Bulham 1985, Nandy 1992, Serequeberhan 1994, Gordon 1996, Presby 1996.

reactivation of stereotypes on a personal and institutional level” (12). Furthermore, she argues that its repetitions “[dulls] one’s sense of outrage,” leading to a form of racism that is “everyday” or appears to be “benign” (12). Fanon’s inclusion of the *banania* man in his list of signifiers that are attached to the black man demonstrates the ways that the “triple existence” of the black man permeates all aspects of French culture—from social norms to consumerism. The smile of the *banania* is frozen and passive, becoming an object that is marked by its relationship to a consumer good with tropical origins. The *banania* man does not smile of his own volition just as his role as a *tirailleur* suggests that he fights for the French colonizer who oppresses him. Such a figuration slots itself into Fanon’s overall understanding of the psychosis of the black subject as yearning for a Hegelian recognition from the colonizer, but instead being seen as simply an object—in this case used to sell a drink and fight in a war.²⁴ He does not and will not ever receive “recognition as an independent self-consciousness” from the master (*Black Skin* 170). The suicidal laugh and the satiric curse that Fanon articulates, however, are critical, subversive, and empowering; they disempower the relationship of gazing on which the white French onlookers rely through a violent engagement with the body and communication. The grimacing face and powerful expulsion of air writes on and communicates black subjectivity in new ways.

In his article, “A Questioning Body of Laughter and Tears,” Fanon scholar Lewis Gordon argues,

Laughter enabled [Fanon] to cope with his situation, to move on. The role of humour in oppressed communities is well known. There is not only the form of humour in which the oppressor is ridiculed, but there is also self-deprecating

²⁴ Moreover as many scholars have noted, this understanding of self-recognition and the black subject being made into an object was heavily influenced by Sartre and existentialism. For a good reference on the topic, see Henry 1996.

humour, humour that creates a paradoxical distance and closeness with their situation. (20)

While I do not deny the argument Gordon forwards in terms of types of humor, it seems to me that the ideas of coping and moving on from trauma are not the end of the story for laughter in Fanon. Laughter is an embodied experience that necessitates a close attention to the event of laughter itself.²⁵ When we laugh, or as Fanon articulates, we can't laugh, it forces an awareness of the ways in which the mind and emotions are connected to a body. This body that allows Fanon to laugh is also the recipient of signification from others—the new psychoanalytic trauma he recognizes. But it needn't succumb to that signification. It is this chapter's argument that the laugh engages with perceptions of control of the body, of the repetitive/iterative nature of traumatic response, and the destabilizing communicative capacity to express feeling through an embodied experience. It explores the stakes of laughter in a postcolonial context, conjecturing that laughter functions as a productive affective response to the conflicting experiences and traumas of marginalization because it takes back the body.²⁶ Rather than see the body as something that is written upon, the laugh forcefully and dramatically uses the body to communicate. The laugh takes back the image of the black body as overwritten and divorced from the

²⁵ Postcolonial studies has a wealth of scholarship on the question of embodied experience such as the ways in which colonized bodies bear the physical signs of colonialism (Dube, Fanon, Mowat), how embodiment has become connected to “utopian postcolonial cosmopolitanism” which takes as its starting point a practical and ethical engagement with globalization and neo-liberalism (Wilson, Sandru, Welsh), and in articulations of subjectivity (Moore-Gilbert). Yet the complicated physicality of laughter as of the body, as a response—to logic or absurdity, or as emotion-- remains understudied. The irony of this gap is that we all experience the phenomenon of laughter and know its potential to alter our physical state through the spasms of the body, the psychological release or relief accompanying laughter, and its infectiousness in a group.

²⁶ My thinking here is indebted to scholars like Anjali Prabhu who have argued that Fanon sees the black body as fragmented, dissolved, and exploded (2006). The sentiment of explosion seems particularly useful in a study of laughter because of the explosive exhale when someone laughs. Much like Fanon's thinking on colonial violence necessitating violent resistance, it seems to me that the fragmentation and exploded black body under colonization benefits from the explosive response of the laugh.

black subject's self-perception, and repositions the body as of the subject, and most importantly, as part and parcel of the individual's capacity to respond to the world. To rewrite Fanon's train encounter: the beautiful black man *laughs* and says, "Fuck you, Madame!"

My chapter seeks to acknowledge the difficulty of employing laughter to the ends of bolstering the subject as Fanon articulates, while showing how other authors such as Myriam Chancy and Grace Nichols use the corporeal, social, and imaginative potential of the laugh to respond productively to the physical and psychic traumas featured in their texts. Each of the authors --Frantz Fanon, Myriam Chancy and Grace Nichols-- has different investments in laughter. Fanon is the least swayed by it, seeing it as a precursor to asserting oneself and forming a national consciousness in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Chancy's novel *The Loneliness of Angels* is more modest in its estimation of laughter. It endorses laughter in so far as it feeds her larger project of imagining a transcultural feminine spiritual network that resists lived trauma. Grace Nichols's work, my chapter's conclusion, embraces laughter in *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*. Thus in her work, laughter performs in powerful ways an assertive and healing force in the face of what McClintock asserts is commodity racism.

Moreover, these authors are not only diverse in their understanding of laughter, but also their national affiliations and the genres they use to write. Fanon is a Martiniquan scholar and essayist, Myriam Chancy is a Haitian novelist and literary scholar, and Grace Nichols is a Guyanese poet. Yet they all turn to the same thematic issues: of the traumas of colonization, particularly the transatlantic colonization of the Caribbean, with an eye

for the comic and for laughter.²⁷ Each author has a particular engagement with the trauma of transatlantic slavery and its legacies in the Caribbean. For example, *The Wretched of the Earth* connects comedy and laughter to the development of national culture and consciousness in the post-colony. In that work, Fanon discusses how postcolonial subjects need to overcome the ideological handicap bestowed on them by a colonial government that capitalized on the subjugation of its native populations. Chancy's *The Loneliness of Angels* discusses the 20th-century effects of the colonization of Haiti. She does this by describing the atrocities of Francois Duvalier's regime (1957-1971), which came to power in large part because the Haitian people wanted a leader who represented Afro-Haitian cultural values. Chancy connects the Duvalier's government with another postcolonial situation, that of the Irish's experience being governed by England, suggesting that the role of colonization continued to influence the struggles of both islands. Grace Nichols directly references the idea of the "belly" of the Atlantic and the slave trade in her poem "Waiting for Thelma's Laughter" in order to draw upon the Black Atlantic as a space of great violence and also of great cultural and social possibility. Her poem "The Assertion," which concludes the chapter, speaks from a place of empowerment, imagining the position the poem's female speaker might find herself in if she were able to celebrate herself in the face of racism and sexism. Thus, the slippery combination of the laughing body with the assertion of subjectivity facilitates for each author the generation of new ideas and ways of being, what this dissertation is calling comic spaces of non-reality. Their attachment to the complicated object that is the *Caribbean* is not what holds them together in this chapter. Rather it is the interesting way

²⁷ I should qualify what I say here and recognize that Fanon's writings are incredibly influenced by his time in Algeria. Thus, his work is transatlantic and also distinctly African in its approach to a global consciousness of decolonial thought.

that they make use of figures of laughter to engage with the particularity of their colonial and postcolonial contexts that makes them valuable in a chapter such as this.

To that end, I want to position laughter as a saturated node at which comic incongruity and transgression can be understood and quite literally felt. It will function as a building block for later discussions of comic language and genre. This chapter will articulate some of the major ideas inherent in how I am enacting comic spaces of non-reality through laughter, as the most physiological manifestation of humor and comedy. I will show that just as the traumas of cultural imposition are both of a physical and psychological reality, so too is the laugh a way to *combat* a physical and epistemic conflict. It combats those realities through the alteration of the body—as convulsing, mouth gaping, eyes wincing—and of the mind—the experience of perceiving incongruity.²⁸

Laughing, Spewing, and Muscular Tensions in Fanon’s “On National Culture” in The Wretched of the Earth

Although I began with *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon’s later work *The Wretched of the Earth* is more illustrative of the potential of laughter as an embodied form of resistance.²⁹ Fanon’s first substantive reference to laughter is as follows,

²⁸ However, I should note that prominent Fanon scholar Lewis Gordon disagrees with me here. He reads Fanon’s work as both showing the strengths and limitations of laughter. He argues, “It takes much to be able to laugh at oneself, and excess could lead to pathology. The struggle for liberation, for humanization, is thus structurally similar to therapy. Patients may, for instance, laugh at their situation while telling their story, but this laughter is to make them go on although often without genuine confrontation; it is a practice of seeming closeness that leads to distance” (20). Gordon’s concerns are valid, however, beyond Fanon’s example, I would argue that the potential for psychosis as a result of laughter seems to be outweighed by the imaginative potential of laughter’s rupturing effect. Furthermore, to mark one as “psychotic” or “mad” seems incredibly bound up in an ideology of Western rationality that seems to me to be the real bogymen.

²⁹ As I am writing this chapter the newly discovered works of Fanon, including a couple plays, have been collected and published in French. Editors Jean Khalfa and Robert Young discuss in this book the

"Sometimes this literature of just-before-the-battle is dominated by humour and allegory; but often too it is symptomatic of a period of distress and difficulty, where death is experienced and disgust too. We spew ourselves up, but already underneath laughter can be heard" (21).³⁰ Although positioned as two options in the beginning of his quotation, Fanon seems to collapse humor/allegory with distress/difficulty. This collapse occurs through the physiological experience of "spewing." Fanon's use of the word "spew" seems particularly poignant as the act of vomiting makes use of some of the same muscles and organs that laughter does.³¹ Both are an aggravation of the torso, neck and face. Both are violent. Both expel something from the body, whether poison or benign air. Fanon's layers of bodily aggression, spasms of the diaphragm and abdomen, form a palimpsest of bodily experiences.³² Colonial domination facilitates for him cyclical, self-

influences of existentialism, Césaire and others on Fanon's literary works. Accordingly thinking about the violent convulsions and expulsions of the body in these theatrical works might prove to be a useful expansion to the work done in this chapter.

³⁰ Fanon scholar Pal Ahluwalia begins a discussion of nausea in Fanon in his article "Fanon's Nausea: The Hegemony of the White Nation," although his article seems more about the topic after the colon than before. He does note that the image of being nauseated by racism and colonialism begins early in *Black Skin, White Masks* just after Fanon encounters the white boy on the train platform. Ahluwalia sees nausea as part of the stages and staging of the black response to racism, which is ultimately overcome through anger and the move to assert oneself. Such a reading is valid but I wonder, like I posit in my introduction to this chapter, if the bodily should be engaged with more closely here. Why nausea and vomiting? Why laughter? Why these extreme bodily reactions which are often symptomatic of illness or disease?

³¹ This imagery of laughter and "spewing" or overflowing recurs over and over. In particular I am reminded of Donna Goldstein's study of Rio de Janeiro. She writes of the women's laughter she studied, "Such laughter became a challenge, an interpretive method for beginning to unravel the complex ways in which people comprehend their own lives and circumstance. Perhaps at times only partially or imperfectly, I found that humor, despite its grinning, Cheshire cat-like nature, nevertheless opens up a window onto the complicated consciousness of lives that were burdened by their place within the racial, class, gender and sexual hierarchies that inform their social world. Despite the rigidity of these hierarchies and tightly woven webs of power, they were not strong enough to contain this laughter, not the meaning disguised within it, as *it spilled over into my work*" [emphasis mine](3,4). Goldstein articulates an interesting concept here: that laughter is uncontainable and its meaning, although masked, surfaces and infects its listeners. Like Fanon there is a sense in which the self, unmarred by its context, emerges or spews from the laughing subject and that laughter is the first sign of a battle.

³² Moreover, Jean Khalfas's article "Fanon, corps perdu" suggests Fanon's enduring engagement with subjectivity through the body. He writes, "there is clearly an urgent, almost desperate insistence in '*fais de moi toujours*' rather than '*fais toujours de moi*.' And if the tone is that of a prayer [in *Black Skin, White Masks*], it is a paradoxical one since it does not open onto any kind of transcendence but rather signals an inner dialogue of the self with itself through the immanence of the body" (426). Thus, this idea of knowing

reflexive layers of distress and humor, and difficulty and allegory. When the colonial subject “spews [him/herself] up,” the boundary between what is the subject and the thing expelled from the subject becomes unclear.

The violence of spewing, moreover, engages fundamentally with the idea of trauma and consumption. It radically opposes as a figure the consumption of raw materials and labor by the colonizer. Fanon’s word choice signals that this literature is “symptomatic” of distress, marking vomiting and laughter as part of the physical and mental trauma of colonization, what Jeffery Alexander calls cultural trauma. “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves an indelible mark upon their group consciousness” (1). This cultural trauma, according to trauma theorists like Alexander, must be mediated through the identification of the perpetrators of violence, victim testimony, and a collective acceptance of wrongs that a community endures. Yet importantly, Fanon sees this violent physiological response as part of the black intellectual’s fraught “racialization of thought” (150), which inhibits his ability to fully protest the colonizer.³³ Thus within this frame, laughter and vomiting are seen as a fraught attempt on the part of the colonized to resist the powers of the colonizer.

This moment of laughing and “spewing” is a small moment in the chapter overall.

“On National Culture” is largely about how national independence and politics are

oneself through the body persists as a through line across his works from the trembling angry curse and bodily prayer in *Black Skin* to the spewing and laughing body in *Wretched*.

³³ I and other scholars disagree with such a sentiment. Maryrose Casey in considering comic aboriginal plays in Australia comes to the conclusion that comedy is a way of representing and witnessing traumatic events. She argues, “The traumatic internal and emotional experience may resist representation or iteration, but *the source* of the trauma can be represented and iterated in a variety of ways [such as comedy] for different purposes”(10). Her point is that iteration in the form of testimony or what we might recognize as testimony may not be possible. However, if we broaden what we understand as response, particularly comic response, then we have before us a different kind of engagement with trauma which leads to productive resistance to, in this case, white settler communities in Australia.

intertwined with the development of national culture—and subsequently, international culture. Here Fanon critiques the black intellectual’s propensity to “look back” to pre-colonial cultures for representations of their community, to find “some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others” (*Wretched* 210). Instead, he argues that national culture is embodied by and present in the struggles of a nation, the violence of self-realization.³⁴ Moreover, the passage I quoted above comes from his discussions of proto-national culture, which is still fraught by its ever-present perceived colonial audience; “talking back,” we might say, to the motherland. As the quotation graphically makes clear, the proto-literature of the colony or recently independent post-colony is an embodied rejection of Western culture and governance. For Fanon, the problem lies in that the expulsion is directed at the West, rather than being an expulsion in-and-of itself. And in that expulsion though creative work, the black intellectual “fails to realize that he is utilizing techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country” (223). Thus Fanon, like Benedict Anderson, sees national consciousness as imagined by the citizens of a nation.³⁵

Such a connection between the failed black intellectual and the gesture of laughter, and humor more broadly, seems damning. But Fanon’s discussion of national culture does not end with this critique of the black intellectual. Instead, he presents a “ground up” approach to national culture that is embroiled in political struggle and later, a dynamic definition and redefinition of artistic practice rooted in national citizens articulating to each other what their collective identity means (240). He describes, in what I can only perceive as a utopian manner, how a nation’s culture comes to be from its

³⁴ For more on self-realization and violence, see Gordon 1995 and Young 2004.

³⁵ For a more sustained conversation on Fanon’s relationship to national consciousness, particularly in relation to Benedict Anderson, see McClintock 1995.

people, for its people, and addressed to its people. And in that self-address, “Comedy and farce disappear or lose their attraction...By losing its characteristics of despair and revolt, the drama becomes part of the common lot of the people and forms part of an action in preparation or already in progress” (241).

It is here in this marking of comedy and farce as of “despair” and “revolt,” rather than “utopian” and of the nation’s people, which is the productive space for thought. This dissertation’s overarching argument is that laughter and comedy make it possible to imagine new ways of interacting and being in the world through a dual return and move toward “comic spaces of non-reality” that we recognize but cannot yet realize. Thus in that way, Fanon’s articulation of national culture as “a fundamentally different set of relations between men [that] cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the people’s culture” because it “defines a new humanism both for itself and for others” (246) fits with my project. Although he does not mark comedy and laughter as modes of expression that could do the work of speaking to the people of the post-colony, rather than to the motherland, it is precisely this phenomenon that I find to be the most compelling reason to investigate comedy as a postcolonial scholar. Much of what Fanon describes as part of a *healthy* national culture I see in comedy and laughter. Both are forward-looking or future-oriented. Both seek to embody present struggles, rather than mine the past for solutions. Both have a utopian appeal and a desire to build a dynamic culture that interacts with the postcolonial subject, rather than pursue a means to subjugate them. Finally, both see subjectivity in the recognition of difference, in the polyphony of voices that make up nations.

And furthermore, how I imagine laughter, as utopian but also violently critical, straddles the same line that Fanon draws in his work between a non-European humanism which respects all humans and the means to achieve that humanism— self-realization through violence or as Samira Kawash coined it: “absolute violence.” Fanon’s figures of spewing and, earlier, of cursing, seem to play with that experience of embodied violence—of the heavily spasmodic expulsion of air. Perhaps retaking the black subject’s body through laughing violence could perform the “psychic redemption” that Sidi Omar sees in Fanon’s call to violence (270). Such an understanding of the potential of comedy exists in Myriam Chancy’s novel *The Loneliness of Angels*.

Finding A Connection: Spiritual Networks and Laughter in The Loneliness of Angels

Myriam Chancy’s *The Loneliness of Angels* frames the traumas of Haiti during François “Papa Doc” Duvalier’s presidency and later in the mid-2000’s during the coup of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Tropical Storm Jeanne through five characters. These five characters are connected by their ability to access “the *poto-mitan* or channel between the dormant and waking worlds” (58). The novel opens with Ruth, a Haitian-Syrian merchant and seer, anticipating her brutal murder at the hands of an angry mob following the coup. She sees that her former mentee, Romulus, the famous Konpa singer turned heroin addict, will be a part of that mob and meditates on photographs of him with one of the central characters, Catherine. Catherine, also a musician—although concert pianist, is Ruth’s niece and daughter of the empathic seer, Rose. Rose, the novel implies, has the strongest connection to the spirit world and becomes an alcoholic and later commits suicide because she cannot cope with her role as an intimate witness to all those murdered by

Duvalier and his *Tonton Macoutes*. Elsie, Rose's grandmother, is a pregnant Irish immigrant who left during the potato famine, hoping in 1847 to find a mystic in Haiti to guide her baby and the four other characters in the novel. The novel weaves these five characters' stories, moving through time and geography in non-linear ways in order to foreground the power of an intimate spiritual connection between individuals and communities. The novel concludes with Catherine embracing her ability to see into the past and future, becoming the spiritual figure that Elsie sets out to find.

The timeframes and settings of the novel suggest the highly traumatic and political valence of the plot. Chancy draws connections across colonial situations implying that Duvalier and the Anglo-Irish landlords of the late 19th century pocketed the profits from international aid and agricultural production, leaving the lower classes starving and fearful of government violence.³⁶ Chancy also explores a spiritual and chronological plane of knowledge that is non-linear, global, and boundary crossing as a way to resist those traumas. In an interview, she discusses how this plane of knowledge is modeled on the pagan-turned-Christian labyrinth, which is constructed to allow the walker to meditate on a question and through moving through the maze find the answer. She notes, "When you get to the middle of [the labyrinth], you arrive at what's called 'the rose,' which then provides you with an understanding" (unionpenumbra.org). To that effect, the novel's character Elsie argues that "time was like a circle defying chronology"

³⁶ Laurent Dubois's notes that Duvalier's government made use of industry monopolies, significant taxation of Haitian labor (including indentured servitude for migrant Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic), and international and American aid to line his coffers and the coffers of his closest political allies. See his book *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* for more detail. The Great Famine in Ireland was due in large part, according to Alvin Jackson, to "commercial restrictions; unstable market conditions; the existence of an unencumbered landlord class reluctant to invest capital in estate improvements; the continued subdivision of holdings into smaller, and, by extension, economically less viable units; and the over dependence of the poorer classes on the potato crop" (111). The potato as a crop gains its prominence as one of the only productive crops on the increasingly shrinking plots of land leased out to the Irish peasantry.

(239).³⁷ In this novel an understanding of the temporal and geographic maze is ultimately about coming to terms with the legacies and traumas of Haiti and colonialism through a turn to spirituality and sisterhood.

To this effect, Chancy's epigraph is telling. In it she quotes Khalil Gibran who says:³⁸

My house says to me, "Do not leave me, for here dwells your past." And the road says to me, "Come and follow me, for I am your future." And I say to both my house and the road, "I have no past, nor have I a future. If I stay here, there is going in my staying; and if I go there is staying in my going. Only love and death change all things. (As quoted in Chancy 6)

Gibran's settling on the relationship between love, death, and "change" while the past and future fold into one another is representative of the putting aside of trauma for connections of love between the individual, the living, and the dead. Chancy's novel forwards a transcultural, global, and distinctly feminine spiritual network and religious practice, which is and is not connected to Haiti's practice of *Vodou*, Latin America's practice of *Santería*, a Catholic or Christian understanding of prophesy, Jewish Cabbalism, and Celtic paganism.³⁹ Moreover, it weaves a variety of ethnic identities

³⁷ Chancy forwards in her acknowledgements to this novel a similar version of this idea. In discussing the novel's symbolic roots in the Christian labyrinth, she remarks, "Each walker [in a labyrinth] brings with them a history, a past, a genetic code. Within this process, time and memory function in a non-linear fashion, interacting with each other non-chronologically in such a way as to inform lived experience both discretely and symbiotically" (350). Such a point emphasizes her break from a narrative of progress. It also shows her investments in the metaphor of non-chronological spiritual journey that leads to greater understanding, knowledge, or healing.

³⁸ Gibran is a particularly interesting choice for an epigraph due to his well-documented engagement with spirituality and the influence of Catholicism, Islam, Sufism, and Judaism in his work. Chancy's inter-faith formulation of the spiritual realm echoes this move toward accepting multiple faiths in one's creative work. Layla Maleh argues that "he [Gibran] steps aside from the sequence of events to engage in boundless moral and philosophical speculations in which the speaker is immediately elevated from his position as narrator to the higher position of seer" (428). While I do not see Chancy adopting a "messiah" approach to her novel's tone, I do think that the move to articulate some sort of transcultural spirituality suggests a desire to reach across boundaries of religion and ethnicity to forward some notion of universal solidarity in her figuring of love and death.

³⁹ All of these practices are represented in Chancy's novel. Lucas—another mentee of Ruth-- practices *Santería*, Ruth a composite of Catholic and Jewish cabbalism, Elsie a kind of Celtic paganism, and all of them a little Haitian *Vodou*. Each of these faiths folds into each other, sometimes appearing incomplete and

together through the presence of Irish, Syrian, Afro-Haitian, and Jewish characters. This network values and defends connections of love and family over narratives of progress or return, focusing on the feminine figures of various religions and ethno-cultural contexts. Such a transcultural, feminine spiritual space connects her characters to each other, even if the traumas of their mortal lives would seek to interfere. This space is entered into through the transmission of memories by way of visions, ghosts, and spiritual communion. Through it they understand the motives of their family, the legacies of violence in the spaces they inhabit, and the future possibilities of overcoming these traumas through a different understanding of community.

More importantly for this chapter, this spiritual space is one through which laughter is able to assist in the break-down of binaries between mirth and despair,⁴⁰ life and death, past and present, and repetitive trauma and healing. Although laughter is not the most central aspect of this breakdown of binaries, it does prove to be a useful figure for exploring her ideas. Moreover, the fact that laughter is employed, with or without the extended attention of its author, as a means to break binaries points to the broader significance of laughter in postcolonial spaces. It raises the question: Why do authors return to laughter? To that end, the violence of a hearty laugh explored in this novel

sometimes illustrative. However, their convergence suggests Chancy's move toward spiritual solidarity, rather than division.

⁴⁰ Mirth might sound as if it is linked to laughter. After all, we often laugh when feeling mirth. Yet, it is not synonymous with laughter here or generally. Mirth is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a "pleasurable feeling; enjoyment, gratification; joy, happiness. Often used for religious joy and heavenly bliss" as well as a "diversion," mirth is an emotion that can be expressed by laughter, however not always ("mirth"). Laughter, conversely, is defined rather simply by the OED as a "sound" and "movement" of or pertaining to laughter ("laughter"). Oddly, absent from the OED's definitions are a direct alignment of laughter with joy, amusement, nervousness, or any emotion for that matter. The closest the OED gets is to say that laughter often has a "subject" that it responds to. It should not surprise then that laughter occurs in *The Loneliness of Angels* when characters feel despair, fear, and sadness as well as mirth, joy, or satisfaction. Or that her use of laughter highlights the amazingly ambiguous definition of laughter as "sound" and "movement." Finally, mirth is associated with substance abuse, which is strongly critiqued by the novel as a false or an escapist happiness.

directly engages with the ways that the body becomes vulnerable, particularly in the exposure of the neck. This vulnerability plays with the thinness of the boundary between life and death through the exposure of the jugular vein and the violent augmentation of the breath. Thus, it becomes a way for characters to respond to violent traumas and for Chancy to forward her overarching theme that that which connects us all is love and dying.

And furthermore, laughter's power comes, in this novel, through the shared experience of it as a corporeal sound and movement that is viscerally dramatic. Most people share the sense memory of jerking our head back or feeling the laughing spasms in our diaphragm. It is this shared memory that Chancy is positioning as having connective potential akin to shared spiritual communion. Therefore, I argue that the collapsing of time, the valuing of love as a connective emotion, and the shared understanding of death can be experienced on a micro-level as a reader or character in her novel through the sense memory of the full-bodied laugh. Moreover, the ambiguous definition of "sound" and "movement" provided by the Oxford English Dictionary foregrounds the ways in which laughter remains largely nebulous as an experience and concept, much like the varied understandings of spirituality.⁴¹ In the novel, this shared experience is positioned as antithetical to the major traumas of Haiti, specifically those enacted by Francois Duvalier's leadership. Laughter is used to respond to Duvalier's patriarchal political persona marking it as a powerful masculine embodiment of his

⁴¹ The OED provides the following definitions of laughter: "The action of laughing; the sounds and movements produced by this. Also: a manner of laughing," "An instance of laughing; a laugh," or "a subject or matter for laughter" ("laughter"). Such a series of definitions is strikingly unhelpful in their vagueness and suggest that laughter might not be the kind of phenomenon so easily described in a dictionary. Yet, what is helpful is how laughter is defined as distinctly of the body in the emphasis on sound and movement.

governance, yet suggesting that the atemporal, community-focused sisterhood of mentorship, mothering, and friendship is what has longevity and significance. Duvalier's carefully constructed identity as spiritual father of Haiti is problematized by the empowerment of such a transcultural, feminine spiritual space.

In order to better articulate such an idea I will look at three moments of laughter in the novel. The first occurs when Rose laughs at the election of Duvalier. The second will consider the role of laughter and dancing in the parallel car accidents in the novel. The first car accident is a suicide; Rose purposefully drives into oncoming traffic while recalling laughing and dancing with her daughter earlier that day. The second car accident will feature Rose's daughter, Catherine, as an adult finding herself in a similar situation, reliving her mother's suicide as if her own and remembering that same moment of laughing and dancing. The final example will dwell particularly on the recurring image of women laughing and dancing in the context of healing. This second mode of laughter is one of love and communion; the characters display their affection for each other through it.

Before I begin this analysis, it is important to note that the figuration of laughter as a border space between the living and the dead is not unique to Chancy's work. Jean Fisher in her book chapter on Native American artist Jimmie Durham discusses how the role of humorous *délire* or delirium "is the triumph of body over abstraction and the disarming of instrumental time" and that that triumph over the body emerges in "the syncope of laughter" (169). Her use of the word "syncope" is telling here, as it connects laughter to language, specifically the stunted language of words that have lost letters in their pronunciation. To lose the letters in words is to alter the connotative meanings of

those words and as syncope's other meaning suggests, losing consciousness. The OED definition of laughter points to the ways that it resists clear conceptual meaning in that it simply describes a particular kind of sound and movement. Yet communicating something seems essential to laughter as a response even if absent from the OED definition.

The idea of the embodied communication, of the “full-bodied” laugh, returns to the figure of *slaughter* I allude to in my title. The figure of *slaughter* has potential as a way out of the repetitive and indigestible nature of trauma by communicating trauma differently, extra-linguistically. We find the empowering laugh amidst the slaughter. As Fisher articulates more broadly, “Humor works to reveal the limits of life through the limits of what is representable. And it is through the experience of limits in our encounter with others that we also encounter the trauma of our finitude, which reminds us that we have not yet lost the possibility of forging a new ground of human solidarity” (174). The repetition of a laugh which is so embodied in Chancy's novel showcases the finitude of the full-bodied laugh while also suggesting that it is that shared experience of spasmodic contortion that has the potential to unlock solidarity. This solidarity is formed through a spiritual network of individuals that embrace and empower victims of violence in both Haiti and Ireland in their laughing.

Rose: Noun or Verb, defiance and answer

As I mentioned earlier, the “rose” or center of the labyrinth is the destination of meditative wandering, the place where the walker receives an answer to his or her question. Accordingly, Chancy notes, “Rose's character only appears in the middle. And

the information you receive there is about the Duvalier regime you don't get elsewhere. Only she is able to release it, because as a mystic she's been processing the pain of people who were tortured and killed during the regime" (unionpenumbra.org). To do this, Rose stirs at night, spending the wee hours sitting at her family's kitchen table, waiting for the ghost victims of the *Tonton Macoute* to visit and consume all of the leftovers from dinner that day.⁴²

Her first moment of full-bodied laughter occurs just as Duvalier is elected. Rose's laugh is, first, a laugh of defiance; its aggression figured in her "flashing teeth" and consuming, gaping mouth (Chancy 164). She laughs at the idea that "over a million people voted for the Doc," insinuating that the election was rigged (164). Moreover, in laughing, Rose recognizes the magnitude of violence that will occur during the regime--estimates range from 30,000 to 60,000 murdered during his presidency by the *Tonton Macoute* (Metz 288-289). Her laughter signals the irony of his election, which succeeded because of his mobilization of black citizens--including the poor, black military officers, and black youth-- and the support of the military in combating his political opponents (Sylvain 67-68). The previous ruling mulatto bourgeoisie, particularly illustrative of the policies of former President Lescot, discriminated against the black majority and the practice of *Vodou* (66). Duvalier's opponent, Louis Dejoie, in 1956 was no different in his display of disgust for black Haitians (66). Thus Duvalier's reinforcement of blackness and the *Vodou* religion (he was a member of the Griots, a group of young black Haitian

⁴² Although only tangentially related to the argument I am making here, I am interested in the dark comedy of ghosts who eat all your leftovers. Chancy is clearly making a comment about consumption, trauma, and the afterlife here, which has interesting implications for comedy and tragedy. Even at the novel's darkest it inserts the incongruity and inconvenience of the dead on the living in ways that induce an uncomfortable chuckle.

intellectuals who studied *Vodou* history and thought) cemented his place as the leader of Haiti's executive branch, which effectively ruled the nation without political check.

Moreover, Rose's laughter at Duvalier's election and her ability to see the destruction which will come with his rule resists the cult of spirituality that he constructed around him. Duvalier's attempt to cement his spiritual place as leader of Haiti is exemplified in the accounts of his communion at *Trou Foban*, home to evil spirits (*loas*) memorialized during the time of slavery. It is said that he invited the evil spirits to inhabit his palace with him, and the force of those spirits remained until his death in 1971. Legend then follows that he could not be overthrown because he had these spirits backing him (Marlowe). To that end, scholar Darien Davis notes:

While laying claim to Western models [of political power], [Duvalier] proclaimed himself the spiritual father, even the messiah, of the traditional peasantry. He skillfully played a double, social and religious, role. On the one hand, he partly controlled vodou priests... and claimed to be able to use witchcraft. On the other, he ingratiated himself with the Catholic clergy. (104)

Rose, then, as true seer and laughter is positioned as the authentic spiritual figure that is opposite to the false syncretism of Duvalier. Although the transcultural, feminine spiritual network that is foregrounded in this novel is just as syncretic as Duvalier's combination of *Vodou* and Catholicism, it does not manipulate or seek power in its employment. Rather, this spiritual network is more about the acknowledgement of trauma and resistance to history's erasure of that trauma. If political leaders such as Duvalier can manipulate their place in history, being seen as "an insertion of the eternal into the temporal" (Nicholls 233), then legitimatizing a network of women who manage to triumph in a spiritual place over the traumas of Haiti is particularly compelling. Moreover, there is a sense that the "triumph of the eternal into the temporal" is actually

accomplished by these women and thus shows how limited Duvalier's spiritual power is.⁴³

The description of Rose's laugh, uttered while drinking in a bar, is significant in and of itself. When hearing that Duvalier had won the election by a landslide, she laughingly responds: "head thrown back, mouth open, showing its red cave behind her flashing white teeth" (164). Her violent laugh contorts the body in such a way that it leaves Rose vulnerable, her neck fully exposed. Such an image is apt in its proximity to death and its parallel to the deaths that will occur once Duvalier takes power. The omniscient narrator of the novel further remarks, "Rose laughs because she knows that now begins the carnage, now the madness. Especially hers...It's the beginning of the end and she has to laugh...She's made to remember *Mamie* [Elsie] prophesying...that girl will receive the devil's victims" (164). In two ways, then, the laugh signals death: the political deaths of Haitians and Rose's own "death" as an independent woman. She takes on the burden of witnessing or what Cathy Caruth remarks as an "enigma of survival...not simply an effect of destruction" (58). She experiences through proxy the violence, in the parade of ghosts that visit her in her kitchen, comically consuming the leftover in her fridge.

Jean Fisher draws our attention to Freud and his concept of latency. She recalls Freud's assertion that:

the enigma lies not in the forgetting of the event but that the survivor is not fully conscious of it as it occurs. The return of the traumatic experience is not the signal of the direct experience, but an attempt to master what was never fully grasped in

⁴³ To a lesser degree, the novel also positions music as a means of connecting to the spiritual space. This explains Ruth's role as a music teacher to students she mentors and Catherine's initial pursuit of music as a career. However, Catherine discovers that music is a less fulfilling substitute for the practice of spiritual healing. Thus her hands, which as I will explore later, become the site of her ability to heal, rather than her means of generating music on the piano.

the first place. It is precisely the *survivor who suffers through the trauma of the missing other*. The survivor is fraught with guilt, shame and bewilderment at having somehow survived unharmed an event whose enormity is beyond the sea's power of conscious incorporation." [emphasis original] (as cited in Fisher 166)

Freud points to the important role that survival plays in trauma and the fundamental issue with Rose as a character—embodying a person who witnesses trauma and cannot come to terms with her survival and knowledge of violence. There is a sense that that laughing sound and movement signal a death, first of her sanity and then her life, connecting the image of the open mouth to that of the screaming mouth.

The contorted, violent laugh described, however, should remind us of one essential ingredient to a laugh—that of the breath. And it is through the breath that laughter is also, paradoxically, deeply connected to living, to the respiration that is more essential to human survival than shelter, food, or water. To that end, the fact that Rose survives the political violence in Haiti under Duvalier as does her immediate family suggests that her ability to laugh in such a prophetic and violent way is, in part, what saves her, if ironically it does not save her from herself. Such a relationship to divine gifts is mirrored in the novel's repeated references to Noah, articulated by Catherine.⁴⁴ Like Noah, each of these characters feels burdened by the knowledge of destruction, "the visions of annihilation" (Chancy 91), of knowing its coming and of living through it. Further the gift of knowing the divine appears less as a gift and instead a violence that can be passed on. In Noah's case, he passes on his violence through the cursing of his grandson and in the case of the novel's characters, violence is passed on through the

⁴⁴ The key piece to understanding the gift of receiving the dead and bearing witness to Papa Doc's rampant violence lies in Chancy's novel extensive use of the story of Noah, the flood, and his drunkenness. One might expect that the reference to Noah's curse might lead to a mediation on or allusion to historical justifications of slavery. However, Noah's story in the novel more so does the work of asking what is to be done with trauma? How does a person deal with trauma, even in situations of divine intervention and intent? Noah's drunkenness is repeated in the novel as Romulus and Rose both struggle with substances, and further Catherine's coping with Ruth's murder is at first mediated through heavy drinking.

failure to act on knowledge—whether it is Ruth refusing to help Rose, Rose’s suicide and desertion of her daughter, or Romulus’s addict abandonment of the world.

The most important idea that Catherine forwards with regard to Noah is the idea that the destruction of the earth and the story of the ark is fundamentally a story about the survival of trauma. Catherine continually asks, “What did Noah think *then* as he fulfilled moments of a history yet to be written” [emphasis original] (90), then answers her own question with the argument that Noah thought he needed a stiff drink.

Noah got good and drunk when it was all over. He needed to let go of all that exactitude, of the order of things. Getting drunk allowed his mind to overflow and let the visions of annihilation ebb away. That kind of destruction gnaws away a part of your soul and then takes up residence in the hole it’s eaten. (91)

She remarks that he mustn’t have known that he would survive, and that watching those doomed to drown “gnaws at your soul.” Faith and the promise of God do not carry Noah through the experience of the flood, and consequently, “Noah’s only thought was to plant the first vine” (90). Rose’s laugh is the laugh of survival and destruction, prefigured by her in many ways solitary ability to see the future. Moreover, as the next section will make clear, it is her inability to look toward the role of laughter and community, and her relationship to alcohol that will prevent her benefiting from that spiritual community while she is alive. This first laugh is, accordingly, a failed one; its power falls short. It recognizes and exposes the politics of Duvalier but does not turn to the shared and contagious nature of laughter in a community.

Icy Intersection and Faltering Breath

The other moments of laughter in this novel also perform the dual function of referencing life and death. Although Rose’s laugh at Duvalier is more obvious in its

political valence, the moments of laughter that occur in her car accident and suicide, and her daughter's accident have a more distinct relationship to the question of life and death. However, laughter emerges in these moments of trauma in a way that breaks rather than reproduces the repetitive nature of violence and trauma. This is a dramatic progression that foregrounds the possibilities of laughter in communal circumstances.

After Rose begins having visions, she marries Ruth's brother and flees with him to Canada, where they will be safe from Duvalier's government and from Haitian ghosts. Yet Rose quickly finds that she cannot escape the nighttime visitors by moving and becomes increasingly more dependent on alcohol to cope with her gift. Eventually, she commits suicide by purposefully sliding on an icy road into an intersection and oncoming traffic. Right before Rose's car is struck, she meditates, "with the warm breath of her daughter's remembered laughter, she feels the impact" (195). In this moment, her daughter's laughter represents life, particularly the warmth of a body's metabolism. It is set in stark distinction to her suicide and the icy context of her accident, in a wintry, rural Canadian town. Moreover, before Rose drives into the intersection, causing the accident that will kill her, "she finds herself holding her breath, suddenly conscious of the relationship of oxygen and life" (194). Her holding in of breath signals her conflicted relationship to dying in that holding air in her lungs prolongs her body's ability to respire. Yet her refusal to continue to breathe signals her willingness to die.

Interestingly enough, this relationship to breathing out and in has broader significance, according to philosopher Brian Boyd, in terms our tendency to play, learn, and relax our bodies. He argues that breathing out in moments of speech and laughter relaxes the body and signals our willingness to communicate and form communities with

others (5). Holding our breath in, as we do when we cry, signals a building of tension and a rejection of play and communication. Boyd focuses on a binary relationship between laughter and sobbing in his essay “Laughter and Literature: A Play Theory of Humor,” marking them as inverses of each other. When one laughs, he asserts, primarily the laugher breathes out (5).⁴⁵ When someone cries, he or she primarily breathes in. Yet he notes, both are socially contagious and contain specific emotional resonances (4). The significance of breathing out or breathing in lies in its relationship to tension and relaxation. If you breathe in, your body tenses up, but if you breath out, it relaxes. To breathe out is to join the world, to leave a piece of yourself beyond your body. To breathe in is to take something from the outside and to keep it inside of you.

Such as sentiment is forwarded in other places in the novel. For example, when a young Catherine meditates on the loss of her mother. She reflects, “Even though there has been a funeral... I held on to the possibility that my mother might rise up, and return from the frozen ground. It was a period of looking back rather than looking forward, *of pulling in rather than expanding out*” [emphasis mine] (65). The pulling in that Catherine describes seems consistent with this move toward generating tension in the body, of the hiccups of sobs, and of the limited internalization of the outer world within the body. Catherine’s small breaths hold on to her mother as living rather than dead.

This sense of holding in reverses later in the novel when Catherine returns to Haiti to attend Ruth’s funeral. At the funeral, Catherine repeats negative behaviors associated with her mother, drinking heavily and then frantically driving through Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince. At one point, Catherine realizes that her car is about to be t-boned in an

⁴⁵ Interesting too, Boyd notes that speech is also enacted on an exhale, and that unlike chimpanzees, humans find it very difficult to speak on the inhale. Both speech and laughter are social responses. Perhaps this sociality can be in part due to their physiological relationship to the exhale.

intersection. She is faced with the same choice her mother had: accelerate quickly and let the car hit her trunk or be complacent, hold her breath, and let the car hit her. She chooses to press down on the gas pedal. Significantly, Catherine in the midst of her car accident has a vision and relives her mother's suicide—"I realize with shock, disgust and dismay that my mother had chosen her exit, and I remember, horrified, our dance in the kitchen before she got in the car" (252). Rose chose to hold in her breath and die. Yet in Catherine's accident, she "resigns [herself] and [lets her] breath escape" (250). These two parallel motor accidents are supposed to repeat each other while signaling a new outcome in the second case. Both car accidents hinge on the memory of Rose dancing with her child in her home. Yet that memory serves different purposes in each accident, in one case simply preceding a death and in the other accident saving Catherine. These two parallel accidents then show the ways in which Rose fails to embrace her gift—to resign and breathe out. She does not make use of the spiritual networks available to her, while Catherine will find in her car accident a watershed moment which pushes her to pursue a greater relationship with the spiritual world and to take on a role as a healer.

The two breaths stand as opposites, the one a holding in, and the other an expanding out. It does not seem like coincidence either that the holding in signals death here, as Catherine's holding in of breath in a parallel moment after Ruth's funeral prevents her from connecting with her community and is the reason she ends up driving wildly and crashing the family car in Port-au-Prince. In the remembrance of Rose and Ruth's funeral, the language of pulling in is paired with looking back, which should return the reader to Chancy's epigraph. What, if any, significance does the act of looking back, rather than forward, have? Gibran suggests that the past and future are false paths

to follow. Thus, Catherine in both moments of mourning seems to be missing the point in saying her problem was that she could not move forward. The components of time are at odds with the loss of a loved one. Although Catherine wants to say her inability to look forward was the issue at both funerals, in fact, as her accident will reveal, it is her inability to join her community, to give something of herself to the world that is inhibiting her. Perhaps, and the novel will explicitly state this later when Catherine decides to embrace her destiny as a seer, she will find her mother in joining in the dance and “expanding out” her breath through laughter. Thus, as Robert Provine articulates, the importance of laughter stems in part from its ability to solidify a community. He states, “Mutual playfulness, in-group feeling and positive emotional tone...mark the social settings of most naturally occurring laughter” (cited in Storey 76). Chancy seems to push that idea further and in order to provide the terms of community—love and death, shows the ways in which laughter and dancing become manifestations of this community.

The healing and laughing dancing

The image of mother and daughter laughing and dancing is mirrored once more in visions that Catherine has in the novel, of women “heads swung back, their mouths open, and then seemed to be laughing” (200). The remembered community of the mother/daughter bond is expanded for Catherine into a large community of women whose synchronized breathing, sisterhood, and power to heal respond to the traumas in Haiti. Moreover, Catherine sees her mother among the dancing women turning the memory of dancing and laughing with her mother in their kitchen into a moment of triumph, rather than a moment destroyed by her mother’s suicide. To that end, Catherine

intuits that the dancing and laughing women are participating in a ritual that exacts vengeance against the wrongs they have suffered; their dancing and laughing are movements of triumph (200). Her mother's depression, a result of the parade of Duvalier victims who visit her in the night needing to tell her their story, can find its resolution not in the false mirth produced by alcohol but genuine spiritual empowerment that comes through connection to others. In having these visions, Catherine finds in the dancing, laughter and spiritual sisterhood responses to moments of crisis and the everyday.

Through this process, Catherine takes her places as a healer and significantly, enacts her healing powers through touching her cousin's abdominal solar plexus—the root of laughter. Catherine, in Haiti after her violent car accident, visits her old friend, Lucas, who has been consumed by a false spirituality, that of *Abakuá* or the Cuban spiritual fraternity of men. There she is nearly poisoned by him. Her cousin, rather, is exposed to the contaminated holy water of his altar to St. Peter and Mary. In order to save her cousin, Catherine reaches out and “[places her] hand on Mary-France's solar plexus and [she tells] her to breathe, just breathe, and to think of the breath going through her and through her, in circles from the top of her head down to her spine” (265).⁴⁶ It is no coincidence that the bodily act of breathing rooted in the diaphragm is connected to healing. The solar plexus is the location of a *chakra* or one of the seven spiritual centers in the body, according to Indian thought. It is also where if hit, people have “the wind knocked out of them.” In referencing the solar plexus, Chancy gestures toward the ways in which specific corporeal sites can be both physiologically and spiritually significant.

⁴⁶ The area of the solar plexus is associated with the diaphragm and the feeling of “having the wind knocked out of you.” Yet it is also considered to be the emotional center of the body, associated with the liver, intestines, pancreas and skin (Albanese 492). In using the precise words “solar plexus,” Chancy asks that we think of the spiritual significance of that area of the abdomen as well as the physiological response one might have to distress.

To that end, laughter agitates the diaphragm in a way that mimics the loss of control that one might experience being hit in the stomach. Yet instead of signaling danger, it initiates release and relaxation. The “broken spasmodic sounds” (Kundera 87) of laughter are, in fact, not broken but intimately engaged in the practice of repair. And this repair happens distinctly in Chancy’s novel through the dancing and laughing women who value love and connection to communities past, present, and future. Thus, Chancy creates new rules of engagement or a new game with which to approach trauma—particularly the traumas of Haitian political despotism. Her folded spiritual space mimics the descriptions of laughter as of life and of death, gesturing toward the reader’s own sense memory of laughter. The laugh of love and death resides in the narrative just as it sits in our chest, throat, and mouth. Thus like Fanon, laughter is violent in Chancy; yet in both examples this violence leads to a utopic humanism. The violence of laughter functions as a conduit through which one can imagine spaces of non-reality.

Furthermore, the coexistence of laughter and linguistic testimony points to the ways in which traditional forms of testifying to violence are not only implausible in many scenarios but also limiting.⁴⁷ Being able to testify in a courtroom or in an even smaller community setting requires a willingness of the community to hear testimony. But if that is unavailable, her novel suggests a way in which the corporeal engagement with the boundaries of life and death, here experience through the laughing contorted body, might

⁴⁷ Trauma theories’ prime test cases that of the Nuremburg Trials and the Truth and Reconciliation Committee require that nations recognize the traumas they inflicted on their population. These large scale and widely publicized events modeled a classic understanding of moving beyond trauma through testimony, community acceptance, and reparations (See for example the work of Jeffery Alexander, Cathy Caruth, Shoshanna Felman). The flaws of this process have been explored thoroughly by Shoshanna Felman in her book *The Juridical Unconscious* and I would further draw attention to a scholar I have previously cited in this chapter, Maryrose Casey’s article on Aboriginal drama, for a clear articulation of how laughter stands in place of clear naming and testifying to productive ends for that community.

do that kind of work without needing to ask permission of the community at large.⁴⁸ Her image of laughter is significant from a postcolonial perspective as it, like Fanon, dares to imagine new modes of engagement with racism, violence, colonial legacies, and trauma. Laughter, in her novel, participates in a transcultural, feminine spiritual network that is available to the witnesses, survivors, and sufferers of trauma. It becomes a tool to be utilized to motivate “change” as the Gibran epigraph describes it or “solidarity” as Fisher describes. Thus with Chancy’s novel, an important figure for postcolonial studies emerges—that of the spiritual, community-building laugh.

Grace Nichols’s Drowning/Healing Laugh or How the Fat Black Woman Might Change Us All

Grace Nichols’s contribution to this discussion of figures of postcolonial laughter comes from the gendered and triumphant valence of laughter in her poems. Whereas Chancy’s novel features laughter as on the edges of life and death, performing a spiritual community-building function, Nichols’s poems often feature women whose community is grounded in reality and whose power comes from within, rather than solely through relationships with others. To that end, scholar John McLeod argues, “the advocacy of female solidarity, black consciousness or coordinated communities of resistance are . . . absent from Nichols’s work” (120). Although McLeod’s reading is apt, it is possible to read the fat black woman as a unifying figure who in her subversive nature has potential to build solidarity. Accordingly, both Chancy and Nichols inflect their laughter with a

⁴⁸ Here I am thinking in particular of Jeffery C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman and Bernard Giesen’s argument in *Cultural Trauma, Collective Identity* that a broader collective of people, not just those who suffered violence, must recognize the trauma of that minority group. Could Chancy’s formulation change how we understand the idea of the collective and the process of testifying?

gendered valence, relying on, respectively, a woman-oriented spiritual practice and a celebration of the black, fat, and female body. Nichols, moreover, addresses this issue by asserting that “Although *The Fat Black Woman’s Poems* came out of a sheer sense of fun of having a fat black woman doing exactly as she pleases, at the same time she brings into being a new image...a universal figure (287). Both women engage in what Chancy might herself call “a dynamic fusion of poetics and women-centered politics” (xxi). Thus, they stand apart from Fanon’s proto-national laughing as it comes hand-in-hand with his dismissal of the feminine.⁴⁹ Therefore what both Chancy and Nichols provide if placed next to Fanon’s *oeuvre* is a complication of that gendered politics.

Nichols’s poem foregrounds more forcefully issues of gender than Chancy whose feminine spiritual practice is more inclusive of male figures.⁵⁰ Nichols’s poems make use of the black, female body to forward a politics of self-affirmation and resistance to Western ideas about gendered and raced bodies.⁵¹ Nichols’s poems are engaged in thinking about how the laugh breaks free from trauma, from slaughter.⁵² At the same time, this section will attend to the nuances that a closer attention to “othered” femininity

⁴⁹ See Anne McClintock’s discussion in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives* or her book “Fanon and Gender Agency.” See also MC Kalisa’s “Black Women and Literature: Revisiting Frantz Fanon’s Gender Politics” and Madhu Duby’s “The ‘true lie’ of nation: Fanon and Feminism.”

⁵⁰ Chancy does discuss the role of Romulus in an interview. She argues, “The reason why I’ve done that [include Romulus in the novel] is because I’ve realized that change cannot be led only by women, that in feminist movements in different parts of the world, women are still—even in the most privileged countries like the United States—behind in many ways ...What I realize is that men have to be on board, part of that conversation. In a place like Haiti, men often are privileged by their gender, but don’t realize they are as impoverished in every other way” (unionpenumbra.org).

⁵¹ In fact, the exclusivity of Nichols’s poems have been critiqued by scholars like Mara Scanlon who assert that the fixation on fatness, blackness, and femininity seems limited and perhaps too reliant on “biologism” and “an unproblematized selfhood” (62).

⁵² Here I am reminded of Melissa Johnson and Gabriele Griffin’s assertion that “Nichols’s poetry is, in many respects, the perfect example of an *écriture féminine*” (Griffin 33) which is “subversive,” and “volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval...to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter” (Cixous 1099). In the same way the figure of the laugh in slaughter does this subversive, shattering work.

might bring to this conversation about the influence of laughter in postcolonial contexts. Finally, I argue that the feminine valence of Nichols's poems makes the laugh of triumph all the more powerful because it validates not only blackness, but femininity and alternative bodies—as seen through the valuing of fatness as opposed to a Western ideal of the starved, thin body.⁵³

In order to arrive at this concept of triumph, I will first consider Nichols's poem "Waiting for Thelma's Laughter." This poem features a paradox that might sound familiar as Nichols positions the laugh as both of death and of living much as Chancy does. Yet, "Waiting for Thelma's Laughter" is temporally interesting. It contradicts the triumphant chuckle that I will conclude with in that Thelma's laugh does not occur within the boundaries of the poem. The reader expects that Thelma's laugh will come and anticipates that "[her] laughter's gonna come| to drown and heal us all" (line 20) but we do not actually hear that laugh.

After considering "Waiting for Thelma's Laughter," I will move on to "The Assertion." "The Assertion" will feature a laugh that I deem very important to a postcolonial project: the laugh of triumph and success. Unlike Fanon and Chancy who position the laugh as potentially powerful when in conjunction with other ideas, Nichols's "The Assertion" is a laugh of power experienced. The fat, black woman laughing in this poem does not need to hope for acceptance or safety. She is already confident and safe, reveling in what makes her body magnificent. As Ana Bringas López remarks, "Nichols here uses humor as the main deconstructive strategy, and irony turns out to be an efficient tool for subverting and exposing the myths that have oppressed

⁵³ For a good discussion of how Nichols empowers black femininity in urban space, see John McLeod's *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*.

black women” (29-30). Rather than be the victim of slavery or the over-sexualized, reproductive female, Nichols instead turns toward affirmation of the body.⁵⁴ Dennis Walder describes her comic tone as “sly, brash, exuberant, laid-back and wonderfully economic, refusing cliché” (148). “The Assertion” then shows the power of a laugh like Thelma’s, which we can at first only anticipate.

Healing and Drowning in Laughter in “Waiting for Thelma’s Laughter”

“Waiting for Thelma’s Laughter” is a domestic poem set in Thelma’s living room that features a woman who has big aspirations for the world. The narrator asserts,

You [Thelma] wanna take the world
 In hand
 And fix-it-up
 The way you fix your living room (lines 1-4)

Thelma’s world is one of extremes. The living room is set opposite the world, fire and honey can be held (line 7), and her “head’s too small for [her] dreams” (lines 10-11). The extremes are held in suspension through the short lines and cascading stanzas, which facilitate the feeling of delay that is made explicit by the end of the poem. The speaker, we learn, is “watching,” and, as the title asserts, “waiting” for laughter whose presence resolves the extremes of the poem.

As this entire chapter has explored, laughter often functions as a rupture and a paradox. One does not expect to find the laugh embedded in slaughter, and yet it resides right at the center of the word, waiting to break through. Although this poem does not

⁵⁴ It is this gesture of affirmation that might be her distinguishing feature. For a more in depth discussion of her use of the female body, see Joanne Nystrom Janssen’s “‘Feeling Fine’: The Transatlantic Female Body in Grace Nichols’s *The Fat Black Woman*” and Gabriele Griffin’s “Writing the Body: Reading Joan Riley, Grace Nichols and Ntozake Shange.” For a discussion of Nichols’s connection to Cixous and Bakhtin see Melissa Johnson’s “{Re-)Writing the Marginalized Body” in *Postcolonial Perspectives on Women Writers*.

explicitly feature a laugh, the speaker already knows what the laugh can do and what will happen when Thelma finally laughs. The palimpsest nature of time in this poem both resolves the suspension between “world” and “living room,” and foreshadows the possibility of that resolution in laughter. The complicated nature of death and rebirth has broader significance in a Caribbean context, particularly for thinkers like Edouard Glissant and Paul Gilroy, who imagine the Atlantic as the site of trauma—of bodies rotting on the ocean floor, and also as the genesis of a Caribbean cultural identity.⁵⁵ Furthermore, as Ana Bringas López argues, “This ‘comic vision’ is a very common strategy in West Indian women’s writing, and as O’Callaghan points out, it ‘entails subversion, which defies or challenges the codes of rational, hierarchical ‘antinomic’ society’ in order to effect a transformation (1993: 85)” (as cited in López 29-30). Nichols’s addition to this story of a phoenix-like drowning is to introduce the laugh as the catalyst for this dynamic relationship. But why the laugh as catalyst?

The poem features three different modes of articulation: two failed articulations, and one successful. The speaker comments that Thelma interacts with her environment through her hands, which have an almost supernatural ability to hold or generate fire and honey (lines 7-8). Yet the efforts of her hands, particularly in relation to her living room, are destroyed by her children, who are “running around/ acting like lil clowns/breaking the furniture down” (lines 14-15). Further, Thelma interacts with the world by screaming in frustration at her “too small” head, which has no space for her “dreams.” The poem then critiques the logic of proponents of “dreaming big” or investing one’s energy in

⁵⁵ Interesting too, Joanne Nystrom Janssen discusses Nichols’s critique of the figure of the ship in Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, arguing that the body is the site of cultural mixture. Moreover, she argues that the body then becomes a place of inhabited cross-cultural exchange, rather than floating on an ocean of “undefined, connecting cultural space” (32-34).

children as a way to break systems of oppression. Children and dreams are antagonizing in the poem.

Instead, Nichols returns to the body, to the breath and diaphragm spasms that produce laughter. In fact, this laugh accomplishes what her other efforts have not. The inclusive use of “us” in the final lines, “your laughter’s gonna come/to drown and heal us all” (lines 19-20) expands Thelma’s world beyond her living room. While the speaker suggests that she and the children are healed and drown by Thelma’s laughter, there is a sense in which this corporeal act bleeds into the realm of the world. Thus “Waiting for Thelma’s Laughter” is a good bridge between the notion of rupture and spirituality seen in Fanon and Chancy while also introducing and pushing all the more the significance of laughter’s ability to enable the body to productively interact with its surroundings. Whether we are talking about Fanon’s refusal to be written upon by white eyes or Chancy’s and Nichols’s embodied life/death laugh, all three authors’ figuration of laughter facilitate productive interactions with the world.

Yet Nichols gives the reader more. In her poem “The Assertion,” she articulates a politics of success and body acceptance. The poem begins with contempt and refusal. Nichols’s poetic figure, marked as “the fat black woman” of her collection’s title, languishes:

Heavy as a whale
 eyes beady with contempt
 and a kind of fire of love
 the fat black woman sits
 on the golden stool
 and refuses to move (lines 1-6)

But contempt for what, to whom does she need to assert herself? The poem continues in the next stanza, pointing at “white robed chiefs” (line 7) who have resigned, perhaps to the woman’s position on her “golden stool.” Their posture is a “[posture] of resignation” (line 9), a vague description but one that seems to mirror the crossed-armed assertion of rights that the fat black woman might be presenting to them; both groups expressing contempt from their “eyes beady” (line 2). Thus, Nichols’s poem is inflected with issues of gender—who is entitled to sit on the golden stool, and what are the parameters that define entitlement? Surely the woman must cede her place to her “white robed chiefs” (line 7)?

The golden stool, moreover, could be a reference to the Ashanti golden stool, which scholar Melissa Johnson reminds us was believed to contain the *sunsum* (soul or spirit) of the Ashanti and if sat upon would result in execution or war (216). She furthers that a woman sitting on the Ashanti golden stool would be particularly shocking, as the silver stool of the Ashanti queen was the female seat of power (216). Yet the fat black woman asserts, “*This is my birthright*” [emphasis original] (line 14), shattering the presumption that her male counterparts might be entitled to something more—implicit in her gesture of “refusal” (line 6). The ringing “birthright” troubles the designation of women as inferior by birth. To that end, the color of the men’s robes and the association of the fat, black woman with a whale might also point to the West African and Caribbean spirit Mami Wata (or Mother Water). Often depicted as a mermaid, the original representation of the deity might be based on the West African manatee (van Stipriaan 324). Worshipers of Mami Wata wear red and white, the white signifying, in particular, femininity. Mami Wata is a spirit associated with prosperity and sexual fidelity and has

been present in Nichols's home nation of Guyana since at least the 1740s (van Stipriaan 327). Nichols then makes use of a variety of African and Afro-diasporic spiritual traditions and stories to bestow her fat, black woman with divine power.

But what is perhaps most interesting for me, given this project, is that the line, "*This is my birthright*," is connected through a series of enjambments to a non-linguistic utterance, specifically the chuckle.

This is my birthright
 says the fat black woman
 giving a fat black chuckle
 showing her fat black toes. (lines 14-17).

The question of gendered rights and the reversal of the paradigm, woman is less than man, gains its poetic force from its connection to "the fat black chuckle," a non-linguistic utterance whose signification is inaccessible except for its relationship to the woman's "fatness" and her "blackness." It expresses through its adjectival association an identity. Further it is a "gift" that the fat black woman bestows upon her male counterparts, "showing her fat black toes" in a gesture that demands submission from her resigned "white robed chiefs."

And, in connecting this "fat black chuckle" to her "beady" eyes, it becomes clear that contempt is only half of the woman's emotions. She is contemptuous and experiencing "a kind of fire of love" (line 3), which can be read as a love of the self, of the "fat black toes" and her "body ringed in folds| pulse beat at her throat" (line 17, line 10-13)⁵⁶. This self-love is one that resists rhetoric that would point out all the things she is not—white, male, thin--and forwards a celebration, or chuckle, at her loveliness.

⁵⁶ This fire can be contrasted with Thelma's fire and honey "of [her] hands" which are not as powerful. Yet, the connection across the poems might suggest that Thelma's fire of self love might be lurking, not yet fully expressed.

Amina Mama articulates the significance of this gesture when she notes, “During the 1970s, black girls growing up in Britain were by and large subjected to the dominant society’s notion of female ‘attractiveness’: notions which appear in their desire for long, flowing hair, lighter skin and aquiline features” (149). Nichols then refutes of the concept of the ugly black body and insists on that body’s right to be worshiped, loved, and respected. Much as Fanon feels his body written as violent, lascivious, and dangerous, Nichols resists marking the black female body as ugly, promiscuous, greedy, or lazy.

Here is the desire of the self, rather than the desire for whiteness and masculinity—interestingly connected to the whiteness of the robes. The word “chiefs” suggests not only masculinity but also leadership and sovereign rights. Further, the group of “chiefs” is juxtaposed with the singular “fat black woman,” thus complicating a reading of the “collective” experience of black femininity. Unlike “Waiting for Thelma’s Laughter,” which ends with the expansive, healing laugh, “The Assertion” features the solo figure of the woman. Is this a poem of individualism at the expense of the collective? Could we perhaps see this as a rewritten train encounter? Rather than the arrested laugh, which requires the curse to appear, the fat black woman refuses to succumb to her “cultural imposition” and instead she chuckles.

The particular valence of the poetic subject’s laugh as “chuckle” generates a tone of amusement, of superiority over the subject, and of pleasure. The Oxford English Dictionary describes the key features of the chuckle as a laugh of “triumph,” “vehemence,” and also of the “suppressed” inward laugh of amusement at others (“chuckle”). Thus the destruction of an epistemology of inequality arises from the poetic subject’s laugh, which is intense and passionate. Yet its passion is controlled in a way

that we don't see in Fanon or Chancy. Here the chuckle works in tandem with the fat, black woman rather than arising from frustration or the overwhelming corporeal response to the world. The imaginative space of this poem is more a space of realizable potential, of affirming the fat, black woman's subjectivity as born from both her mind and her body.

Conclusion

Each example of laughter explored in this chapter has an intensity that initiates ruptures in understanding and the generation of new worldviews that had previously been marginal or non-existent. Fanon's cursing laugh denies the ways in which his body is written "black." Just as the intensity of laughter, which embodies life and death in Chancy's novel, forwards an entirely new spiritual universe that allows individuals to connect with those who have died or who have been lost. Nichols's vehement chuckle singularly affirms the black woman's body and marks it as the origin of community (as seen in "Waiting for Thelma's Laughter") and of self-love (in "The Assertion"), significantly in the very body that Western society seeks to denigrate. Therefore, although the valence of each of these examples differs widely, they all have a rooting in the ways that laughter affirms both the body as well as spiritual or epistemological difference. They break boundaries between race, gender, the self and the collective, and the realities of oppression. In breaking these boundaries, these modes of laughter create hybrid spaces where new realities emerge--what I introduced as comic spaces of non-reality. They challenge the justification of slaughter and instead value the centered response—the laugh that stand out in the middle of the experience of violence. In the next

chapter, the rupture and intensity of laughter will be combined with language use in more explicit ways. The chapter will explore the relationship between non-linguistic articulations or gestures and language, posing the question of what wins out when language seems infused with laughter and comedy. Consequently, the next chapter will maintain an interest in the body but will assess the effects of comedy on language.

Comic gestures, comic language? A Study of Language and Logic in G.V. Desani's All About H. Hatterr and Salman Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh

In his 1997 conference address “The Animal That Therefore I am (and More to Follow),” Jacques Derrida frames his naked encounter with a cat’s gaze by thinking through the reigning Western philosophical argument that man is distinguished from animals by his capacity to name and feel shame/modesty (135). His essay problematizes definitions of humanity – humans are those who leave a trace, mourn, laugh, give gifts, or use language--in order to suggest a more networked and dynamic relationship between animals and humanity. In coming to that conclusion, Derrida highlights a historical and philosophical boundary between man as linguistic and understood, and animal as alterity. Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet* critiques Derrida for his turn to investigate the indeterminacy of what defines humanness, rather than attempt to engage more fully with the animal. Some scholars such as Michael Naas will see this move as intentional—Derrida acknowledges he is no an animal behaviorist (27). Yet she points out the people who attempt to do that kind of work to which he could have turned. The question of response and alterity that Derrida and Haraway engage with articulates the problem of meaning making—communicating and being understood. They highlight both how language has been prioritized as a mode of communication, and the possibilities of recognizing non-linguistic communication. Derrida and Haraway find themselves in the introduction to a chapter on comic language because both construct and deconstruct a linguistic/non-linguistic communication binary that comic language problematizes. They provide a counterpoint for the new binary of gestural and non-gestural communication upon which this chapter will rely.

It is my contention that a number of postcolonial authors' literary works categorize expression in a fundamentally different way. In this chapter I explore particularly G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* and Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*. What makes Desani's and Rushdie's novels so interesting is that instead of delineating a divide between linguistic expression and other forms of non-verbal or extra-linguistic expression, they divide expression into gestural expressions and non-gestural expressions. G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* defines a gesture as follows:

“Warning! ‘Melodramatic *gestures* against public security are a common form of self-expression in the East. For instance, an Indian peasant, whose house has been burgled, will lay a tree across a railway line, hoping to derail a good train, just to show his opinion of life...’—Anglo-Indian writer” [emphasis original] (12).

So a gesture is physical in nature. The Indian peasant feels wronged and pessimistic in his worldview, so he tries to derail a train to communicate that frustration to train passengers. That sounds a lot like non-linguistic expression. But wait! Following this, Desani recounts another warning: a conversation that an “Indian middle man” has with an “Author” about the marketability (or lack thereof) of *gestures*. The author wants to publish his *gesture*, but seeing that there is no market for that kind of writing/expression, concedes that his work is, in fact, a *novel* (12). So what is a gesture, and how can the dramatic derailing of a train be at all similar to the published words of an author? And why does it reframe the conversations Derrida and Haraway are having about language, expression, and response?⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The field of gesture studies has been rapidly growing and developing theories that attempt to address the relationship between gestures and language (For a good overview, see Marianne Gulberg and Stephen McCafferty's "Introduction to Gestures and SLA: Toward and Integrated Approach"). A number of scholars will see the origins of the gesture and language as the same: rooted in thought. See for example the work of McNeill and Duncan (2000). Some theories will see the gesture as secondary to language (see De Ruiter 2007). This field developed after Desani published his book. However, study of the contemporary understanding of the gesture and language might bolster the collapse that Desani forward. That said, the

Gestures are not unified by their mode of transmission—words, physical movements, sounds, or gazes. Rather, these two quick warnings, printed as epigraphs, signal to the reader the necessity and function of the gesture as a kind of message, a kind of expression that can be transmitted in a number of ways. “A gesture is a performative sign that stands in opposition to the cool fixity of writing and administration,” Paul Sharrad argues. “In its colourfulness, its lack of rigour, of proportion, it may be only tenuously appropriate to the situation it addresses, therefore the subject of misinterpretation” (136). He furthers, “...it is vulnerable to containment or dismissal...but it also serves as a tactical move that resists...and sets up powerful echoes in its semiotic ambiguity” (136). The gesture's purpose, linguistic or otherwise, is resistance and critique. It encapsulates the exclamation "Fuck you!" experienced in saying a curse word; performing the multitude of hand gestures that mean, "Fuck you!" (the middle finger, for example); or imagining that you might get robbed and derail a train to express a similar kind of displeasure.

So much like the discipline of postcolonial studies, the gesture is defined by its message(s) and its method. In principle, I argue, Desani's (and a postcolonial) gestural method is *comic*, and it uses all of comedy's sidekicks—word play, incongruous situations, pratfalls, and embodied laughter and expression. The gesture's message is the generative potential of thinking and doing otherwise as expressed through misdirection, lack of scale and rigor, and inappropriateness. It uses and creates comic spaces of non-reality by resisting the “cool fixity” of colonial administration and its contemporary descendants. In that resistance, it offers “colourfulness.” In some ways, I addressed this

political and critical nature of Desani's gesture is unique and most likely not rooted in a general cognitive understanding of communication, but rather a postcolonial and more symbolic understanding.

issue of gestural categories vs. linguistic/non-linguistic categories in my introduction by discussing what I found productive in collapsing investigations of laughter, humor, and comedy. The reason for such a collapse was that the categories which separate a laugh from a joke along the lines of one being a behavior and the other verbal or conceptual playfulness ignores their shared impulse, especially in the postcolonial context. Instead, laughter, humor, and comedy are linked by their critical and generative impulse.

Comic language, outside of a gestural schema, is generally understood as a language of evasion and incongruous possibility. Although it is difficult to pin down a precise definition, comic language has a few distinguishing features. Isabel Ermida points out that comic language or word play originally was associated with “wit” and not comedy, although that distinction has broken down recently (9).⁵⁸ With regard to language, she alludes to why a collapsing of the corporeal and the linguistic comic event might occur: principally because situational comedy is often articulated in language (9). To that end, comic language is often defined, according to Ermida, by its forms such as puns, stylistic choices (changing the rhythm or rhyme), using literary devices (alliteration, assonance, repetition), changing the morphology of words, syntactical ambiguity, and playing with linguistic meaning. Ermida’s suggestion that the two categories collapsed due to situational comedies often occurring in the linguistic form excludes the idea that comedy is more often bodily than not, whether expressed with the body or on the page. This is the key to the gestural category, which makes use of both the bodily and the linguistic space, or indeed sees no distinction, to misdirect its readers. It

³ Theorists who distinguish between linguistic humor/comedy and situational humor/comedy include Cicero, Pierre Guiraud, Violette Morin, Umberto Eco, and Henri Bergson. For other studies of comic language, see the work of Violette Morin, Walter Nash, Wladyslaw Chlopicki, Chris Holcomb and Slavatore Attardo.

leads them toward new logics and understandings of the situation presented, and it is for that reason, I argue, that Desani's understanding of the gesture is comic.

This chapter is interested, then, in how the gestures in the first-person narratives *All About H. Hatterr* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* feed into what we recognize as comic language and the possibilities of that language to use evasion, plurality, and misdirection to intervene in conversations about colonialism and its after effects. Desani's and Rushdie's comic gestures are invested in brokering a new deal between language, and the passages of history and culture in the Indian subcontinent. They both articulate a version of Indian history and culture that is distinctly their own through the concept of the "gesture" and comic language. They both mix language and embodied expression toward that end. For Hatterr, embodiment will be conveyed most strongly through an investigation of nakedness, and for Rushdie, it will occur through an attention to the ways that the aging and ill body communicates physically.

A reader will see comic language operating in a number of ways in these two novels: the elongation of sentences, an excess of punctuation, and a purposeful misuse of logic in both sentence structure and content. There is also an engagement with etymology. Desani's Hatterr, for example, invents new syntactical structures that mix Standard English with stereotypes of Indian-inflected English or extreme English-inflected English. He haphazardly uses capitalization and punctuation, emphasizing unexpected words. The illogic of his ideas, then, is pronounced and augmented by the illogic of the sentences themselves, which join and separate ideas in surprising ways. Yet, if the reader spends time with Hatterr's autobiography (or what he calls his "Autobiographical of H. Hatterr Being Also a Mosaic-Organon of *Life: viz., A Medico-*

Philosophical Grammar as to This Contrast, This Human Horseplay, This Design for Diamond-Cut-Diamond”), the logic he presents begins to take hold. His writing ends up pushing the reader toward a new incongruous logic, compelling in its alterity.

Hatterr’s preface, which discusses his motives for writing (being lonely), speaks directly to the question of new logics and illogics. He articulates loneliness in three ways. First, he imagines himself in the opening act of *Hamlet*, playing Hamlet’s father. Then he tells two parables: one about a man digging for diamonds and finding only mice, and the other about being sat on by a tired elephant. Finally, he appeals to the reader by narrating his origin story. Each of these false starts at an introduction mimics the rhetorical gestures that authors make in order to draw their readers in-- from literary allusion, to symbolism/proverbs, and finally to a good old-fashioned origin story. They are jarring in their rapid succession. However, the comic and chaotic language of his gestural novel seems intentional and rhetorically sophisticated, from the simple sentence to the larger rhetorical choices that he makes.

Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* allows the framing illness of the main character, Moraes Zogoiby-- who suffers from asthma, rapid aging, and a clubbed hand-- to influence the language of his first-person narrative.⁵⁹ The novel’s use of English is labored, frequently featuring lists, insertions, and heavy use of connective punctuation---

⁵⁹ Michael Bérubé’s argument for an attention to the deployment of disability in literature is as follows: “For many reasons, not least of which is the literalism is so (literally) literalist. As I have noted above, the diagnostic mode leads us to conclude that *character X has Y disability* and can thereby preclude us from asking broader interpretive questions about plot and motive...The diagnostic mode then leads us away from the grainy details of specific passages and utterances, distracting us from what we should be asking about a narrative as such” (130). Like Bérubé argues in regard to literary manifestations of disability, Moraes’s ailments are not present in the novel to be diagnosed and connected to real human health conditions. They are rather Rushdie’s “*deployments of disability... narrative strategies, devices for exploring vast domains of human thought, experience, and action*” (Bérubé 2). Some have asserted that Moraes is a literary example of progeria, but I believe in keeping with Bérubé that this diagnosis limits our understanding of what Rushdie is attempting by thinking of Moraes’s disease as *real*.

commas, semi-colons, parentheses and dashes. Moraes's narrative is also obsessed with etymology, breaking down and putting together words in order to articulate Moraes's experiences in India. Such a phonetic and orthographic obsession shows that when words are broken down into their letter parts and their existence seen as dependent on the body (the tongue, throat, diaphragm), their meaning becomes obscured or complicated. The internal logics of the prefixes and suffixes are made illogical through their etymological digestion. This obsession corresponds with Rushdie's larger concern with "chutnification" first articulated in *Midnight's Children* (548). Modeled on the Indian condiment, chutnification is a metaphor for the mixed, heterogeneous, and tangy nature of post-Independence Indian culture and language use. Such a mixed up and tangy language full of neologisms, weird collocations, conjoined words, and an overly connective syntax is incongruous with Standard English, unique to the hybrid experience of post-colonial India, and comic in its refusal to fit models of Standard English syntax and grammar. It resists linguistic supremacy through the metaphor of an embodied practice—eating—to describe culture, language use, and national identity.

On a larger scale, both authors will play with genre, employing stereotypical language conventions to service their individual ends. Desani will misdirect his readers by having his novel pose as a spiritual journey narrative in keeping with literary predecessors like Kipling's *Kim*, Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, and Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*. The protagonist, one H. Hatterr, is a misfit of Empire-- mixed race, neither colonial or colonized, a man about to step through the door of Indian Independence and Partition. The novel follows Hatterr's experience testing the wisdom of sages that he seeks, travelling to the far corners of the Indian subcontinent to understand the laws of

the universe. There are seven chapters in the novel, which seem heavily influenced by Desani's interest in Tantric Hinduism--an interest he will cultivate extensively after this novel's publication.⁶⁰ Each chapter features a proposition and lesson that Hatterr receives from a sage. He then attempts to enact the sage's wisdom in his own life, recording the results for his reader. All the advice he receives, however, proves useless until Hatterr stumbles upon a new logic of the world--the law of contrasts--that productively questions old ideologies and becomes a useful tool in a colonial and soon-to-be postcolonial India.

Rushdie's novel uses the confessional form to infuse his family narrative with a tragicomic tone, one that is deafening in its critique of fundamentalism, Hindu nationalism, and neoliberalism.⁶¹ The tragicomedy's main character, Moraes Zogoiby, has a number of ailments that reinforce that tone. Moraes's rapid aging and inability to breathe are ironic, disturbing, and at times, outrageously amusing. Rushdie connects comic language and diseased breathing to events in 20th-century India, which seems as

⁶⁰ I will discuss the role of Tantric Hinduism in more detail later in the chapter. At this point it suffices to say that the allegedly peripheral branch of Hinduism (positioned as antithetical to Vedic Hinduism) is built upon a few relevant principles. The first worth noting is Tantric Hinduism's embrace of the body as a site of spiritual possibility, unlike Vedic Hinduism, which figures the body as unclean. The body and its "gross" aspects can be harnessed by the tantric practitioner (after prolonged study under a guru's teaching) to dissolve binaries between good/bad, clean/unclean, and moral/immoral. This experiential and non-binary approach to spiritual practice is significant for Desani's work. Finally, the obscurity of Tantric practice is due in large part to the close relationship between a pupil and a guru. Tantric practice requires that the pupil invest his/her entire faith and spiritual learning in the guru. This means that the beliefs and practices of many branches of Tantric Hinduism remain obscure to the uninitiated. Moreover, many argue that the indecipherability of some Tantric texts facilitates this relationship.

⁶¹ Yumna Siddiqi discusses how *The Moor's Last Sigh* is in conversation with the "political carnage of 1992 and 1993" in India, "[exploring] the themes of rising fundamentalism, globalization, and state violence in a narrative of violent intrigue, raising questions about the relationship between nationalism, rapid and uneven development, liberalization and globalization" (1218). Although as many scholars have noted, his exploration of 90's India is done through a strategic engagement with lesser known minorities rather than Hindu or Muslim figures.

doomed to expire or fall into an asthmatic fit as Moraes is.⁶² Jonathan Greenberg, to that effect, describes Rushdie's novel as "a novel about *lastness*" [emphasis original] (99), which we can see in the opening pages featuring an exhausted and dying Moraes Zogoiby in Spain, thinking of his family. Yet the metanarrative of Moraes penning his own confession before he presumably dies signals a different path than the series of funerals we might expect. Rather, Moraes produces a memoir that is an ironic legacy. In the face of everything crumbling, *something remains*—and that something is a heavy 400+ page text. Accordingly, the novel leans heavily into the *comic* part of tragicomic, seeming to take a page from Cornell West in viewing the role of the tragicomic as one of perseverance and fearless articulation-- to "preserve hope even while staring in the face of hate and hypocrisy" (16-19).

To close this introductory section of the chapter, I return to the distressed Indian peasant who attempts to derail a train. This inaugural moment in the novel articulates why the gesture can be so powerful. Derailing a train because you got robbed seems like an extreme act, bringing hardship to those around you. Yet in derailing the train, a poignant symbol of empire, the wronged Indian peasant rebels against his colonial oppressors. He resists the perspective emblematically articulated by Phileas Fogg, a character in Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days*, which argues that because of European colonial endeavors, one never needs to learn anything about the world. Fogg can travel around it for 80 days on colonial trains, boats and other innovations of the *fin de siècle* and never once engage with the peoples and cultures he passes. Desani's

⁶² Many scholars delve into the relationship between Moraes's body and Indian history by way of an examination of artistic practice in the novel. Moraes's mother, Aurora, features largely in these conversations. This chapter deemphasizes artistic practice for the sake of focusing on the crafting of comic language.

epigraph tells a different story: the Indian railway rebel forces those around him to participate in his plight, making his personal robbery far more meaningful. It becomes aligned with the theft of resources in India by the British Empire through that ever-so-poignant symbol of progress: the train. To that end, James R. Marley notes, “an informed reader might be reminded of the Kakori Conspiracy train robbery of 1925 or the numerous attacks on refugee trains in 1947” (673). The misdirection and vague nature of the train derailing moment get at the essence of the comic gesture. The incongruity of causing so much damage for a personal problem is funny, but it is also illustrative of the fact that no personal problem exists outside of the larger contexts of our world. Robbery is much larger than the absence or presence of objects in our possession, and sometimes it takes a particular kind of gesture to get that across.

Journeys, Naked Endings, and the Law of Contrasts

Trains and travel continue to be a theme in *All About H. Hatterr*, beginning with the first episode of the autobiographical, in which Hatterr gets a job as a journalist. He is asked to interview a Sanskrit translator and guru, and to report back to his boss, Chari-Charier---whose name could be roughly translated as “cautious carrier” derived from “chary” Indianized as “Chari” and the French “charrier.” Hatterr is soon bamboozled by the Sanskrit translator who, along with his mosquito-eating brother, insists that Hatterr take off his clothes so they can steal them. Left with only a *Great Indian Peninsular Railway* towel to wear, the despondent Hatterr returns to Chari-Charier, who immediately fires him. Chari-Charier laments, “I am sorry for *you!* And for six reporters whom I have dismissed for misbehavior on this very assignment. Every reporter I have assigned to this

job...has chosen to loiter in the city wearing a dirty towel” (55-56). Frustrated and confused by this repetitious set of events, Hatterr returns to the guru and demands an explanation, whereupon the guru tells him he is a secondhand clothing tailor and steals people’s clothes to limit his overhead costs. Hatterr’s nakedness is, then, a result of the confluence of the capitalist impulse to remain competitive and the mystique associated with spiritual practice. He misunderstands and thus “falls” for both the guru as a legitimate spiritual figure and the promise of capital gains from employment—embodied in his work as a journalist and the broker offer he later gets from the tailor. The fact that he ends up in a railway towel and working for a boss whose name implies a connection to the transportation industry ironically mirrors the pervasiveness of the British Empire and the ways it becomes inextricably attached to the colonial body. The colonized subject becomes clothed both in the towels of empire and its language, English.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Desani’s novel makes use of the trope of the spiritual journey, although this journey goes awry. One way in which that trope manifests itself is through nakedness—as seen in Hatterr gallivanting around in a railway towel. Nakedness signifies a comically repetitive beginning for Hatterr, who has an uncanny way of getting himself into and out of trouble. Comic repetition also linguistically occurs in the frequent use of double letters in character names. This understanding of new beginnings *gesturally aligns* his nakedness and use of language with a syncretic understanding of reincarnation heavily influenced by Tantric Hinduism, a tradition that Desani would later take up. Tantra's influence is most clearly seen in the overemphasis on the body and its ability to aid an individual in reaching spiritual understanding. As Tantric scholar Thomas Coburn describes, “Tantra stresses achieving enlightenment in

one's lifetime through extreme practices involving individual visionary experiences, vivid sexual imagery, and the use of forbidden substances like wine and meat in its rituals. Tantrikas...use desire to seek liberation" (72). With each successive return to his body through nakedness, Hatterr is given the opportunity to learn from and further progress toward what the novel might figure as his enlightened state—when he discovers the gestural law of contrasts. This enlightened state will be a hybrid combination of an understanding of spirituality and capital. It is comic in that the exposure of nakedness yields incongruous logical conclusions, which have actual value in a colonial and soon-to-be postcolonial world.

The aforementioned law of contrasts radically questions a prevailing belief in fate or karma. It is gestural in its suggestion of a politics of misdirection. The law is described accordingly:

Life is no one-way pattern. It's contrasts all the way...Well, if there is Law behind all these contrasts ... it cannot itself be subject to any contrasts. If it were, it cannot remain Law, which is supposed to be constant and rock-steady. As constant-steady Existence, it is bound to be different: and unique: the Contrast of all the contrasts. The Contrast- principle Itself. The All-seeing, Super-all, Cyclopean Sight! The All-Understanding! The absolute, unshakable Law!...Let a god or a human deliberately court hell, commit Evil, yet, the laws of Contrast! as binding as death-and-birth, contrast'll come to him and deliverance from whatever state he happens to be in! Let a feller act Evil, and, on the top, enjoy himself, and deliverance will come to him, in contrast to his acting and feeling. (Desani 275)

Hatterr's law of contrast argues against the idea that good comes to those who are good and bad comes to those who are bad (*karma* in its most basic description). Instead, Hatterr proposes that if you do too much good, the universe needs to balance that good with bad. Therefore, you are miserable. If you are bad, you reap rewards, as the universe will try to counteract your poor decisions. Such a formulation at first seems outrageous,

but then, upon closer examination of the colonial context of the novel, makes perfect sense. The British Empire stole, cheated, and violently destroyed a number of Indian resources. And yet the legacies of that empire continue to positively affect citizens of the United Kingdom. Thus, in developing the law of contrasts, Hatterr manages to mediate between the spiritual and the colonial, melding the two ideas into one philosophy. Hatterr's search for a world philosophy and the solution he comes up with feed the novel's investigation of what spirituality and philosophy could possibly be in an emerging postcolonial India: a place built on the philosophies of Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian religious and cultural traditions. It plays with the Western notion that India is a place of spiritual awakening and identity making, ironically reinforcing and problematizing the role of the austere body (the naked body) in that awakening process.

The complexity of the spiritual journey and life philosophy is further doubled in Hatterr's ethnic identity. Hatterr physically embodies the incongruity of hybrid identities produced by colonialism, with a European seaman for a father and a mother who was a "Malay Peninsula-resident lady, a steady non-voyaging, non-Christian human (no mermaid)" (Desani 31). His parents are positioned as polar opposites: one is of the land, the other of the sea; one is Asian, the other European; and one stays in one place while the other travels extensively. Hatterr is a figure that embodies a multitude of subject positions. As a result, although not *genetically* Indian, Hatterr chooses to "[go] completely Indian" (47), a sentiment problematically employed by Victorian writers such as Kipling in his characterization of Kim. Ironically, Kim's chameleon-like ability to blend in all over India turns him into a pawn for conflicts between Britain and Russia. His role as *chila* serves a political purpose rather than a spiritual one. Desani's Hatterr, in

contrast, is subject to manipulations by a motley crew of characters and yet manages to cultivate his own philosophy rather than forward the policies of a colonial nation.

As the train and novel exemplify, nakedness as a gesture of beginnings is linked to the incongruous logic of Hatterr's autobiographical sentences. The logic of his "medico-philosophical grammar" is tenuous at best and confusingly articulated.

Accordingly, Desani anticipates reader resistance to his novel and responds to concerns in the preface by fictionalizing himself as the novel's ghostwriter. While peddling *All About H. Hatterr* to publishers around London, Desani ends up discussing its language with Betty Bloomsbury, an interested editor. He narrates:

She insisted that I *do* explain the *ABC* of the book. Awed, I did the best I could. *A*. A man's choice, Misbetty, is conditioned by his past: his experience. That's true of his word too. I dare you there are *other* ways of saying "Aspirin", "Corpse-reviver", "Acetyl-Salicylic compound". To one, *M.P.* stands for *Member of Parliament*. To another, it might mean *major parasite*. ...*B*. There are *two* of us writing this book. A fellow called H. Hatterr and I. I said to this H. Hatterr, 'Furgoodnesssakes, you tell 'em. I am shy!' And he tells. Though I warrantee, and underwrite, this book's *his*. I remain anonymous. *C*. As for the *arbitrary* choice of words and constructions you mentioned. Not intended by me to invite analysis. They are there because, I think, they are natural to H. Hatterr. (16-17)

Fictional Desani makes some good points here about how we are socialized into the language we speak. He compellingly asserts that there is an arbitrariness to language that leads to confusion when language is employed in a nonstandard way. Hatterr/Desani seems to want the reader to believe that confusion is fundamental to language itself--as simple as the ABCs. "English" is far more diverse than Standard English suggests, a point contradicted in the appendix written by the novel's resident lawyer, Sri Belliram/Rambali. Marley will argue that the conflicting frames of reference for the

novel are a key feature of its critical structure.⁶³ Finally, the fact that he connects the choice of words one uses to experience draws a clear link between the nakedness of the novel and the illogic of the sentences. In this passage, his plays with naming. In particular, the significance of M.P. reveals an overt reference to British-Indian conflict in the novel. Are members of parliament “major parasites” or simple “members of parliament”?

The passage places particular emphasis on this idea of the speaker, and a shifty and shifting relationship between who is speaking (Desani or Hatterr). Scholars have puzzled over the preface of this novel precisely because Desani and Hatterr speak as characters. Accordingly, Desani’s *All About H. Hatterr* is often read biographically. In part, such a phenomenon has sprung from Desani’s multitude of professions and personalities as a runaway genius, war correspondent, novelist, journalist, spiritual man, and eventual professor and guru for a number of graduate students at the University of Texas. The complex and confusing identity of Desani translates; scholars like Leela Gandhi contend, into his portrait of Hatterr, whose quest for spiritual and philosophical truths results in an eclectic collection of conversations with *wise* sages (187).⁶⁴ Yet as Amardeep Singh argues, “Desani tries, in numerous ways to make his own person ‘a text like any other’ and strenuously insists that he is not ‘the subject, the impulse, the origin, the authority, the Father, whence his work would proceed’” (Barthes as cited in Singh

⁶³ For more information on the role of the prefaces and appendix in *All About H. Hatterr*, see Marley’s “‘Misunderstanding is Universally Rampant’: Misinterpretation, Mistranslation, and Colonial Authority in G.V. Desani’s *All About H. Hatterr*.”

⁶⁴ Such thinking is due in large part to Desani’s own 15-year spiritual journey, which saw him travel around Asia in search of God. True too, the manner in which he searched often led him to participate in yogi practices that are astonishing. For example, he assented to being buried alive in imitation of local yogis (www.desani.org). When he became a professor at the University of Texas, he purportedly relished in debunking spiritual myths and exploring what he deemed valuable contributions to Buddhist and Hindu thinking.

91).⁶⁵ Singh also notes, “Desani’s deferrals and confrontations scattered in these repeatedly revised prolegomena suggest a combative relationship with his readers, publishers, critics, and even himself” (94).⁶⁶

No truer example need be found than that of the name of his publisher, Betty Bloomsbury. The reference to modernism, its role in publishing “experimental” writing in the early 20th century, and its fascination with the *avant-garde*, the orient, and breaking/remaking formal constraints in writing is apt. *Even* for the experimental T.S. Eliots and Virginia Woolfs of the publishing world, this *gesture* remains elusive and subject to critique.⁶⁷ And so it should, if the train example has any worth. For the key to the impulse to derail a train after being robbed seems to lie precisely in the critique of systemic theft rampant in a colonial system, a system that modernist writers benefited from and made use of in their obsession with the occult and “oriental” culture. Desani’s gestural novel with its nonsense language pushes its readers to attend to larger conversations about how language frames our understanding of the world and who gets to assign value to that writing (experimental or otherwise). Eric Smith will mark the gesture as a rhetorical brand of parody (115). Singh further elaborates, “The insistence on gesture

⁶⁵ Singh provides a good reference for thinking about the role of religion and revision in Desani’s work.

⁶⁶ Desani’s revision and resistance to readers and publishers is a result of the novel’s perception as a satire of Hinduism, specifically the tradition of religious instruction involving a spiritual teacher and disciple. Desani, 30 years and many revisions later, will attempt to counter the attack on the novel as a satirical work in the 1978 article “Difficulties of Communicating an Oriental to the Western Audience” by arguing that in fact the novel is not irreligious and critics are misreading it (Singh 90). He instead asserts that Hatterr “was a portrait of man, the common vulgar species, found everywhere...[he] does not thoughtlessly, imitatively, deny God or infer God or presume himself to be God...He has a religious experience by the Ganges” (as cited in Singh 98). Singh will note that perhaps these additions to the novel are rooted in his Tantric practice.

⁶⁷ It is this opacity, reader frustration, authorial slipperiness and divergence from the narrative styles of his Indian contemporaries that may have led to the novel falling out of circulation-- only to be discovered 20 years later by some American academics looking to revitalize old English-language classics, according to Eric Smith (111). H.M Williams remarks that after its initial print run, no one but “a private cult of ‘Hatterr fans’” (67) maintained much interest in the work. This cult includes Eliot himself who asserted, “In all my experience I have not met with anything quite like it”(as cited in Innes 228). The renaissance of his work in the late 20th century can be seen in the novel being claimed as an influence for Rushdie and Roy.

[in Hatterr's preface]... might be read as an attempt to unground the text, to detach it from the weight of literary history. However, ... it also certainly weakens his claim to literary authority" (91). Singh and Smith then point to the ways that the novel is couched in parody and literary illegitimacy as a way to escape a literary history that is constructed by the British colonial oppressor, at its very height at the turn of the 20th century. Such a sense of illegitimacy is mirrored in the figure of Betty Bloomsbury, who insists on knowing the logic of the novel—because she and London more generally control what is deemed “publishable.” And yet, far from “weakening” literary authority as Singh suggests, this move works to defamiliarize the reader from the expectations of a literary work, how it communicates, and what it says. Ultimately, this move is an attempt to socialize readers into Hatterr's world, moving them to see the gesture for its possibilities as a critical articulation.

The best way to become acquainted with the illogical and comically incongruous nature of Hatterr's prose is to experience it. As an example, after visiting his fourth sage, the Sage of Bombay, Hatterr meditates on the matter of fate and divine intervention in the lives of man. Confounded, he leaves his house for a walk, only to meet up with his dear friend Banerrji who serves the role in the novel of problem solver, Anglophile, and respectable man-- as the suffix of his name implies. In this current case, Banerrji offers to help Hatterr feel better about losing his job—Hatterr is regularly fired from his jobs—by sneaking him into poet-singer Master Ananda Giri-Giri's concert, a high-class affair.

In agreeing to help Hatterr, Banerrji quotes Shakespeare and his ability to shine light on the world and references optometry in Elizabethan England. This makes Hatterr mad. He yells:

What did I say, Banerrji? Optics is a branch of medicine! Damme, man, this is the medical man's century! Body, man! Doctor the body! *Live!* Information! Read the daily press! *Vis vitalis*, old feller! Your point about Shakespeare. Hell, we have advanced since! Obvious! A tail may not wag a dog, but a propeller wags a ship! Ever heard of Braille? The blind can read it! Everybody can see a church by daylight today! As to fog, refer you to infra-red photography. I am interested in *Life today*, not as it was in Elizabethan England! (Desani 165)

In this whimsical rant, Hatterr's illogical logics become apparent. He seems to have missed that Banerrji was speaking metaphorically about the lessons of Shakespeare and that he digressed in his meditation by thinking broadly about vision and sight in Elizabethan England.⁶⁸ Instead, Hatterr counters Banerrji's suggestion of Shakespearean insights into life by responding only to the question of sight, as it exists physically in the 20th century. He discusses how the lack of sight—either because a person is blind or because it is foggy—has been solved by modern technology through the invention of braille and infra-red photography. He even proffers his own gestural metaphor of the wagging tail and the wagging ship propeller as an example of how the relationships between parts to a whole have changed. The dog controls the tail, allowing it to wag to express excitement or happiness. Yet the propeller “wags” the ship in order for it to move, thus using the movement for a practical rather than emotional purpose.⁶⁹ He marks a false progression between the dog and ship, and implies that the insights into human nature offered by Shakespeare are akin to the dog, whereas medical technology is akin to the propeller. This logic seems strange and exaggerated.

⁶⁸ Although, it should be noted that Banerrji often makes little sense. Hatterr is not the only character in this novel that speaks in interesting ways.

⁶⁹ Interestingly, the ship might also be read as a symbol of empire. Such a reading would make the emotion/purposeful “wagging” binary all the more resonant. Desani might be playing with the ways that colonialist are figures as “purposeful” in imperial documents while the natives are “emotional” or without purpose.

Yet in misunderstanding the question of insights in Shakespeare, Hatterr still manages to say something fairly profound about what sight is. Sight is more than the ability to see a church or to gain a greater knowledge of life through literature. Instead it is divorced from the physicality of the eye and the interpretive capacity of the mind, an important point for this chapter given that it aims to collapse verbal and non-verbal communication. Hatterr focuses on the ways that technology augments the eye or the mind, *seeing* what people were not able to see prior. He implies that the question of what is visible is troubled by the tactility of following bumps on a page with one's fingers and by the existence of light waves that are imperceptible to the eye. Furthermore, his Latin explicative—*Vis vitalis*—means biological vital force, but points to the question of vitalism and the nonmaterial forces that make up life.⁷⁰ The irony here is that the examples he cites are examples of how the definition of sight is being expanded conceptually. The non-materiality of a light wave or of understanding reading as tactile and not visual implies linguistic indeterminacy as well as an indefinite line between what we perceive as physically present and the components of *life* that are nonmaterial and spiritual.

Thus Hatterr's linguistic play gets wrapped up in his philosophy of contrasts. If sight is defined at its most general level, then, Hatterr tells us, we expect to "see" a limited number of things. In fact, sight is not defined so narrowly as we thought, and if that is so, then what else can we question? In the frame of his philosophy we might ask: Is the positive effect of karma or fate always brought about by being and doing moral

⁷⁰ Vitalism has a long tradition in global medicine. Its basic concept is that the difference between living and non-living entities is the presence of a spirit or energy. The theory has been largely discredited in the medical community, although holistic and many forms of non-Western medicine continue to support some version of vitalism. For an interesting study of the role of vitalism's relationship to colonialism, see Donna V. Jones's *The Racial Discourses of Life: Negritude, Vitalism, and Modernity*.

things? Can we define fate so narrowly? Hatterr's reading gestures toward how the changing definition of sight and the medical age of the present are linked to the irony of fate's intervention into the spiritual and lived experience of man. We can only see what we recognize as "seeable." This is, of course, the philosophical proposition he intends to engage with in the chapter as a whole, wondering at the beginning, "IN THE AFFAIRS OF MAN, [do] GODS AND SUCH-LIKE FOREIGN FACTORS INTERVENE? IS THERE ANY TRUTH IN THE NOTION THAT PARANORMAL INTERFERENCES IS GOING ON IN THE UNIVERSE? IS A HUMAN FELLER A FREE AGENT? IS FUTURE TENSE A MYTH-JOKE?" [caps original] (Desani 160). Such questions are heavily debated in Buddhism and Hinduism (and Christianity for that matter). Do we have free will? Does karma exist, or are humans on a predetermined path through our cycles of reincarnation?⁷¹ The only way to gain intellectual insights, Hatterr proposes, is to live in the present and to commit to the philosophies of today -- or as Hatterr puts it, to "Live!" Banerrji makes the mistake of looking to the past for answers.⁷²

In order to articulate this complex thought, Hatterr attempts to make meaning by incongruously putting ideas together—or rather by putting ideas together in ways that may be comical and not readily logical to the reader. Moreover, on a micro-level he linguistically makes illogical or even *wrong* choices that further his point about the material and the spiritual as if by accident—a textbook gestural move. In the above passage, he uses the word "damme" instead of "damn." "Damme," as the Oxford English Dictionary recounts, is used most frequently as a compound word—"Damn me!" in the

⁷¹ See for example, Jonardon Ganeri's discussions of karma in *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology*.

⁷² Living in the present and renouncing material and psychological goods is, of course, a key idea in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy.

18th century (“Damme”). It can also reference a particular oath that one is swearing. In using this archaic word—and he does so frequently in the rest of the novel, Desani presents the reader with a puzzle. There is, of course, an irony in Hatterr’s linguistic choice. After espousing so much faith in the present, he picks a word that has fallen out of use. The oath and the swear word on the surface are simply a remonstrance to Banerrji. Yet they also directly reference how the immaterial world acts upon the material through language. To damn someone or yourself is to place a curse on an immaterial soul.⁷³ As with his use of *vis vitalis*, Hatterr seems to comically stumble on the essential and complicated question of the relationship between lived reality and the spirit through his non-standard language use.⁷⁴

Moreover, this passage’s argument turns around an incomplete sentence -- “Your point about Shakespeare.” This sentence is less noticeable because it is surrounded by commands, which have an implied subject, making them appear less complete. At first glance, it is difficult to see precisely what Hatterr’s point is. It is only after some time that it becomes apparent what he is trying to say about sight, insight, and medicine. Such a moment of incomplete thought or of a thought that is articulated to some degree in language and in another degree without it is precisely the *modus operandi* of the gestural utterance. Hatterr’s problem with Banerrji regards the question of the significance of

⁷³ It is interesting to note that Tantric Hinduism is often figured as akin to black magic and tantric practitioners as casters of spells. See *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* by Georg Feurstein.

⁷⁴ Rushdie uses the word “damme” in the title of his famous article on Indian literature in English, “Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You!” In that article, Rushdie argues that Indian literature composed in English is “the true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century” (50). Controversy aside, the use of outmoded language in his title “damme” and “oriental” imply an argument about the role of transplanting a language in a new place. How does English evolve to support (and he implies thrive in) an Indian context? Such an implication might suggest that the irony of Hatterr’s language use is more complex than the simple reading I provide above. It does not suggest a flaw in Hatterr, but rather a further argument for the significance of the hybrid, gestural use of English. English is perhaps losing the clothing of English culture.

Shakespeare in our contemporary moment. And in commanding Banerrji to do a number of things, none of which includes reading Shakespeare, Hatterr implies a critique of Shakespeare as the pinnacle of English language expression, the literary arts, and as a source for moral and ethical enlightenment. But instead of directly stating as much, he instead articulates a half thought and attaches it to what seems like unrelated commands. Yet the command itself as a kind of “sentence” becomes the important message.

How is this philosophy of sight and, subsequent, law of contrasts at all related to Britain’s colonization of India? This question has obsessed scholars since the novel’s publication. Scholars of Desani’s work have puzzled over his relationship to Indian Independence. Some scholars such as Srinivas Aravamudan see him as primarily a modernist writer of “mock mock epics” interested in aesthetics, the written word, and the English literary canon (129). Many have argued that for a novel published in 1948 just after India gained its independence, there is shockingly little about Independence in it (Smith 113, Singh). Leela Gandhi controversially asserts, “Desani...can only be said to count as an Indian writer by virtue of his ancestry” (186).⁷⁵ Singh adds, “The novel is not fully in control, one might say, of the target of its critique, nor is it entirely consistent in making the critique [of mimicry]” (96). And, most outrageously, H.M. Williams proclaims, “He avoids all political questions (which is refreshing), has no moral to make and his picture of India is frankly surrealistic” (69). Such descriptions are fairly damning in their critique of his work. It appears that Desani’s gestural nonsense is simply nonsense.

⁷⁵ Interestingly, H.M. Williams will see Desani and Raja Rao as engaged in the “[attempt] to write a novel about ‘Indianness’ rather than India” (6-7). Such an assertion marks Desani’s difference from his contemporaries as more Indian, rather than less.

Such a damning perspective on his relationship to colonialism and Indian Independence occurs because his writing is so different from that of his contemporaries. English-language writing coming out of the 1930s and 1940s in India was intensely preoccupied with the competing national identities emerging in the soon-to-be-free midnight nation. Authors contended with the writings and philosophy of Gandhi as well as Nehru and Marx. They were thinking about the place of Indian writing in English in terms of national struggles and in terms of canon—whose literary legacy would they carry on (Gandhi 169, 173). Mulk Raj Anand famously wrote to Mahatma Gandhi on the question, receiving the comforting reply, “The purpose of writing is to communicate, isn’t it? If so, say your say in any language that comes to hand” (as cited in Gandhi 173). Authors were thinking about who should be referenced and from what canon. And, on a broader scale, their work narrativized the prevailing ideas of the time, turning Nehru, Gandhi, Marxist thinkers, and colonial officials into characters in their work, and trying out their ideas in literary spaces (169, 171). Social realism ruled the decades; a genre that Desani’s novel emphatically resists.

Yet Desani was interested in these questions as well. The style of the novel and its comic gesture serve the purpose of questioning why one would need to be legitimized in the English literary canon or, in opposition to Anand’s anxieties, why one would worry about representing an Indian tradition in English. Thus, the satirical components of this novel, what Singh describes as “the stilted mode of the dialogue, with its hypertrophied formality (“Sir [...]” (91), do seem engaged with the questions of early 20th-century literary production in India and, more importantly, its relationship to colonization and Independence. The very fact that his writing is so heteroglossic is an indication of the

cultural exchange between the British and Indian colonized population, even if its critical gesture is not immediately present. What Gandhi describes as his language cannot be ignored for the compelling ways it bastardizes the English language: “Shakespeare combines with Indian legalese, cockney with babuism, Anglo-India rubs up against the pompous drone of Colonial Club talk, and grievously unpunctuated sentences find a temporary hiatus in random and arbitrary capitalization” (187). Such bastardizing has led some scholars to read the novel through the lens of national identity formation (Aravamudan) while others have gone further, connecting the politically salient prose to post-colonial readings of James Joyce (Smith 113, Gandhi 187, Williams 69). Consequently, Priyamvada Gopal’s call to see Desani as the first Indian writer to use English ironically to critique colonial discourse (92) is a sound one.

It is, furthermore, clear that the main plot of the novel--Hatterr’s quest for a life philosophy--is undeniably linked to the event of Indian Independence and the *birth* of the Indian nation. His repetitive returns to nakedness are another kind of birth (a discussion of how he ends up naked in this episode is to come). The quest is intertwined with what Smith marks as the novel’s awareness of “where the material and spiritual spheres constructed by Indian nationalist discourse clash and expose one another’s *constructedness* in highly illuminating and comic ways” (118). To return to my analysis of the Shakespeare passage, it is no accident that Hatterr’s meditation on the question of sight occurs in a chapter that asks a question about fate. Moreover, the plot of this chapter directly engages with the ways that the material and the spiritual meet.

In this chapter, Hatterr becomes the unwilling love interest of the poet-singer, Giri-Giri, who forces him to spend the night in his tent. Giri-Giri then becomes

possessed (*chhaya*) by Heropal the Igniter's sister and attacks Hatterr (presumed to be Heropal himself).⁷⁶ In order to release Giri-Giri from his possession, both Hatterr and the poet-singer are roasted over a fire that burns holes in their clothes, and then expected to "confess," lest Giri-Giri's followers mutilate their genitals with flame. As a reward for Hatterr's role in the "roasting Lolly's loins" (186),⁷⁷ he receives "a thousand chips!" (189). Such an outrageous scene is interpreted thus by Hatterr:

Do you think the gods intervene in the affairs of man? Damme, a thousand silvers for a comparatively easy assignment and no effort at earning it? And that, when I was stark short, under hell of an economic pressure? Ponder, Banerrji, man, ponder over this hell of an issue. Certain lay bodies like myself, who go to a concert without a ticket, and who return home richer to the tune of a thousand chips, would *so* much like to know! Out of dire conflict, sweet reward! Damme, what a Santa Claus!" [emphasis original] (191)

Here Hatterr doesn't so much directly respond to his own question as imply that because he chose to attend this concert without a ticket when he had recently lost his job (and it is implied it is his fault he lost the job), he was rewarded by the gods. Instead of employing the logic that Hatterr did the wrong thing in sneaking into a concert and thus was punished in the most horrific of ways—being sexually and physically assaulted by Giri-Giri and his followers, the opposite logic seems true. Hatterr did a bad thing in sneaking in, and thus he was rewarded. As he himself exclaims, "Damme, this is *Life*, and *contrast* for you!" (186).

And furthermore, irreverence runs rampant in this chapter. Giri-Giri thinks that Hatterr is the earthly embodiment of the Supreme Being, while Hatterr fantasizes about

⁷⁶ Desani mentions a particular name for Giri-Giri's spirit possession, *chhaya*, which refers to the consort of the sun god, Surya, who was the shadow of his first wife, Saranyu. There are references from at least the 19th century that use *chhaya* to categorize the act of being possessed by a spirit. See for example, Edward Balfour's reference in *The Cyclopaedia of India and of Eastern and South Asia* from 1874. Heropal does not seem to be a reference to a particular god of figure.

⁷⁷ Pandit Lolly is the pseudonym that Hatterr uses to get into the party.

relations with a woman during a musical performance. Hatterr finally escapes Giri-Giri's clutches by convincing him that he is in love with Jenkins (his dog). And Hatterr seems to think that the minor inconvenience of sexual assault and the genital mutilation that he receives are well worth the money he is paid. It is, to him, akin to a gift from dear, old Santa. This irreverence gestures in some ways to the Tantric tradition, which sees the breaking of social taboos such as eating meat or ritual sexual intercourse as a way to see "Ultimate Reality, a realm in which there is no right or wrong" (73), as scholar Thomas Coburn defines it. If the body is a microcosm for the spiritual as scholar Greog Feuerstein describes, then what kind of spiritual insights are revealed in this "Lolly loins" episode? The physicality of Hatterr's experience both sexually and generally points to taboo breaking as enlightening and rewarding, in its lay sense if not in a precisely Tantric sense. Hatterr is financially compensated for his discomfort and has a life experience that will affirm his later statements about the law of contrasts. In Hatterr, Desani creates a figure of binaries—at once holy and profane. In doing so, he paradoxically gives his reader a character that is not an idiot savant, but perhaps an enlightened guru.⁷⁸ It is through Hatterr that the reader is introduced to the novel's radical revision of fate and karma, and that revision's connections to colonialism. In doing so, he provides a very real to benefit (materially and spiritually) in the present. Moreover, in obscuring Hatterr's enlightenment through the gestural complexity of each episode, Desani maintains a level of secrecy which is akin to the Tantric tradition as well as a key feature of the comic.

The fact that Hatterr regularly ends up naked, moreover, suggests a phoenix-like approach to his philosophical quest. Just as his mixed-up response to Shakespeare leads

⁷⁸ Aravamudan argues that Hatterr and his best friend Banerrji "are in some sense opposite faces of a single Orientalist archetype—Hatterr as the Guru...and Banerrji as the eager Anglophilic 'Babu'" (95-96).

him to say something profound about sight, each time he fails spectacularly to the point of ending up naked, he comes closer to understanding precisely what life is: that in order to be comfortable and happy one must commit bad acts. In fact, he reflects that such a fate should come to the Devil. He imagines, “Hell, can you imagine the depth of red on Lucifer’s face when he finds Himself in Heaven? Yet, that’s where the Feller is heading for! Free board and lodge! That’s Law. That’s *Contrast*. That’s *Compulsion*. No escape!” (Desani 276-277). Hatterr suggests that fate wants its subjects to end up with precisely what they do not desire. Lucifer does not want to be in heaven any longer, so that is precisely where he will go. Thus, the only way to trick fate, Hatterr supposes, is to play at, as convincingly as possible, wanting exactly what one doesn’t want. He considers, “Maybe, I will cheat Satan yet; by understanding Law. A legal fight! I will be His accessory, and abound in what feels good and fine. I will win his favour...And when my turn comes to go to Hell (as assuredly it must come), I’ll be *feeling* it Heaven, and know no pain!” (Desani 277). Such a statement articulates the potency of the gesture as an expressive and rhetorical tool. Hatterr foregrounds how one gets what one wants in a colonial situation where direct expression fails. Instead of proclaiming one’s pain at being robbed, inconvenience and endanger others on a large scale by derailing a train. Be the Devil. This is misdirection *par excellence*. In order to make it into heaven, it is necessary to spend one’s entire life in the pursuit of morally questionable ends, just as the white British colonialists who imagine themselves civilized and blessed do.

The decision to write outside realism in what some see as a modernist and others a postmodernist mode, heavily laden with dialect and comedy, is a choice that speaks to the process of final liberation/Enlightenment and/or going to Heaven. Like his

contemporaries, Desani dramatizes the philosophies and ideas of Indianness in this novel. He takes many of the principles of English language and literary traditions and mixes them with Hindu spiritual traditions present in India in order to generate a philosophy that is distinct from both spiritual and ideological traditions. Furthermore, the advice not to reveal one's desires might have a real value outside of the novel. In fact, it is unclear to readers if the novel is operating on a larger level of misdirection, leading us away from Hatter's "true" philosophy. The joke may be on us.

Waiting to Exhale: Labored, Comic Sentences in Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh

While Desani's novel offers gestural nakedness and illogically logical sentences, Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* offers a gestural, labored body and sentences. His corporeal gestures do not mimic the cycles of reincarnation that suggest a plastic understanding of the world. Instead, his main character and narrator of the novel, Moraes Zogoiby, speaks in a labored and broken way because he represents a corrupt hybridity--one that he desperately wants to escape and yet, simultaneously, revels in. Early in the novel in discussing his family, and particularly his mother, Moraes describes a dream he had: "When I was young I used to dream...of peeling off my skin plantain-fashion, of going forth naked into the world, like an anatomy illustration from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, all ganglions, ligaments, nervous pathways and veins, set free from the otherwise inescapable jails of colour, race and clan" (157). Moraes's fleshy dream stands in opposition to his reality as the ultimate hybrid subject: a wealthy Indian man of Christian and Jewish descent who works for a Hindu nationalist against a father who represents all that is ugly about globalization. On top of that he is a man who ages twice

as fast, has asthma (due, he suspects, to his family's relationship to pepper) and a clubbed hand. His person mediates between the minorities and the majorities in India. So such an assertion about being stripped down to the parts of his body that might be more "universal" makes perfect sense. Unlike Hatterr who "goes completely Indian," Moraes seems to have little choice about how his hybridity manifests itself. In fact, he becomes a metaphor for the Indian nation precisely because of the corrupt hybridity that he embodies.

The Moor's Last Sigh is an epic family history. The novel opens with Moraes Zogoiby trapped in a surrealist version of a Moorish palace and faced with his own impending death. The palace is owned by a man, Vasco Miranda, obsessed with Moraes's mother, Aurora, and hell bent on destroying all that is associated with her. The palace, modeled on the Alhambra and Aurora's final painting *The Moor's Last Sigh* which Vasco is destroying, signals the novel's ambivalent investment in the question of multicultural societies, drawing a connection between Moorish Spain and India. From his captor's high tower, Moraes records his family history, from the island of Cochin where his mother's family was involved in the spice trade to the skyscrapers of the Cashondeliveri Corporation that his father takes over and runs. As he writes his final "confession," it becomes clear that the Zogoiby family story is wrapped up in the history of India, which is wrapped up in the history of Spain and the promise of multiculturalism generally. Unlike *All About H. Hatterr*, Rushdie's novel is unquestionably political and invested in discussing what a postcolonial India looks like. His novel is also more expansive, beginning with the spice trade and ending with events in late 20th-century India. In that

way, his novel is just as much grounded in events as it is theorizing language and identity.

That level of significance and allegory seems the stuff of great dramas, yet, Moraes reminds us, “We were not, did not deserve to be thought of as being of tragic status...Tragedy was not in our natures. A tragedy was taking place all right, a national tragedy on a grand scale, but those of us who played our parts were—let me put it bluntly—clowns. Clowns!” (352). The clowning that Moraes endorses should give pause. Why give credence to the story of clowns when a “national tragedy on a grand scale” is occurring? The misdirection of the clowning version of history brings something to the story of postcolonial India, a mixture of outrage and the outrageous. It suggests that tragedy and comedy might be the same event mediated by scale. The micro Moraes is a clown, but his role as the embodiment of the Indian stage is tragic. To privilege the micro is gestural. It resists the elite articulation of a postcolonial nation by academics, politicians, economists, and international organizations—potentially offshoots of the colonial administration that is so suspect in Sharrad’s definition of the gesture. It also gives Rushdie the opportunity to explore the figurative potential of corrupt hybridity without committing to a full-scale argument for it. The clowning gesture is manifest in the employment of Moraes’s broken body and broken language. Moraes’s body is racially, religiously, morally, and able-ly mixed, and thus, his language groans under the weight of that hybridity. It mirrors the labors of those groans through his punctuation use—which leads to expansive sentences, and his attention to how words are built through their pre- and suffixes and their sonorous nature (this sounds like that). The deployment of language that matches the symbolic significance of Moraes’s body

becomes comic through the confessional format of the novel, unlike Hatterr whose language seems more unhinged than labored. Written words are not affected by one's ability to breathe, and yet connecting them forces the reader to contend with the ways that the gestures of the body include language use.

Accordingly, an attention to commas, dashes, parentheticals, and semicolons highlights how Moraes attempts to stretch out his language and connect it to his body.

Take, for example, an early passage in the novel where Moraes is articulating his bodily ailments:

Speaking for myself, at this late hour? Just about managing, thanks for asking; though old, old, old before my time. You could say I loved too fast, and like a marathon runner collapsing because he failed to pace himself, like a suffocating astronaut who danced too merrily on the Moon, in my overheated years I used up a full lifespan's air-supply. O wastrel Moor! To spend in just thirty-six years, your allotment of threescore-and-twelve. (But let me say, in mitigation, that I didn't have much choice.) (53)

Moraes's tone is conversational, directly addressing the reader through dependent clauses such as "thanks for asking." Repetitions such as "old, old, old" or the running list of similes that describe his rapid aging seem excessive, although grammatically correct. The excess and hyperbole of Moraes's prose is a rhetorical strategy that hopes to elicit a reader's pity—especially since he "didn't have much choice" about how and under what terms he aged and he is just "managing" to express himself at this point. Such a point, moreover, is articulated in a parenthetical phrase, which suggests that the subordination of reader pathos is inversely hierarchical. Although the parenthetical phrase seems the most removed from the passage grammatically, it is the most direct address to the reader regarding Moraes's innocence/lack of choice. Moraes's rhetoric, consequently, meanders like Hatterr's and attempts to lead the reader through the labyrinth of his narrative only to

arrive at his pathetic state. Thus labored language is an effective strategy for gaining reader buy-in and support for what will become an endorsement of corrupt hybridity as manifest most obviously in Moraes's disability.

Coupled with the pathos of Moraes's situation, Rushdie comically rehearses the association of nature with the dysfunction and savagery of the colonial body. Moraes describes how his body is something to be tamed and overcome:

So: there is difficulty, but I surmount it. Most nights there are noises, the croaks and honks of fantastic beasts, issuing from the jungles of my lungs. I awake gasping and, sleep-heavy, grab fistfuls of air and stuff them uselessly into my mouth. Still, it is easier to breathe in than out. As it is easier to absorb what life offers than to give out the results of such absorption. As it is easier to take a blow than to hit back. Nevertheless, wheezing and ratchet, I eventually exhale, I overcome. There is pride to be taken in this; I do not deny myself a pat on my aching back. (53)

Moraes's body "honks" and "croaks" with the sounds of "fantastic beats" (Rushdie 53). Thus, he equates how his lungs *communicate* with the way animals communicate. The word "jungles" in particular calls to mind the colonial accounts of Indian jungles memorialized in stories such as Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. What kind of hybrid body is Moraes's if it is like an untamed jungle that consumes him? Such a connection between nature, the human, and Moraes as a figure of colonization is apt. It should remind us of Adorno's and Horkheimer's arguments in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which state that nature is always the first to be colonized (2). Moreover, it mirrors the frequent rhetoric of colonial administrations to see colonized subjects as physically and psychologically diseased and akin to nature. Finally, it circles back to discussions that Derrida and Haraway have about the means and modes of communication available to animals, and the inherent alterity of that communication.

Syntactically, Moraes's sentences mirror the conflicts that the content of the asthmatic jungle passage sets up. The passage features a series of clauses that clarify but stand aside from the primary message of the sentence. "The croaks and honks...", "sleep-heavy," "wheezing and ratchet" are offset by his use of commas. It is no accident that these phrases stand apart in the passage. Asthma is being figured as the savage animal within Moraes rather than unified with his sense of self. Moraes also employs transitional words, phrases and punctuation that syntactically signal moments of connection that are not reinforced by the content. The beginning of the passage, "So: there is difficulty, but I surmount it," seems out of place because of the position of "so" followed by a colon. It elicits a reader response of "so what?" Such a transition is followed by "still" and "nevertheless," which move the reader through his struggles to breathe in and then position the struggle to exhale as a metaphor for action. He connects this struggle through allusion to his profession as a hit man: "As it is easier to take a blow than to hit back" (53). In so doing, he justifies not only his physical struggle for breath but also his choice of profession, which is built upon his non-normative body.⁷⁹ The punctuation mirrors the wheezing and stunted articulation of asthmatic expression by breaking up ideas into these small, hierarchized linguistic pieces, but also fulfills a similar rhetorical function to the aging passage explored above. The passage literally feels as if it is wheezing along with Moraes, and we as readers are expected to sympathize.

Yet when Moraes articulates, "it is easier to absorb what life offers," the life Moraes absorbs is one ripe with the corruptions and exploitations in Indian history—his

⁷⁹ Moraes has a clubbed hand that is particularly suited for punching. At various points characters encourage him to use his clubbed hand to his advantage. For example Lamjan Chandiwala teaches him how to box and Mainduck employs him as a hit man. Although I do not go into detail regarding this aspect of Moraes's non-normative body, it is an interesting line of inquiry that merits further discussion.

maternal family's spice empire; his father's brutal, black-market venture capitalism; his employer Mainduck's violent Hindu nationalism⁸⁰; his relationship with Uma and her vacuous hybrid subjectivity⁸¹; and his mother's secular artwork of which he is the principal subject.⁸² The passage is quite literally a corrupt hybrid passage in which Moraes takes on a number of conflicts in his life through the metaphor of labored breath. All of these conflicts, Dohra Ahmed will note, become "fundamentalist mindsets," (2) or as Vasco poignantly remarks in the novel:

Let me give you a tip. Only one power in this damn country is strong enough to stand up against those gods and it isn't blankyety blank sockular specialism. It isn't blanket blank Pandit Nehru and his blanket blank protection-of-minor-ities Congress watch-wallahs. You know what it is? I'll tell you what it is. Corruption (166).

Vasco's articulation is not only apt in its critique but it shows the ways in which Rushdie is employing comic language to make extremely timely political critiques. Like Desani he is imagining an alternative to the legacies of colonial administration, although here Rushdie takes a more explicit tact in mentioning Nehru and thus making the object of his

⁸⁰ Trousdale discusses the politics in Rushdie's literary works, noting "As the Hindu nationalist movement gains strength in India, his arguments against it become more and more overt, and his alterative visions of a pluralistic, secular India becomes at once more appealing and more apparently impossible. *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) offer varying visions of an ideal India that directly answers and combats the ideal put forward by the Hindu nationalists, simultaneously tracing the origins of that movement to the failures of the pluralists" (96).

⁸¹ Dohra Ahmad remarks, "That epic and often disorganized novel [*The Moor's Last Sigh*] brilliantly represents fundamentalism and hybridity as not only competing modes of expression but competing forms of historiography... Ultimately, Rushdie reveals the apparent opposites as distorted versions of each other... there are not one but multiple fundamentalisms, and as it turns out, all of them are contemporary, manufactured phenomenon" (1). Priyamvada Gopal agrees seeing the hybrid postmodernity of Uma as linked closely to fundamentalism (133). Ahmed further notes, "By the time of independence new middle-class suburbs and neighborhoods appeared, which were increasingly linked more by class than by ethnicity: as economic divides in the population of the city became sharper, religious and caste divides faded, creating middle-class neighborhoods instead of Gujarati, Marathi, or Muslim neighborhoods... Bombayites seemed to have used hybridity as a form of resistance by improving on the original—strengthening the English, Gujarati and Marathi theatrical traditions by swapping techniques among them" (98-99).

⁸² Ahmad argues that in the novel, "art is another kind of faith; it is a vehicle for organizing and expressing experience, and it is a discipline with internal orthodoxies and schisms. In treating art as a secular expression of faith, Rushdie revisits Adam Aziz's "god-shaped hole" from *Midnight's Children*" (6).

critique clear—political re-imaginings of India after decolonization. Here the idealism of Nehru and a secular, multicultural India is reduced to censored, spasmodic language—“blankyety blank sockular specialism” and “blankeyety blank protection-of-minor-ities Congress watch-wallahs” (166). The “blanks” spelled out imply a harsher language, which would have been more regionally or culturally specific. Swearing is highly community and culturally based—not everyone’s goddamns are the same. Thus the erasure of cultural and religious diversity through secularizing in the political sphere, of which Nehru was a proponent, is signaled ironically in the language itself. Vasco’s linked and spasmodic language with regard to Nehru is in turn contrasted with his simple one-word articulation regarding how India really works. It is “corrupt.” And it is corruption to the extreme that is on display in this novel. It is as if the novel is a carnival of sublime characters and articulation *a la* Gargantua whose topsy-turvy nature functions, as Bakhtin would have us believe, as an ambivalent but ultimately positive force.

The corruption of India and the corruption of Moraes and his body are, subsequently, linked together and to the fraught metaphor of multicultural, early modern Spain.⁸³ The rapid growth and rise of the Indian nation post 1947 are mirrored in the rapid aging of Moraes’s physical form. As Stephen Greenberg points out, ““the magical realist device of Moor’s disease” is related to the “outrageous dislocation in a country full of pasts that disappear too quickly” (95). Vassilena Parashkeova adds, “[Moraes’s] unnatural rapid growth parallels that of a city...like Bombay, he ages prematurely” (49). “The Moor is one of Rushdie’s many allegorical figures for India,” argues Yumna

⁸³ For more on this topic, see the work of Stephen Henighan, Vassilena Parashkeova, Paul Cantor, and Ana Guttman. These scholars discuss the relationship of the Reconquista to the end of a productive multicultural society, the problem of figuring Moorish Spain as a utopic multicultural society, the question of authentic historical records, and connections to *Don Quixote* and its Arabic translation.

Siddiqi, “representing with his multi-religious and ambiguous parenthood India’s religiously and ethnically mixed policy” (1218). The imaginative potential of a character who *lives* the rapid growth of the Indian nation and its historical legacies so legibly on his body foregrounds the ways in which the legacies of colonialism are written on the bodies of all of its subjects. To that end, the problem with Moraes’s body is that it is ephemeral, wasting away quickly as the novel progresses. The parallel between himself, the city and Spain creates a domino effect: if one goes down, so, too, do the other two. And go down they do. By the end of the novel Bombay has been blown to bits, and Spain is a soulless tourist town full of chain stores.

In addition to the labored punctuation-heavy sentences in this novel, Moraes proves himself to be very interested in etymology.⁸⁴ At first this gesture seems connected to his desire for something a little more solid: Latin and Western civilization. He asserts,

I am what breathes. I am what began long ago with an exhaled cry, what will conclude when a glass held to my lips remains clear. It is not thinking makes us so, but air. *Suspiro ergo sum*. I sigh, therefore I am. The Latin as usual tells the truth: *suspirare*=*sub*, below, +*spirare*, verb, to breathe. *Suspiro*: I under-breathe. (53)

The fascination with etymology in this passage at first glance seems to subordinate Moraes to his breath and to lofty Latin language. He is under or below breath, even if breath is duplicitous over the lifetime of a person and manipulated by the subject to form words or other modes of non-linguistic expression. Yet the fact that Moraes can and does

⁸⁴ Although it is not explicitly mentioned, Desani is interested in etymology as well. This is evident in his title *The Autobiographical of H. Hatterr Being Also a Mosaic-Organon of Life; viz A Medico-Philosophical Grammar as to This Contrast, This Human Horseplay, This design for Diamond-Cut-Diamond*. Here Hatterr links up heady terms associated with knowledge explication--"organon" and "grammar"--to describe his philosophy, even though the two words are associated with different disciplinary fields (philosophy and language). Moreover his law of contrast gets attached to "horseplay" and the process of shaping the hardest substance on earth (the diamond). In this way the denotations and connotations of words in his title end up linking a number of fields and concepts: autobiography/memoir, science, philosophy, language, medicine, play/comedy, and intelligent/skillful design.

break down this Latinate phrase and revise Descartes's proposition doesn't quite feel as subordinate as it should. Furthermore, the practice of breaking down words into their morphemes in order to better articulate their meanings has roots in ancient Sanskrit scholarship. Done in particular connection to the interpretation and study of the *Vedas*, the *Nirukta* methodology continues to hold sway in contemporary India as an interpretive tool.⁸⁵ Thus, Moraes aligns himself with ancient Western and Indian intellectual thought, a move that seems far from submissive.

Moreover, etymology in this novel seems to be a fast and loose tool. Fifty pages later, Moraes will again break down words: "*Bastard*: I like the sound of the word. *Baas*, a smell, a stinky-poo. *Turd*, no translation required. Ergo, *Bastard*, a smelly shit; like, for example, me." (104). Here Moraes combines the Hindi word for "smelly" with the English word for "poop." Unlike in his translation of Latin, Moraes makes meaning out of the hybrid and corrupt combination of two languages available to him. This etymological example is more explicitly hybrid than the first example, which implies a facility with both ancient Roman and Indian interpretive methods. What remains important, however, is that in combining linguistic methods and different languages, Moraes has far greater access to prefixes, suffixes and morphemes with which to express himself. And he relies on the ways that the word "bastard" sounds and feels like other words, rather than relying on their orthography or morphological logic. Meaning making is accordingly rooted in his ailing body.

The gestural nature of these passages puts forth an argument for the kind of corrupt hybridity that Rushdie endorses—one that is dynamic in its mediation of the

⁸⁵ For more information on the role of etymology in ancient Hindu scholarship, see Peter Schaf's chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Linguistics* edited by Keith Allen, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* by Arthur A. MacDonnell, and *A History of Civilization in Ancient India* by Romesh Chunder Dutt.

various layered pieces that make up the whole. This hybridity is not the hybridity of Uma, Moraes's love interest, who had the "ability to take on radically different personae in the company of different people—to become what she guessed a given man or woman... would find most appealing" (266). Nor is the hybridity he endorses to be found in Adam, Moraes's stepbrother, who speaks in binaries and catch phrases. Instead the comic, hybrid language is a language of layering like the layering of history to be found in Moraes and his representation in his mother's art. Scholars call this Rushdie's palimpsestic writing. As Alexandra Schultheis argues, "In *the Moor's Last Sigh*, historical, metaphorical, and narrative concerns reflect one another. To represent and respond to the paradox of national identity through history and across cultural differences, Rushdie employs sutures and palimpsests" (570).^{86 87} Aghogho Akpome describes this style of writing as "an interesting model of pastiche, a collage of narrative and literary devices or modes comprising magic realism, myth, pun, metafiction as well as *ekphrasis*" (143). He furthers, "All these combine to construct an iconoclastic notion of identity and ontology that is kaleidoscopic, uncertain, and constitutive of multiple layers of oppositional realities' that are bound together in concurrent co-existence" (143).⁸⁸

⁸⁶ She furthers, "Rushdie may have borrowed the trope of the palimpsest from Nehru, who pictured Indian history as a palimpsest of successful intercultural exchanges that the new nation would constitutionally extend an guarantee" (570).

⁸⁷ Vassilena Parashkevova argues that, "This utopian/heterotopian 'Mooristan/Palimpstine' is an idealized place of intercultural tolerance and "home" for the Moors...and Aurora Zogoiby repeatedly attempt to re-articulate in text and painting, but the 'return' to which, the text suggests, is impossible" (45). The idea of the palimpsest recurs in the novel through the layered paintings that Aurora produces and that Vasco covets, the duplicitous histories of its characters, and the ways that characters reinvent themselves.

⁸⁸ Akpome will connect the palimpsest to autobiography and life writing by way of Mark Freeman's work. Freeman states, "the idea of self, as we have come to know it, and the idea of history are in fact mutually constitutive" (28, cited in Akpome). He furthers that life writing is "thoroughly enmeshed" in discourse, and within "a narrative order of *some sort*" (28; *original emphasis*), an order that Jane Starfield notes is often a "very conscious revaluation—often re-creation—and presentation of the self" (as cited in Akpome 140). Akpome summarizes Freeman and Starfield, stating that life writing "best be approached as a moving target, a set of ever-shifting, self-referential practices that engage the past in order to reflect on identity in

Their stories are gestural articulations that resist stable meaning. Rushdie himself will note in his 1990 Herbert Reading Memorial Lecture, “The novel... is a literary manifestation of cultural syncretism” (59).

Even more empowering, through the composition of this confession, Moraes makes it clear that his hybrid, diseased, asthmatic articulation will prevail even if his body does not, and indeed it does. The content and style of the novel endure while everything else in the novel dissolves in a comically Western-style throw-down complete with a shot fired through a painting that appears to bleed. Moraes’s composition of his *confession* does not save his fellow captor, Aio Ué, the real source of the painting’s blood. All of Moraes’s family is dead by the end of the novel, Bombay is blown to pieces, most of Aurora’s artwork has been destroyed, Vasco dies suddenly from the needle that was lost in his body, Mainduck is brutally murdered by Moraes, and Moorish Spain, which is presented as a Eden of cultural hybridity, is found to be a stagnant tourist location made to look like the rest of commercial Europe. It is blood everywhere, and Moraes is “deep in blood” (430). At the same time, Moraes reflects, “As are all these; as they must be, having no means of being other than through my words” (425). Thus what looks like a tragedy has a comic ending—something is born, a marriage made between the gesture and hybridity. Moraes, the lackey for a variety of characters whose own chameleon-like identity undergoes multiple transformations, has his tale frame and explain all of those around him. The confession appears almost phoenix-like as it rises from the ashes of Bombay, giving its readers insight into the paradox of post-colonial India. Moraes leaves it “nailed to the landscape in my wake” (433) as Luther left his

the present” (2 emphasis added). Although discussing life writing and autobiography, his thoughts on the shiftiness of Rushdie is linked to the author’s comic tone as well.

defamation of the Catholic Church. In this way, the confession becomes a paradigm shifting document, not giving rise to Protestant Christianity, but a ringing endorsement for what Ahmed argues is “a utopia of universal illegitimacy” (12).

This confession is, then, both hyper-local in its inhabitation of Moraes’s body and also global in its exhaustive analysis of the various ways Bombay has come to be defined by its inhabitants. It is akin to the phenomenon that Homi Bhabha describes in “DissemiNation” regarding national identity as performative and pedagogical. Moraes’s performativity narrates his family history, and he interpolates himself and his readers into that narrative through a variety of cultural references. But his confession makes it clear that understanding what India is in a broad sense is impossible—that “the horizontal, homogeneous time” described by Bhabha indeed does not exist (216). Instead, Moraes’s account operates as Bhabha describes:

Coming 'after' the original, or in 'addition to' it, gives the supplementary question the advantage of introducing a sense of 'secondariness' or belatedness into the structure of the original demand. The supplementary strategy suggests that adding 'to' need not 'add up' but may disturb the calculation. (218)

Things not adding up is a key feature of the comic and of comic language, which revels in the conceptual incongruity it presents. To that end this experience of knowing India in an ambivalent and dynamic way—it is both understandable and foreign—is a site of solidarity and possibility.

Conclusion

Rushdie’s own thoughts on the matter of playfulness, particularly linguistic playfulness, are illustrative of the potential of comedy. “Unreality is the only weapon,” he argues in *Imaginary Homelands*, “with which reality can be smashed, so it may be

subsequently reconstructed” (32). Further, he argues that it is play, “[t]he power of the playful imagination to change forever our perceptions of how things are,” which has a utopic bite (32). Rushdie connects the word “unreality” to play, and implicitly to comedy. Although he chooses the prefix “un” here rather than “non,” he gestures to the ability of comedy to yield change. Far from being a symptom of his postmodern disinclination to address the political, playfulness and comedy are the tools he chooses to employ to express and resist the inequalities he perceives in the Indian subcontinent and, more broadly, the globe.

To that end, the idea of smashing rules in order to reconstruct them is reminiscent of the derailed train in *All About H. Hatterr*. Thus, both novels suggest that change is dramatic, utopic, violent, corrupt and gestural. Moraes and his family may be clowns, but they also are key components of Rushdie’s playful unreality. Hatterr endorses a logic that is incongruous, resulting in the law of contrasts, and yet his ideas are powerful. Clowns and incongruous logics are weapons. The novels’ characters are part of the dynamic process of self and communal articulation, a process at once rooted in the body, illogic, and the elongated, fragmented, and broken nature of sentences and phrases. Moraes reminds us, “A sigh isn’t just a sigh. We inhale the world and breathe out meaning. While we can. While we can” (54). Unreality becomes rooted in the corporeal and its ability to gesturally create and articulate. Rushdie himself said it best, asserting, “*Hatterr*’s dazzling, puzzling, leaping prose is the first genuine effort to go *beyond the Englishness of the English* language.... My own writing...learned a trick or two from him” [emphasis mine] (*Mirrorwork* xvi). This idea of going beyond has a utopic ring. What lies beyond the Englishness of English is a form of expression more capable of articulating dissent

and imagining an alternative. The next chapter will explore this idea of utopia even further. It will consider the relationship between the cursing and generative quality of satire. In this way it builds off of Desani and Rushdie's "Dammes" by moving toward the way language contributes to a sense of genre. Accordingly, it will look in the most unlikely of places, the afterlife, for an ethical and productive engagement with the inequalities of reality. The afterlife is about as far as one can get from reality, and thus, becomes the very site where authors engage and critique (neo)colonialism.

**Keep Smiling Through Like You Always Do: Satire and Spiritual Utopias in
Anthony Winkler's *The Duppy* and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem***

Stanley Kubrick's satiric exploration of the end of the Cold War in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* concludes with Major T. J. "King" Kong riding his nuclear bomb into the snowy Russian landscape, hat waving and shouting "Yaaaahhhooooo!" while his compatriots scramble to organize a mine shaft strategy. The scene then moves to a series of mushroom clouds and Dame Vera Lynn crooning "We'll Meet Again." In this moment, we, the audience, laugh for many reasons. We laugh at the parody of American cowboys—and the ideals they represent. We laugh at the misbegotten solution to Cold War anxieties through, well, the beginning of the nuclear holocaust. We feel, I argue, uplifted by the experience of seeing and knowing that the arms race could never get that out of hand, or just maybe, that they have something figured out that we don't: We cannot stop the inevitable setting off of bombs that would destroy our world and those who could seem incapable of doing so. In the last minute scramble for a solution, the audience recognizes the rhetoric of "closing the mine shaft gap" spoken by General "Buck" Turgidson as not a passionate call to preserve the American people but the very rhetoric which justified the overzealous purchase of weaponry in the first place.

Yet beyond *Dr. Strangelove* as a finite example, our sense of "uplift" might come from the inherent meta-narrative quality of comedy as a genre; that comedy never hides its plot structure from the audience as tragedy might. It does not hope, like tragedy, that a

reader will become “wrapped up” or “consumed” by a story.⁸⁹ Uplifted feelings ride the fine line between a cautionary tale (just don’t set off nuclear bombs) and a creative exploration of the future (what would happen if we started a nuclear war?). Comedy exposes the concealed thoughts of our society. Will we, Dame Vera Lynn, actually meet again? The genre gives a sense of “conclusive” knowing perhaps not of a solution but of a narrative. It might not necessarily be inherently “comforting” but at the very least it provides an articulation of a future that the reader or audience grasps as flawed, critical, and potentially, utopic.

But why begin with *Dr. Strangelove* in a chapter on postcolonial satire? What do we gain from this 1960’s American imagining of global extinction that excludes Jameson’s “Third World” from its political imaginary? Well, the film brazenly confronts death and satirically asks the viewer to imagine an afterlife. Dame Vera Lynn’s song is ironic if one imagines that death holds no promised consolation of the afterlife. If one believes in the afterlife then the nuclear holocaust is small peanuts. The song’s optimism, a poignant affect given its affiliation with WWII and the promise of the returned soldier, should remind the viewer of the generative possibilities of satire as a genre, particularly when the subject matter concerned looks so bleak. Patrick O’Neill in his work on entropic humor includes satire beneath the umbrella of a comedy that “allows us to envisage the facelessness of the void and yet be able to laugh rather than despair” (100). He argues that there is something terrifying about satires and the dark landscapes they

⁸⁹ In positioning satire as a comic genre, I enter a contested debate about the boundaries between satire and comedy. Christiane Gutleben notes that this divide began as a formal one. Comedy was associated with poetry and satire with theater. However, as satire became known as a tonal characteristic of writing, debate as to its comic nature flourished (133).

explore (100). Yet satires are also “hopeful” (100). O’Neill is pointing at the slight psychological uplift in spirit from the experience of laughter and comedy.

Darryl Dickenson-Carr, who specializes in African American satire, asserts both a compelling argument for why satire matters generally and why it matters in terms of race. He argues,

Satire manages to fascinate, infuriate, and delight us to the extent that it transgresses boundaries of taste, propriety, decorum, and the current ideological status quo...[its] primary purpose is to criticize through humor, irony, caricature, and parody, satire is nothing if it does not aggressively defy the status quo (1).

Satire is, then, a ripe genre for those interested in changing “the status quo” and articulating the possibility of something different.⁹⁰ This is no more evident than with postcolonial literary practice as its stylistic function is consistent with a drive to critique and to laugh at the ideological systems that create “faulty” worlds.⁹¹

More to the point, an analysis of Dickenson-Carr’s word choice articulates the ways in which satire accomplishes its aims. His use of the words “aggressive” and “defy” suggests that satire is a violent genre, which refuses compliance. This aggressive tone functions as a way to *curse* the “ideological status quo” and in cursing, the satiric text does more than articulate a critique, rather its curse has extra-linguistic or super-linguistic power that acts on the physical world. Yet Dickenson-Carr’s use of the words “fascinate” and “delight” suggest that in enacting violence, the satiric genre generates a sense of pleasure, enjoyment, and even joy. Thus there is a dual function at work. The satiric transgression clears a space for a *generative and fruitful* conversation about and

⁹⁰ The terminology I will use to describe this “satiric possibility” will draw heavily from the historical roots of satire in cursing and fertility rituals. Therefore, I will often describe possibility as “fertile” or “utopic” or “generative.” In so doing, I hope to network the literal and figurative connotations of that language together.

⁹¹ This is, of course, to adopt a more contemporary stance on satire, which during the 18th century was known for its norming function, shaming its readers into conformity with social norms rather than subverting them.

resistance to the satirized object. Therefore the satiric genre and its audiences' laugh participates in the dual act of enacting a cursing violence—aggressively defying—while also generating a new, fertile conceptual space that is antithetical to the “status quo”—the space of satiric possibility.

I argue that postcolonial satire is a distinct kind of satire defined by its extra-linguistic function—that of enacting a cursing violence on the oppressor, while imaging a new utopic space which features the absence of the oppressor's power.⁹² This feature of the postcolonial satire requires its readers to consider not only the influence of words in disseminating ideas but to accept that that which we cannot know—in this case what it is like to inhabit the afterlife—might hold potential as a paradigm shifting space. The colonizer might curse the colonized subject, taking his life for perceived wrongs. Yet the colonized subject might, within this formulation, linguistically curse her colonizer and in so doing, embrace death as a site where the colonizer's power falls flat. Thus, the paradox of the postcolonial satires I consider in this chapter, which locate the possibility of equity after the oppressed subject has died, speaks to the kind of abstract thinking that makes revolution possible. Furthermore, it engages with scholars like sociologist Orlando Patterson who describe the enslaved experience as living death or a “social death.” Locating equity in the beyond flips Patterson's formulation. It suggests that biological death is not, in fact, “death” but entrance into a utopic kind of living. This peculiar

⁹² In thinking through the concept of utopia, I have found Foucault's work on the concept of “heterotopias” useful. He describes it as a space of otherness and difference that contain cursed bodies that simultaneously make utopia possible. Furthermore, the image of the mirror that he employs to both signal a utopia that does not exist but influences the subject's worldview aids in thinking through how the afterlife might function as a utopic space in postcolonial literature. The utopic afterlife that I explore in this chapter functions primarily as a reality with a critical absence. There is no pain in Winkler and no clear divide between the living and the dead in Condé. This absence removes these novels' respective utopias from reality while they simultaneously point to generative politics that combat the subjects of their critique—whether it be a call for some kind of politics of pleasure in Winkler or supernatural remembrance in Condé.

postcolonial incongruity serves both a pedagogical function, as philosopher Francis Hutcheson's might argue for, in that the reader becomes aware of the paradoxes of postcoloniality while also seriously suggesting the revolutionary role of death as something more than the end of social life.

Both *The Duppy* and *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* take as their source of critique American involvement in colonialism, slavery, and globalization. The two novels make use of the afterlife as a site of empowerment. They articulate the ways in which global networks of economic power, cultural capital, and "American morality" facilitate the oppression of those who are black, those who do not put a premium on pure bodies, and those whose spirituality deviates from an American, hegemonic brand of Christianity. These two novels describe the afterlife as *the* utopic space of possibility, which escapes the "ideological status quo" of colonialism and racism by undermining key components of power— in *The Duppy* the ability to inflict pain on others, and in *I, Tituba* the ability to control and end life.⁹³ Both record a testimony of the beyond, marking it as an illustrative text, which, if taken seriously, might guide our world toward a better version of itself.

Anthony Winkler's *The Duppy* is a first-person narrative that follows a newly dead Taddeus Baps as he comes to understand life in Heaven and chronicles his friendship with God who manifests as a "peenywally" or firefly. Baps does not write his narrative from the grave but rather is resurrected by God as a favor so that he can inform

⁹³ These two novels complicate how Frederick Kiley and J.M. Shuttleworth define satire as a "literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humor and wit to the end that institutions or humanity may be improved. The true satirist is conscious of the frailty of institutions of man's devising and attempts through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire a remodeling" (479). Rather than look toward "remodeling" a flawed living world, Condé and Winkler push their readers to wonder how inhabiting the afterlife might nullify the social inequalities of the living world.

the mortal world about how Heaven really is, correcting misperceptions of God and his desires for humanity. His narrative uses reflection on the afterlife to comment on contemporary global politics and racism. Baps discovers almost immediately that in Heaven one cannot feel pain and it is this fact which completely alters how oppression functions—essentially eliminating it in the afterlife. Dead Americans play a significant role in this novel, offering the reader a caricature of American ideology as they try to threaten and physically bully the rest of the dead population. Thus, pain and pleasure become integral in the novel's discussion of American neocolonial and imperialist agendas in the 20th century, particularly in regard to issues of global capital, race, and cultural ideology. Winkler's novel is invested in a politics of pleasure as a way to combat contemporary global inequalities.

Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* imagines that Tituba Indian gave a first-person account of her time as a slave and of standing trial as a witch in Salem, Massachusetts. Beginning with the enslavement and rape of her mother, the novel narrates the atrocities of Barbadian and American slavery, Tituba's discovery of *obeah*, her choice to follow her husband into slavery, and most significantly, her experiences as an accused witch in Salem. Along the way Condé draws connections between the Puritan period of American history and contemporary racism and capitalist oppression. At the end of the novel, when Tituba is finally hanged for her involvement in a slave riot, the reader comes to realize that the entire novel is being narrated by the "spirit" of Tituba and that her tragic hanging is mitigated by the fact that as a spirit inhabiting the space of the afterlife she has a greater influence on the living. In dying, she does not sever her

connection to the living world but rather alters it, making the slave owners' "punishment" of her comically ineffective.

The two authors I explore in this chapter are geographically and historically situated in the Jamaican and Guadeloupean Caribbean, respectively. As a result, my discussions of death, the afterlife, mourning, and spirituality are informed by those contexts, particularly in regard to the novels' attention to the role of memory and remembering those who have passed on. Although my argument about satire is broadly conceived, I have chosen to limit my focus so as to plumb the workings of satire while remaining cognizant of the particularities of place and context. Therefore with an attention to the particular, this chapter on the role of satire in postcolonial literature aims to clarify and expand upon many of the questions this dissertation has asked about the productive and subversive nature of comedy, laughter, and humor through an analysis of satire as an exemplar of a *critical* and *comic* literary genre. This chapter focuses on how comedy performs the dual role of leveling critique while imagining new spaces of non-reality that are alternate to the present. In order to accomplish these goals, I will first explore a working definition of satire, pulling out key ideas that are relevant to the study of postcolonial literary texts. Then I will provide two examples of satire and discuss how each novel imagines satire differently. My investigations will show that both novels are able to critique American imperialism through the strategic use of the afterlife as a utopic space while also justifying their critique in a broader context. Winkler's novel seriously suggests that we, his readers, adopt a politics of pleasure in order to combat American imperialism and Condé's novel wants us to take seriously another mode of engaging with

the dead as living subject, and in so doing, discover new ways of engaging with our unequal world.

A Definition of Satire

Although these novels suggest there is transgressive possibility in satire, within the realm of satire scholarship there are competing understandings of what satire does, if it is comic, and what is to be done with the satirized object. One of the greatest New Critical theorists of the genre, Northrop Frye, sees comedy and satire as distinct, albeit related. He argues in his seasonal schematic that although both genres critique society, they do so to different ends.⁹⁴ For him, comedy loses its comic edge when it concludes with unsuccessful heroes, societies that do not change, and a lack of hope. When this happens, narratives fall into satire because comedy concludes with a “repaired” society. Similarly, the Cambridge companion to satire separates comedy from satire, and then further divides the genre into comic and critical categories, which could be loosely linked to Horatian or Junvenalian ideals respectively (Ogborn, Buckroyd 13, 118-119). However, they note that binary thinking about satire as comic *or* critical is misleading (118). Because satire is so contextually situated, it is often difficult to discern what is exclusively “funny” and what is “critical” (118).⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Frye maps four genres of writing onto the four seasons. Spring corresponds with comedy, summer is romance, fall is tragedy and winter is satire. He argues that each genre bleeds into the preceding and following ones through minor plot and tonal changes. For example, winter’s satire and spring’s comedy both begin with a flawed society that is in conflict with a hero. However, the hero is largely unsuccessful in altering a satiric flawed society, whereas he does alter the comedy’s flawed society through primarily a marriage plot.

⁹⁵ The distinction between Horace and Juvenal tends to map according to the line between critical and comic satires. Juvenal is said to be more “ironic and humorous” while Horace is “denunciatory and critical” (Ogborn, Buckroyd 118). However, such distinctions between the comic and the critical muddy the hybrid potential of the genre to offer both simultaneously. Frye’s distinction of the two, which uses marriage to

The move to consider dark or absurd comedy in recent scholarship, emblematically established by Harold Bloom's edited tome *Dark Humor* (2010), is indicative of changing definitions of satire. After the mid 20th century, which ushered in a variety of darker comic works such as *A Clockwork Orange* and *Dr. Strangelove*; it is difficult to argue for Frye's narrower definition of comedy. That said, Frye does offer us a useful working definition of satire. He asserts,

Two things...are essential to satire; one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack. Attack without humor...forms one of the boundaries of satire [i.e., invective or denunciation]. The humor of pure fantasy [forms] the other boundary of satire." (quoted in Connery and Combe 8)

Frye calls our attention to the relationship between humor and attack—a destructive gesture—as distinct from comedy's reproductive structure, which makes use of the marriage plot. Frye's definition fits with one of comedy's origins: Greek theater's moral invectives and insults, which were employed to correct members of the audience whose manners offended (Elliott, Cornford).

Consideration of the ancient traditions of satire in a Western, Middle Eastern, and African context clarifies how the use of humor, attack, uplifting possibility, utopia and social communities operates in the postcolonial satires I examine here. In a Western context, satiric language and concepts first emerged in Greek dramas, specifically the Phallic Songs, which employed insult language in order to correct audience members who did not contribute food or money to an assembly (Elliott 4-5). These Phallic Songs occurred during fertility rituals, which sought to “[invoke] good influences through the magic potency of the phallus” and “[expel] evil influences through the magical potency

“right” society, might be a more useful way to distinguish between comedy and satire, although it too is too narrow for the purposes of this dissertation.

of abuse” (5). Scholars speculate that the word “satire” can be traced back to the Latin word *satura* or vessel to hold harvest goods (Ogborn, Buckroyd 13).

Ancient Greek scholars often argue that Archilochus is the first recorded Western satirist (7). He is said to have been engaged to Neobule but because his mother was a slave, the engagement was broken by Neobule’s father, Lycambes (7). “In the terrible violence of his rage, Archilochus composed iambics against the father and his household and recited (or sang) them at the festival of Demeter. Lycambes and his daughter (according to some versions, daughters) hanged themselves” (7). The Western “historical” record of satire, then, has its roots in the superstitious power of words connected to an otherworldly space. The power of satiric words facilitates not only a critique, but also a leveling of wrongs. It is similar to, if not in some cases indistinguishable from, a curse.

Of course, satire has roots in not only ancient Western but also Middle Eastern literary traditions; in particular it has a longstanding presence in Middle Eastern poetry. The *hija*, loosely translated as satiric verse, employs satire in order to verbally battle (*zajal*), through ridicule and insult, rival communities in the pre-Islamic period (Lewis 18) and at times replaced physical battles. Bernard Lewis interestingly notes that early translations of Aristotle in the Middle East aligned *hija* with his definition of comedy and that the line between humor as ridicule, amusement, and pleasure was unclearly defined in Persian poetry (18). With the rise of Islam in the Middle East, satiric poetry remained an essential way of denigrating rival communities. Exchanging insults (*naqa'id*) and verbal jousting (*zajal*) was common. Additionally, some scholars speculate that Sanskrit

dramas of the ancient period employed satiric language and insults possibly in conjunction with fertility ceremonies (Cornford).

According to Patrick Ebewo, a scholar of African poetry and drama, the function of satire as a way of controlling the behaviors of a community is somewhat universal to both Western and non-Western communities (48-49). He remarks,

In the realm of song and poetry, Africanists have long recognized the cultural significance of satire in African societies and the impact of the derisive song as a mechanism of social control. Traditional associations, singers, professional groups and individuals all composed satirical songs alluding to complaints about neighbours, relatives, husbands, corrupt men and rulers. Throughout much of Africa, songs used for social control lampoon the pompous and mock those who neglect their duties or those who are cruel or overbearing. (49)

In many African traditions, satiric poetry is connected to song and storytelling which is used to “express disgust, to report and comment on current affairs, for political pressure, for propaganda, and to reflect and mold public opinion” (51). This tradition carries through today, in particular in drama, where traditional satiric figures such as the “kolanut traders, coquettes, thieves, witches, and boasters” (53) are sometimes replaced by urban and contemporary figures (53). Furthermore, in the satiric traditions of Mali, Ghana and Nigeria, the role of such verse was to cleanse society of evil spirits (53). Therefore, although I have quickly outlined three complicated and long histories of satire across the globe, there is consensus on two distinct functions of satiric verse: to cleanse (bring growth, prosperity, and perhaps more utopic realities) and to confront through cursing (rival communities, political/social issues, personal grievances).

Daryll Dickenson-Carr notes,

The *rhetorical* force behind African American satire is frequently based upon the notion that if seemingly sound, decent ideas were cast in other contexts... we would be forced to perceive them as blatantly fallacious. Thus *reduction ad absurdum*, literally translated as “reduction to the absurd,” functions in both

straight polemic and satirical discourse to show the foolishness of a concept or idea by taking it to its apparent logical—and most outrageous—conclusion. (26)

The outrageous, logical conclusions of the novels considered have to do with the afterlife. The spirit world functions as both a liminal and inclusive space where characters are forced to face a radical reduction to absurdity the very flaws they encountered on Earth. Thus I read the satiric space of the afterlife as a place of outrageous exclusion, while also facilitating a hybrid experience of the familiar and the strange. The novels, as would be expected, level critiques against racist, classist, and sexist agendas that marginalize their characters. However, their allegiances are tricky, as the afterlife seems to provide little in terms of articulating a course of action to remedy such marginalizing agendas on Earth. Rather, the novels seem to suggest, “You will figure it out, when you are dead.”

Painfully Satirical: Utopic Heaven and Comedy in Anthony Winkler’s The Duppy

Anthony Winkler’s *The Duppy* proposes that pleasure is the solution to suffering. His novel also points to the real, absurd reality of American neocolonial and imperialist policies in the 20th century, which make use of the threat of pain to maintain control of the globe. The novel then connects one absurd reality—the conceit of a nation to impose on another—with an imagined one that just so happens to undo America’s hold on the globe: No pain, no American power. *The Duppy* begins with the sudden death of a shopkeeper, Taddeus Baps, of a heart attack, which felt like “a vicious tearing inside [his] chest like a crab had squeezed behind [his] breastbone” (*The Duppy 2*). After the attack, Baps becomes a *duppy*, or Jamaican creole for “ghost,” and is lead by Hopton, “shoot...dead five years ago when [he] try to break into [Mr. Byles’s] house” [sic] (11), to a minibus that will take Baps to Heaven. Baps, frustrated with encountering such

idiosyncrasies in getting to Heaven—"I am not crawling through no damn culvert at my age!" (17) -- encounters them even more when he arrives. Because one cannot experience pain, a good "thumping" makes one laugh, getting *pum-pum*, "having sex," is not only frequent but expected in church, and all that one desires eventual manifests. Baps discovers this includes anything from money growing on trees to the spontaneous manifestation of heavenly sheep.⁹⁶

Yet the most satirical moments in the book occur when Baps decides to go on a trip with God (disguised as an "ole negar") to visit America. There he discovers the extreme absurdity of American ideology and how it is made ineffective through a politics of pleasure. Thus, the novel articulates how the satiric genre can remove an assumption about the world, like the presence of pain, and eliminate problems that are dependent on that assumption. It poses the question, what is the point of hurting someone if they enjoy it and ask for more? Americans try at several points in the novel, like their earthly counterparts, to change the way Heaven and the globe looks and to exert their influence at the expense of others. Yet they are found wanting in influence because American policies of threats, bombings, war, sanctions and boycotts no longer matter. Pain brings pleasure and thus, Heaven has no use for capitalism, inequality, moral judgment or manipulation.⁹⁷

The novel offers its readers an image of a visceral utopia available to all *duppies* and a radical suggestion that the only thing keeping the globe from equality is the

⁹⁶ This is not to say that pleasure diminishes in its expansiveness. Rather, the novel suggests that pleasure and joy are mandatory in Heaven.

⁹⁷ Under a British education system, students, when corporally punished, were required to say to their instructor, "Thank you, sir, may I have another?" One might imagine that the subversive effect of a school child uttering these words in defiance rather than ingratiation might speak to the undermining of pain in a similar fashion to Winkler. However, the effective brutality of corporal punishment remains in this example regardless of the child's linguistic meaning whereas Winkler erases brutality and comically replaces it with satisfaction. His *duppies'* bodies always feel good--no matter what.

experience of pain.⁹⁸ For example, with the introduction of the character, Miss B, who runs a country shop where Baps is registered as a citizen of Jamaican heaven, Baps has his first run in with what he sees as the “rampant Manley socialism” (*The Duppy* 45) of Heaven. First, Miss B is a poor manager of the shop and so “some customers occasionally wandered in ...exchanging ...afternoon pleasantries with Miss B as they helped themselves...plucking canned goods off the shelf with no...accounting other than a cheerful, ‘Put it down in de book, Miss B!’” (45). Then strangely Baps, while reorganizing the shop, notices that no one pays for goods and yet, “[Miss B] never could run out of anything!” (60). What is first coded as Manley socialism, which one might mark as a time of economic scarcity, mismanagement and rampant corruption, then becomes something else—a kind of equal access to goods which exists outside of supply and demand, the calculations of capital, and the inequalities of the globe. But, still stuck in a capitalist way of thinking, Baps realizes that since the store had “no overhead plus an endless supply of free goods” (61), he could turn a pretty profit. Seizing on this opportunity, Baps tries to force customers to pay for goods. But, because Heaven gives its residents all they desire, his customers simply wish into existence a money tree. The tree allows them to evade Baps's onus that his customers exercise “fiscal restraint” (64). What becomes clear through this series of events is that desire, pleasure, and enjoyment undermine the epistemologies of capital and its relationship to exploitation, equality, and difference. Yet the ultimate irony here is that, for Winkler’s satire, the imagined, utopic future is to be found once one is without a “future.” Who cares if you have all the food

⁹⁸ Using the afterlife and satire as mechanisms for critique, does not make *The Duppy* unique. Winkler’s novel is one of many postcolonial texts that make use of the otherworldly and a comic tone or genre. One needs look no further than Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock*, Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, or Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana* for examples of the use of comedy and the afterlife as a means of exploring issues of colonization, the slave trade, and the diasporic experience.

and goods you want, if you have to die to get them? Can we employ a politics of pleasure in a mortal world, even partially, and if so, what does that look like?⁹⁹

A Sumo Wrestler at a Tea Party: The influence of the “ole negar” figure

Not much has been written about Anthony Winkler in a scholarly context, although his novels have been very successful.¹⁰⁰ Kim Robinson-Walcott describes his work as in relation to the Jamaican concept of being “out of order,” a phrase “meaning not merely ‘unacceptable or wrong’ as in British informal usage but, more vehemently, ‘rude, disrespectful, or offensive’” (1).¹⁰¹ This persistence in writing about and being “out of order” in his politics and affiliation with Afro-Jamaican communities distinguishes Winkler from other white Jamaican or Caribbean writers. Robinson-Walcott notes, “Winkler is one of the few West Indian writers who distances himself from the white world which other writers have shown to be fragile—distancing himself from the terrified consciousness, the angst, the unbelonging, the eroding exclusivity” (45). Yet Winkler’s commitment to being “out of order” runs deeper than his relationship to race and whiteness. His works are outrageous in their dealing with issues of religion (Robinson-Walcott 112), global politics (112), and black femininity (Shaw 57) all in order to comment upon the inconstancies of colonialism, neocolonialism and contemporary

⁹⁹ In asking this question, I am reminded of Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* whose argument about moving beyond using Eros to escape repressive society might take a different tact in answering such a question. It is possible to read aspects of Winkler’s novel as engaging with pleasurable and non-alienating labor, however, I am not sure how far this thinking might lead.

¹⁰⁰ His novel *The Lunatic* was made into a film in 1991, and several other novels are widely read in the Caribbean and the United States. Most scholarship has focused on his relationship to other white Jamaican authors and how his work might more closely fit in an Afro-Caribbean tradition rather than an Anglo-Caribbean one. The work of Kim Robinson-Walcott is a monolith in the study of Winkler’s work.

¹⁰¹ The notion of a person being “out of order” emerged in the late 18th/early 19th century in British common usage and came from, primarily legal language (“Order” a., n., and adv.”).

Jamaican life.

Moreover, Winkler, himself, engages with this idea of being “out of order” when he writes about what it means to be an “ole negar” in Jamaica, and why such a term might be more than pejorative and in fact, transformative. He describes the figure of the “ole negar” as embedded in a particular image of the poor, working class black Jamaican whose behavior is crass, “out of order,” and offensive (“What do Jamaicans Mean” 120). The “ole negar,” although it is often used in a pejorative sense, is also an important figure of resistance. As Winkler notes,

In 1894 when the British abolished slavery, the population of Jamaica stood at 16,700 whites living among 311,000 slaves, a ratio of better than 18 to 1. How could so few enslave and control so many? The answer was... to get the suppressed and enslaved majority to long to become like the minority. It was to make him want to ape you, instead of wanting to kill you. (122)

In keeping with other scholars of colonialism such as Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha and Gauri Viswanathan who describe the power of mimicry on and in colonial subjects, Winkler describes here the necessity of cultural colonization as a means of social control. The “ole negar,” though, categorically refused to ape the white man. “It wasn’t that he was just being loud and rude. He turned into a rambunctious sumo wrestler at a tea party with the best china on display. His behavior did not violate the rules; it nullified and transcended them”(“What Do Jamaicans Mean” 123). It is this ability to transcend, to imagine “the sumo wrestler at the tea party” that makes the “ole negar” an important figure. The “ole negar” refuses absolutely to acknowledge the supremacy of his white counterparts, refuses to “long to be like the minority,” thus, he escapes them and becomes representative of a kind of “Africanness” unintelligible and uncontrollable by white culture and politics.

Important too, as Robinson-Walcott points out, is the rooting of this “transcendence” in the body (112). One is “out of order” in terms of vulgar, socially-unacceptable behavior. In Winkler’s terms, one is a sumo wrestler who refuses caution around porcelain. The “ole negar” farts, he drinks, and he is obsessed with finding *pum-pum*, or sex. In connecting being “out of order” to the body, Robinson-Walcott dwells on the similarities she sees between a Rabelaisian Europe and colonial Jamaica. She argues that both historical situations share an incredibly repressive and violent ideological apparatus, and that the ambivalent, over-extended use of the body gestures to the ways in which both communities cleave toward celebrating the vulgar, equating it with a comic tone and with transcending the lived experience (112, 126, 128). Thus the grotesque body in *The Duppy*—that I am interpreting here as the body without pain, the negative visceral experience, and in excess of pleasure—becomes in Bakhtin’s terms, a site of regeneration (317, 339).

My own position with regard to Bakhtin and Winkler considers how this connection engages with a satiric space that is intimately related to super-linguistic curses and fertility/community cleansing rituals. These fertile spaces created through satiric work have much to do with irrefutable subjecthood and knowledge. However, subjecthood is gained in losing pain and embracing pleasure in Winkler’s novel. He creates an uncanny body and celestial space, which appears familiar but is, in fact, distinctly strange for the lack of negative sensation. The uncanny body and celestial space in *The Duppy* links with Bakhtin’s ideas of the grotesque body ripe with life and death in order to facilitate a regenerative and joyful epistemology through a heavenly space whose inhabitants have all experienced death, and yet, are more alive in death than while

living.¹⁰² Thus ambivalence in the mixed usage of the curse/death and creation/life codes as positive, rather than neutral, in both Bakhtin's work and Winkler's.

Bakhtin defines three distinct forms of folk culture in his work on Rabelais. The first of which is the importance of ritual spectacle like marketplace carnivals and pageants in the medieval European period. Second, he describes the significance of comic verbal compositions such as parodies at these festivals. And finally, the various genres of billingsgate or "curses, oaths, popular blazons" (5) are an important part of the folk tradition. Thus, Bakhtin links celebration, comedy, and supernatural linguistic utterances. Significantly, this formulation of folk cultures is consistent with Robert Elliott's assertions about the longstanding relationship between satire, the harvest, community cleansing rituals, and curses. Festivals are linked with linguistic utterances which carry extralinguistic powers—to do violence or cure, and finally to critically create comedy as embodied by the parodic performance (Elliott 5-7). Thus words act on bodies and bodies perform comic utterances, which in turn, change the world, critiquing injustice, and striking down those who are wicked.

Bakhtin argues that these folk cultural productions created a sense of two worlds, one bound by social stricture and the other "nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical" (6)—of the carnival. Bakhtin argues further that this concept of the world is important because the carnival spectacle is lived as well as seen (7). One is not simply a passive observer but an active participant in the carnivalesque performance. Thus, its laughter is communal, universal, shared, and ambivalent. It "mocks" and "derides" simultaneously as it is "joyful" (11-12); it is of the singular body and also of the

¹⁰² This Bakhtinian sentiment reverses scholars like sociologist Orlando Patterson's work on the social death, which explores how the slave experience is marred by the lack of ancestral or community connection and a state of being dead while living.

communal spirit. Consequently, death and birth coexist at these festivals in an ambivalent but regenerative cycle (19). Most poignantly, he asserts, “[the bodily element] makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthly, or independence of the earth and the body...the body and the bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people’s character...This is why the body becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable” (19).

Winkler’s heaven is precisely this supernatural space where everyone is dead and yet, their existence remains in its “most human” forms. Appetites for food, sex, and violence continue in both a shocking sense and a benign one. Desires only bring happiness, regardless of their extremity. The most distinct example of a carnivalesque is during celestial America’s annual “Hell Day” Celebration. During “Hell Day,” Americans congregate in the streets to celebrate the idea of having a Hell, even if one does not exist. Civic organizations create floats featuring aspects of a Christian hell that one might expect came straight from Dante’s *Inferno*. For example:

[A] float, put on by an association of American women, featured a damned male fornicator hanging upside down from a wooden pole and being lowered into a pot of boiling oil by stern demonettes. One demonette had clamped the volunteer’s imagined privates (he had none, for he had been governmentally dehooded [neutered], with a pair of red-hot pliers and was pretending to crack his earthly balls. (*The Duppy* 117)

This scene, with a logic slightly backward to Bakhtin in supporting sexual “purity,” accomplishes the irony of celebration mixed with violence and torture. Here the saccharine and patriotic floats of mortal civic organizations like the Elks Club and Kiwanis are flipped on their heads because in heaven pain and inequality become desirable topics for public display, rather than patriotism and “family values.”¹⁰³ Unlike

¹⁰³ This gravitation toward differentiating between the wicked and the good is paralleled by American rhetoric surrounding society and economics, which suggests that one must “pull oneself up by his bootstraps” and that those who do not, deserve their impoverished lot. One might look no further than

Bakhtin's formulation of the carnival that marks the grotesque and the orifices of the body as regenerative, Americans here cleave to macabre violence quite seriously, playing songs such as "Gnawing Out Eyeball of Sinner on the Appointed Day" followed by "goodhearted, patriotic applause" (118-119). Americans advocate for Hell not because it offers regenerative possibilities but because it will maintain difference. The virtuous will continue to reap the benefits of a painless heaven while the wicked must suffer torture, particularly the hot oil and red-hot pliers kind. Here, festivals mix with the viscera of the body—scalding it, burning it, "cracking" it—as an, oddly, critical performance against the repressive nature of pleasurable, equal Heaven. Therefore it is possible to read American behavior in this novel as that of revolutionaries futilely performing resistance in the face of an immovable ideology. Americans through their performances curse the utopia in which they reside; this is no parody for Americans but sincere protest.

However, the performed "cracking" of the fornicator's testicles is complicated by American heaven's compulsory requirement that entrance to the afterlife necessitates that one either cut off his penis, or "hood," or "caulk" her female genitals (*The Duppy* 103). In sterilizing the American dead, the American celestial government is very clearly denying a pleasure to its "heavenly flock," which God allows because choice is still present in heaven, just not pain. Furthermore, the government requires all its newly admitted citizens to "whiten" their skin if they were black on earth (103). It is here that I think Winkler's re-appropriation of the carnival and the parade is muddled. It is unclear if American government officials can "make" all those who die in America give up their

Thoreau's famous call to be self-reliant and his damning thoughts on Irish immigrants who he marks as embodying the antithesis of self-reliance. In drawing this distinction, Winkler alludes to a distinctly dysfunctional capitalist way of thinking, which passes judgment of one's moral stature by considering one's financial assets, successes and independence. Pleasure-seeking and giving heaven seems patently uninterested in such distinctions as it only administers an egalitarian dose of happiness to all its inhabitants.

genitals and melanin, or if the dead can choose to leave American heaven before such procedures. Regardless, Hell Day comes to represent the public performance of an ideology, which might, indeed, be practiced faithfully within the confines of a fixed celestial structure in so far as it cannot accomplish pain. In this way, Hell Day very clearly fits into Bakhtin's historical account of carnival in Europe as a sanctioned holiday whose ways of being and performing are partially absorbed into the repressive culture and ideology of the time.

However compelling Hell Day may be as a sanctioned holiday, the celebration as a function of distinguishing the virtuous from the wicked disintegrates and is mitigated just as quickly as it has begun. Baps describes, "Naturally... the upside-down fornicator was quite jolly, and every time he was dunked into the scalding oil, his peals of laughter rolled over the parade route, causing some disgruntlement... however, ...[he] could not help expressing *compulsory* bliss" [emphasis mine] (*The Duppy* 117). The parade floats mime a certain memory of pain while being incapable of actually experiencing it.

Although the virtuous, of course, would balk at having to experience pain, the performance of laughter instead of screams points to the inescapable laws of heaven. In spite of all their efforts to erase blackness and genitals, Americans are compelled to "express compulsory bliss."¹⁰⁴ Even their protests are marred by uncontrollable "peals of laughter" which only increase as they attempt to imagine more painful forms of torture. Baps notes, "Naturally, the upside-down fornicator was quite jolly," which is to say that the laws of nature—at odds with the laws of man—cannot be overcome by the human

¹⁰⁴ This kind of compulsory bliss might sound in some ways like the practice of pretending, as in feigning joy when conforming to social norms. Yet, I think Winkler is doing something far more radical here in structurally ensuring that bliss is just that, bliss. In fact, the irony in the American Hell Day parade is that Americans are pretending to be unhappy because they cannot let go of their earthly tendencies to enforce difference.

imagination. Rather heaven and heavenly bodies are subject to the peals of *heavenly* laughter.

The Americans' experience of compulsory laughter points to Bakhtin's notion that laughter is shared while simultaneously joyful and ambivalent. And it is in this sense that I find *Hell Day* compelling as an example of American protest, Winkler's poignant parody, and Bakhtin's complicated notion of the carnivalesque. Although the American participants are sincere in their desire to be different from "the wicked," their performance embodies both that individual desire for singularity, and the overarching communal nature of Heaven as imagined in this novel. Their laughter and pleasure is and is not their own, just as their bodies perform and are forced to experience the nostalgic experience of pain mixed with present pleasure. What this means as a satire is that Winkler is capable of leaving his readers uplifted in the sense that he provides them with a critique—of American attraction to inequality and violence-- while also eliminating economic or social inequality and pointing toward a new subject position—of the person who enjoys—which may hold revolutionary possibility in its ability to undermine an epistemology of inequality and differentiation.

Furthermore, Winkler not only alters the relationship of his characters to their bodies and pleasure, but he also provides the opportunity for the reader to viscerally participate in Baps's narrative. After Baps's lover, Miss B, is reincarnated, Baps strikes up a friendship with God, who has been a resident of Jamaican heaven for some time, preferring it to American heaven (where he is being prosecuted for not creating Hell and punishing human subjects that might be deemed immoral). At one point, Baps decides he wants to see America so he and God go on vacation. God, to avoid being recognized,

transforms himself into an “ole negar,” after searching in Baps mind for the most “powerful” image of a person there (*The Duppy* 99). Baps recognized the reader’s potential annoyance with “ole negar” behavior and so he provides a page in the novel specifically for the purpose of allowing the reader to smack his or her face with the book (139). The page reads quite simply, “Thump this page” (139). Thus, when frustrated, the reader can literally bang the book against his/her head to provide “painful” and yet pleasurable relief from his/her frustration. Thumping one’s head also creates a bridge between the imagined space-- the mind-- and the physical space-- the book and body-- so that there is a complimentary parallel between the narrative merging of the mind, body and spirit with a reader's mind and body.

However, not only does Baps elicit a Bakhtinian participation in the carnivalesque nature of the novel, of the doubly pleasurable and violent act of head thumping, but he simultaneously points to the ways in which celestial bodies are infinitely different from mortal ones. The psychological experience of the reader might be one of simultaneous pain and pleasure but the true revolution of the celestial body in this novel is the zero sum pleasure in violence. The “thumping” page then points to the ambivalence of Winkler’s narrative as a comic impossibility in so far as access to the utopic space of pleasurable Heaven remains elusive. Equally, the reminder that even characters only occupy Heaven temporarily and are eventually reincarnated (*The Duppy* 50) means that within the narrative itself Heaven only provides temporary reprieve from injustice. One could argue that this aligns itself with the ambivalent relationship of the carnival to medieval Europe in that it is a transitory event. Carnival does not necessarily alter the feudalistic structure of medieval Europe; rather it releases the tension of that oppressive life.

Allowing God to occupy the subject position of the “ole negar,” contrarily, reminds the reader of a transcendent figure in contemporary Jamaican life, which might hold the key to how to make the principles of heaven function on Earth. According to Winkler’s own formulation of the “ole negar” as fully other to British imperial norms, what makes this figure revolutionary is the bodily disavowal of confining Western social behavior—of the marking of burping, farting, and sexual appetite as “disgusting” or “out of order.” Yet the valuation of these bodily functions foregrounds the fact that each activity requires the release or intake of something external into and out of the orifices of the body; the parts of one’s self deemed “lower” or what Bakhtin’s marks as the bodily lower stratum. The “ole negar” might then become a figure of pleasure, or a figure in pursuit of pleasure, rather than in pursuit of “normalization” and sameness. Most importantly, the fact that God as the ultimate divine figure might become the “ole negar” and validate that way of being further suggests that a politics of pleasure is really what Winkler is after in this novel. The regenerative possibilities of pleasure—even if an homage to or mixed with pain—allow for the not-so-subtle paradigm shift of American power and inequality toward a utopic space whose new foundation is in pleasurable equality and compulsory happiness.

Unseating American Imperialism: The Afterlife Without Pain and Hell

As I have begun to explore, beyond the novel’s subversive relationship to the body, the absence of pain in Heaven is employed as a way to unseat political power, in particular American neocolonial attitudes in the late 20th century. Early in the novel Baps notices that American tourists in Jamaica are constantly trying to trap or injure God, who

manifests himself as a “peenywally” or firefly. The tourists, he learns, are trying to extradite God to the United States to stand trial for not creating Heaven “properly.” As discussed earlier, Americans believe that there should be a hell for the wicked, and more importantly, that the wicked should experience pain in the afterlife. Accordingly, the celestial American government attempts, in several ways, to forcefully alter Heaven. They try to coerce compliance with their idea, threaten nuclear war, and attempt to kidnap God in the hopes that he will fall in line with their thinking. Ultimately the measures put in place and the actions taken by the American government are proved pointless, as the rules of Heaven are firm:

Law 1: Water shalt find its own level.

Law 2: Thou shalt feel good no matter what.

Law 3: Thou cannot capture the Lord thy God. (*The Duppy* 89)

In pursuing so obvious a satirizing of American global politics and their bullying of other nations, Winkler’s novel asks its readers to consider the specific impact the United States has had on Latin America and the Caribbean.

Given that this novel was written in the 1980s in the wake of Jamaica’s 1970’s socialist government under the leadership of Michael Manley and amidst Cold War American fears of communism and leftist thinking taking over global politics, it is not surprising that the terms under which the satire of this novel operate are founded in disagreements about ideology. The United States during the later half of the 20th century engaged not only in economic battles but actual war against leftist and communist political movements, changing the face of global politics, particularly in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Cuba and the Western hemisphere more generally.

After Jamaica gained its independence in 1962 from Britain, it began to develop its economy largely around three main industries: mining of raw materials such as bauxite, agriculture--specifically bananas, and tourism (McBain 18). During that time Jamaica was largely dependent on the United States for the purchase of its exported goods, giving them preferential trade access (26). Jamaica initially experienced growth in its economy in the wake of decolonization but as the global economy slowed in the 1970s, political and economic policies began to change. Helen McBain notes,

The deteriorating terms of trade commodities relative to manufactures influenced not only the orientation toward the development of manufacturing industries but also the protectionism that was presumed in the region during the latter half of the 1970s. The significant balance-of-payment deficits that emerged during the early 1970s were exacerbated by the oil price hikes and provoked import restrictions by countries such as Guyana and Jamaica. (24)

Thus, American capitalist influence and global economies led many countries in the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, to prohibit importation of goods at the expense of national products and to control, more explicitly, market flows. It was during this time of socialist political control of Jamaica that Winkler, himself, returned after being educated in the United States. He returned to Jamaica invested in the rhetoric of equality espoused by the government and wanted to teach English there. He states, “[If] Manley was trying to right this long-standing wrong [poverty and wealth distribution], so much the better. I wanted to be there when he did” (*Going Home to Teach* 14). Although he grew disgusted with the Jamaican government run by Manley and the People’s National Party as is made evident in his memoir, Winkler feels ambivalent toward the United States as well (13). He has described the United States and its society as a place of “endless preaching about freedom and equality, the constant yapping about land of the free and home of the brave, accompanied by the hypocritical nasty practice [of inequality]” (27). Thus the tensions in

his novel regarding international interactions between the States and Jamaica do seems to imply an economic tone—should everyone be equal in the eyes of the Lord or should only the most virtuous—and by that Americans mean wealthy-- get preferential treatment?

Winkler's perspective on global politics of the latter half of the 20th century influenced his portrayal of the relationship between Jamaica and the United States as incredibly strained. The special trade relationships between the US and Jamaica suggest a bleeding of Jamaican resources into the States, and an unequal flow of capital between the two nations. In the novel, this relationship is represented in the American government's desire to extradite God for trial, an act that would transfer "control" of God from Jamaica to the United States. American tourists and students are traveling abroad to Jamaican heaven in order to capture God and at one point, Baps discovers, the United States has threatened nuclear war against Jamaica for being complicit in God's evasion of "justice." Baps researches this event in the heavenly version of the *Daily Gleaner*. He writes,

I found out that God had resided in Jamaica for many years and had even become a naturalized citizen; that over the years Americans had repeatedly pressed for His extradition to face charges of contempt of Congress for maliciously creating and obstinately maintaining an un-American heaven and had even given a deadline for raining down hydrogen bombs on the island if their demands about God continued to be ignored. (*The Duppy* 90)

The hyperbolic nature of American policy and ideology in regard to heaven here exposes the means through which the States has gained influence and power in an earthly context—through legal and policy-driven jargon and actual physical threat. Furthermore, it suggests the American government's foreign policy has a propensity for attacking the

interloper rather than the actual individual or entity with whom the nation disagrees.¹⁰⁵

Given the Cold War context of this novel and the threat of nuclear war between the United States, the Soviet Union, and its allies such as Caribbean Cuba, the above passage gets at the terror and extreme lengths to which the American government was willing to go through, including the decimation of an entire populace, in order to forward its own ideological agenda.¹⁰⁶ The very notion that Heaven should be “American” points to the bullheaded and arrogant nature of American foreign policy which sought (and seeks) to plant its thinking about economics and culture elsewhere.

Like the Cold War, Winkler’s novel does not feature an account of nuclear war on earth or in the afterlife. The cycle of fear and arms production and acquisitions amount to nothing in both cases, but for different reasons. The end of the Cold War, most scholars argue was precipitated by the demise of the Soviet Union and its particular brand of communism as a result of economic stagnation and the over-militarization of its country (Gaddis 257). Heaven’s Cold War ends, Baps learns, because of the reaction Jamaicans had to the news of the imminent bombing of their island. Baps recounts,

I read that Parliament had declared a national holiday on the anticipated day of the nuclear bombardment, with banks and insurance companies shutting down for the long weekend so that staff and their families could fully *enjoy* the anticipated holocaust...on the day of the anticipated bombardment, all Jamaican public beaches, rivers and picnic grounds were jammed to capacity with colorful masses of *festive* people...as they eagerly awaited *the joys of being blown to bits courtesy* of the United State. [Emphasis mine] (*The Duppy* 91)

I emphasize words like “enjoy,” “festive,” “joys,” and “courtesy” because the second law of heaven—“thou shalt feel good no matter what” (89) translates the experience of

¹⁰⁵ For example, The United States containment policies, which hoped to stop the spread of communism post WWII, led the nation to engage in satellite wars in places like Vietnam, Afghanistan and Korea over direct conflict with the Soviet Union as a rival global superpower.

¹⁰⁶ Of course, this moment returns us to the “mine shaft gap” rhetoric of *Dr. Strangelove* and the idiotic ways in which the pursuit of capitalist economic goals wreaked so much havoc on the global stage.

nuclear war from extreme pain to extreme pleasure. There is an equal but opposite experience of pain in Heaven that causes the Jamaican population to declare a national holiday, have picnics, and to thank the American government for the generous gift of “being blown to bits.” Unlike the real world end to the Cold War, which required the deterioration of the Soviet Union, Heaven’s utopic laws re-draw the outcomes of ideological conflicts along the lines of pleasure and more importantly, foreground Jamaica’s role in global politics over the more obvious binary conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. This is not to say, then, that Winkler’s novel is distinctly leftist but rather that his politics point to a simplified notion of humanistic interaction that assesses whether one’s behaviors give pleasure and to what degree. Thus as a utopic space he wants the reader to engage with the shared experience of pleasure and a politics of enjoyment. He shows the ways in which both capitalism and communism provide lackluster answers to questions of economic inequality.

Winkler’s novel seems to be engaging with the simultaneous curse and blessing of the United States. Because of the ubiquitous nature of pleasure and happiness in the celestial space, one could argue, like the Americans in Winkler’s novel, that the right not to experience pleasure and happiness is lost. In this way his text directly curses pain and disconnects pain from actions, words or experiences that might lead to it. However, Baps observes that in spite of their vehement objection to the absence of pain that dead American were “ruthlessly happy” (*The Duppy* 112). One dead American woman exclaims,

All the Girl Scout cookies I sold! The blood drives...The Meals on Wheels...the no-sex-on-Sunday rule I put my poor husband through...for what? To share heaven with nasty Mr. Leonard, who beat his wife...was always drunk...who

probably had sex twice on Sunday? And you know what's even more infuriating? I'm happy! (112)

In this way, despite the woman's protests, she somehow manages to experience a reward and blessing for the hard and very American works she has done, even if she laments that others around her are rewarded for less admirable achievements. This reward is the essence of heaven's fertility as a space; it provides refuge from an unfair world and the possibility of an existence where freewill only yields rewards. Winkler battles structural inequality as manifested through global politics and economics with structural equality and a politics of pleasure. This tactic of using satire and comedy to change the very structure of an imagined space is consistent with my investigation of Condé's novel, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* which makes use of the spiritual and supernatural space to undue the structurally unequal world of 17th-century Barbadian slave society and Puritan Salem, Massachusetts. Yet, as I will explore next, Condé's brand of comic satire is more difficult to articulate because it appears much darker than Winkler's.

“What is life to the immensity of time?”: Satiric Rebirth in the Afterlife in I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem

Much has already been written about parody and comedy in Maryse Condé's work, particularly in regard to postcolonial studies, history and the literary rewrite, identity politics, and feminist studies.¹⁰⁷ As Sarah Barbour points out, "Condé's novels not only respond to certain realist demands in that they fill the voids of African and

¹⁰⁷ For a good discussion of Condé's revision of history, see Zubeda Jalalzai's "Historical Fiction and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*" or Suzanne Roszak's "Salem Rewritten Again: Arthur Miller, Maryse Condé, and Appropriating the Bildungsroman." For work on home, see Wangari Wa Nyatetu-Waigwa's "From Liminality to a Home of her Own: The Quest Motif in Maryse Condé's Fiction." Finally for reference to her work and feminism, see Kaiama L. Glover's "Tituba's Fall: Maryse Condé's Counter-Narrative of the Female Slave-Self."

Caribbean history left by colonialism, they also contain elements of irony and parody that challenge the expectations a reader might bring to all her fiction" (329). Scholars note Condé's paradoxical relationship to history, citing her ironic tone as in tension with her genuine desire to create "revisionist" histories. This attention to challenging expectations tonally and in terms of content stems largely from Condé's literary politics, which some scholars describe as "postmodern" in that her works "privilege fragmentation, indeterminacy, paradox, the constructed nature of identity and culture and the reader as co-producer of meaning" (Simek 15). In privileging the writer/reader relationship, she undermines a hegemonic understanding of history and instead emphasizes a "local" understanding of a lived history or experience.

However, Dawn Fulton develops a reading of Condé's work that helpfully situates her in-between a "postmodern" sensibility and a "postcolonial" one, emphasizing not only an aesthetic ethics but also an ethics concerned with the human and human rights.¹⁰⁸ The idea of "eating well" as ethical practice, Fulton explains,

[Seeks] to overcome the binary oppositions of digestion and exclusion, or absorption and expulsion. Eating well or reading well in this definition goes beyond an evaluation attempting to distinguish "correct" readings from "incorrect" ones; it entails a relation to the text in which the reader remains open to the questions raised by reading and listening." (23)

Parody and irony for Fulton are employed in Condé's work as a way of comically *repeating, revising* and *reinterpreting* images of Caribbeanness, femininity or race with critical differences that trouble pat simplifications of these concepts (24).¹⁰⁹ Furthermore,

¹⁰⁸ Fulton draws on Anthony Kwame Appiah's distinction of the postmodern from the postcolonial. This distinction is based upon the absence or presence of human political principles. See Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodern the Post- in Postcolonial?"

¹⁰⁹ One might extend such a characterization to Winkler whose work also plays with stereotypes such as the figure of the "ole negar." However, his novel has a clarity that is simpler than Condé whose novels seem much more ambivalent about their "message" or "aims."

Barbour points out that the repetitive and reinterpreted critical differences of her novels do not reduce easily into obvious categories of “incorrect” or “correct” ways of reading— what might be marked in a comic sense as who gets the joke and who does not-- but rather sustain dual meanings in their plot, sentences, and characters (332). Condé’s novels are, then, comic, critical, open-ended, and yet, just out of reach—neither willing to fully condemn or embrace figures. She maintains in her comic language the digestible and the repulsive.¹¹⁰

The afterword to her fifth novel, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, written by Ann Scarboro, repeats the assertion that her novel is written with “postmodern irony.” Scarboro claims that instead of attempting to “recuperate the past,” Condé “uses the lost past to dominate the present and open the future to new directions” (193). Thus two key terms emerge in conversations surrounding Condé’s writing and humor-- irony and parody-- that are unequivocally related to time. Her irony is about the past, the present and the future; it is about temporal distance. This temporal distance and crossing helps to sustain, along with irony, competing and contradictory readings of her novel. Condé herself asserts, “*Je crois que [...] nous possédons des éléments qui nous permettent de nous distancier, de nous définir autrement, de lutter contre, de nous moquer de nous-mêmes*” [I believe that ... we possess elements that permit us to distance ourselves, to define ourselves as Other, to mock ourselves] (in Fulton 70, my translation). For Condé the merger of the self and Other comes through self-mockery—the distancing of one’s

¹¹⁰ Significant to the Caribbean scholarly appropriation of Derrida’s concept of “eating well” is Valérie Loichot’s work on literary cannibalism in Condé. Her point about Caribbean literary cannibalism being more than a vengeful “devouring of the other” (146), it is also a practice of “cultural and transcultural relations,” reminds us of the ethical component of consumption—that of hospitality toward the other. In *I, Tituba* this ethics of hospitality manifest in the universal call to embrace the spirit world. For example, Tituba’s Jewish master and lover can commune with his dead wife because he is open to the possibility of spirits, even if that is other to his religious faith.

“serious” self-interest through a comic division of the self. If her fifth novel is any indication, distancing is both a way of occupying a perspective and time outside of our own in order to reflect on the present. She pointedly marks irony as an emancipatory mode in generating this self-mocking, distant and “othered” subject (70).¹¹¹

A Case for Satire in Condé’s Fiction

Perhaps those two modes of comedy are not the only ways to define Condé’s humor, in particular in *I, Tituba*. The bite of satire might aid scholarly investigations of both the critical and elusive nature of Condé’s prose. As Appiah argues, the difference between a postmodern sensibility and a postcolonial one is an attention to guiding moral principles. Condé’s work in many ways is in keeping with Appiah’s view in that not all of her comic gestures are operating in a fully suspended and dynamic capacity.

Significantly, the Puritan figures of Samuel Parris and the villagers of Salem, which might recall to our mind Winkler’s Hell Day parade watchers, are severely critiqued in *I, Tituba* in a way that is more or less uncomplicated. *I, Tituba*’s Hester Prynne provides an exception to her Puritan peers, but nonetheless, on a large scale, it would be difficult to argue that Condé is asking the reader to find a redeeming as well as damning reading of that community’s religious and social values. Further the cultivated connection between Puritan values and continuing American racism is quite clear in her novel. Tituba remarks of the United States: it is a “vast, cruel land where the spirits only beget evil! Soon they will be covering their faces with hoods, the better to torture us. They will lock up our children behind the heavy gates of ghettos. They will deny us our rights and blood will

¹¹¹ This assertion sounds a lot like philosopher Simon Critchley in his book *On Humor* which forwards a humor that is distanced, self-reflexive and critical, like, he argues “a Martian gazing upon earth” and seeing “the emperor’s new clothes” (Authors@Google: Simon Critchley 2008).

beget blood” (Condé 178). In referencing the racial violence of the American South and the work of organizations like the KKK, Tituba gives the audience a singular and clear critique of the values endorsed and cultivated in America, crossing temporal lines from Salem’s mass hysteria to America’s more immediate sinister racial violence. In some cases her work does not suspend judgment but rather, finds indigestible elements that can be satirized.

But more than that, the longstanding alliance of satire with the curse and the creation of utopic possibilities is a significant mode to read *I, Tituba* through. The narrative structure of this novel; its permeable lines between the living, the unborn, and the dead; and the explicit gesture toward the afterlife as seeing into the future as well as living in the present interact with Condé’s critique of the “founding values” of America to both imply that the novel curses colonial practices and ideologies—and implicitly neocolonial ones-- while imagining—and *creating*—the fertile ground upon which racial equality can take root in the spiritual space. Just like Winkler, this utopic space exists in the afterlife, making it inaccessible to suffering slaves in *I, Tituba* who must endure violent and oppressive mortal life. However, if this novel’s understanding of the afterlife is any indication of the accessibility of those who have passed, the term “afterlife” is only “after” in name, not in practice.¹¹² Consequently, I argue that Condé’s novel gains its humorous force not only from its employment of parody and irony, but also from its

¹¹² My line of thinking here is influenced by Joseph Roach’s theorizing of funerals and rituals connected to death, particularly in New Orleans. He argues that NOLA funerals are “less a forgetting than a replenishment” and that this sense of replenishment emerges as a result of the “deep, spirit-world faith, the dead seem to remain more closely present to the living in New Orleans than they do anywhere else” (15). Thus, these funeral rituals through their performance revise and re-enact histories erased in a formal record. They playfully perform, imagine, and record in the audience’s memory tales to fill holes left by the dead or an incomplete past as a way of conceptualizing the future.

indignant satire. To push on Fulton's formulation, Condé does indeed "eat well," but there are things she spits out.

Marking the space of the afterlife in this novel as both the epitome of death and rebirth informs my dissertations broader notion of the force of comic spaces of nonreality through its engagement with temporality and the physical world. The idea that death or the end might also be a birth and beginning initiates a comic turn. Like Winkler, this might make us think about the regenerative possibilities of Bakhtin but more than that Condé's version of the afterlife is not compartmentalized by festival time as in Bakhtin or one's temporary stay in Heaven in Winkler's work. For this reason her hybrid utopic afterlife is, in fact, right here in the mortal world. Her spirits are interacting with those on earth and altering the mortal present while dwelling in the beyond. For example, Tituba, after she is hanged for a slave revolt on her home island of Barbados, mentors a living girl named Samantha, raising her almost as the daughter she never had while living, referring to her as "*ma sorcière bien aimée*" or "my beloved witch."¹¹³ Her mentorship of this child was based on instilling and continuing a legacy of rebellion and Afro-Caribbean identity in the generations that follow her. Tituba asserts, "I have been behind every revolt. Every insurrection. Every act of disobedience" (Condé 175). Thus, her afterlife is one that interacts with those who are alive as she becomes a revolutionary, and sometimes playful, spirit.

Condé's cheeky reference to the mid-20th century American show *Bewitched* in mentoring a girl called Samantha should push the reader not only to think of Tituba's agency in the immediate present following her death but also her presence currently, in the reader's lifetime. The temporal incongruity of this reference seems at first purely

¹¹³ This is a reference to the French title of the American show, *Bewitched*.

whimsical. Yet its gesture toward a middle class, white American family, living the utopic “white picket fence” dream, all the while hiding the Samantha and daughter, Tabatha’s powers should give pause. The show’s rhetoric of hiding and the comedy of failed hiding seem to be the exact opposite of Tituba’s experience. The show encourages us, saying “Let’s all laugh at Samantha’s near exposure” unlike Condé’s novel, which might articulate a sense of “let’s all gasp at Tituba’s trial and escape of death.” The contrasting experience of the situation comedy full of pratfalls and missteps next to the satirical experience of enslavement, persecution and immortalization in an emblematic moment of public hysteria points toward the ways that race inflects the severity and horror of “witchcraft.” Given that *Bewitched* implies many times during the series’ airing that Samantha may be hundreds of years old, Condé’s joke suggests that perhaps Samantha might, in fact, be hiding her racial identity as well as her witchcraft—Is this Samantha the same one as Tituba’s protégé? Regardless of whether this assertion has any basis in the show’s characterization of Samantha, Condé disrupts the continuity of time in order to critique the ways in which race, hiding, and witchcraft operate in the present as well as past.

The introduction of Samantha also points to the fictional aspect of both pieces—their fake accounts of witchcraft—and the enduring absence of Tituba’s real story. In this way, the novel becomes an ironic memory object, a comment on the late 20th-century process of rewriting the records of those written outside of a historical account. Condé’s goal in writing *I, Tituba* has roots in recuperative re-writing projects. She “felt that this eclipse [the lack of historical record about Tituba besides her trial] of Tituba’s life was completely unjust” (“Afterword” 199). Her project, however, is not one of total

recuperation but rather of creative re-telling, which does not have much to do with fact, but rather with the supernatural and the comic. For example, Condé's epigraph asserts, "Tituba and I lived for years on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told me things she had confided to nobody else." Such an epigraph suggests that the two women were contemporaries, and furthermore, confidants. Why this temporal condensation? Condé explains, "I was going to write her story out of my dreams...I felt a strong solidarity with her, and I wanted to offer her revenge" ("Afterword" 199). Our ears should perk up at the words "dreams" and "revenge" as both seem connected with the satiric project. Condé simultaneously curses the erasure of Tituba's history, and in enacting that curse recuperates in spaces beyond consciousness a story that needs to be told.

However, Tituba is not your typical flawless heroine, rather she is a lovesick, occasionally obstinate, and sometimes unreliable woman. Condé notes, "I wanted to turn Tituba into a sort of female hero, an epic heroine...I hesitated between irony and a desire to be serious. The result is that she is a sort of mock-epic character" ("Afterword" 201). The example of Samantha rides this line precisely. The project of inspiring rebellion from the grave is compelling. However, if your protégé turns out to be entirely complicit in Suburban American life, what does that say about your mentorship, particularly when placed next to authors like Winkler who use suburban America to characterize and embody his critique of the nation? Perhaps it is Condé's way of pointing toward false utopias (love those mid-century bungalows!) or the ways in which witchcraft has been co-opted for entertainment means. Or simply, it might be a reminder that the possibilities of comedy and of satire lie in their dynamic and unsettling suspension of contradictory

and opposed solutions. Playfulness, embodied in Tituba as a spirit and Condé as a “recuperative” writer, necessitates a close attention and suspension of the incongruities of reality. In this novel, then, Condé both engages in the fictive rewriting of Tituba Indian, accused of witchcraft in the Salem witch trials, while also poking fun at the project.

Yet the energizing of Tituba in our memory through the novel as memory object does take seriously the gesture toward Tituba’s spirit not being forgotten, that her interactions with the living continue. This move has roots in Caribbean discourse of mourning and death. Colin (Joan) Dayan’s work in *Haiti, History and the Gods* begins with Dayan’s recollection of seeing a ball and chain presumably used to confine a slave placed on an altar arranged by an *oungan* (Haitian priest) and of her inquiring why it was there.

He did not answer me... Now [the ball and chain] were part of the sacred objects on the altar, laid out with bottles of rum, plates of food, chromolithographs of the saints, candles, sacred stones, rattles, beaten flags, and crosses. Why did the relic of a horrible past fit in with the offerings to the gods?” (xii)

Dayan, of course, answers her own question in exploring the ways in which the realm of the spiritual in Haiti, and the Caribbean more broadly, is seen as coexisting through the present memories of the living (xii). Thus the dead only cease to have influence on the mortal world if they are forgotten. Spirits “live” among the living. This idea is consistent with the teachings of Man Yaya who mentors Tituba in the art of healing, called in the Anglophone Caribbean, *obeah*. Further, Man Yaya’s regular return to Tituba after her death suggests, “the dead only die if they die in our hearts” (Condé 10). Dayan’s ball and chain as a memory object reminds one of and makes present the Caribbean slaves of the past. Their erasure, their natal alienation, as Orlando Patterson might call it, cannot be complete but rather their histories remain present. Thus the temporal overlap of the “past”

of slavery and the present becomes essential in disempowering the oppressive rhetorical gesture of the threat to the body and instead puts forward the idea that the performative nature of remembering and mourning undoes the resolution or conclusive nature of death.

As Joyce C. Harte, editor of *Come Weep with Me* argues, the notion of the afterlife in the Caribbean context is vastly different from the predominant Western engagement with mourning (2). Critiquing in particular the groundbreaking work Freud has done in regard to defining healthy mourning as a process of laying to rest someone who has passed, Harte suggests that in the Caribbean there is a stronger sense of the dead as living through the remembrance of their descendants and loved ones. She asserts, “Mourning is defined here as a process, a relevant, essential, and productive event with the power to memorialize and immortalize the dead and those who have been forgotten or purposely erased from history” (2). Mourning, then, becomes something more than the “laying to rest” of a loved one but is, in fact, a continued and sustained relationship between the living and the dead. Thus Patterson’s point about the dishonored slave who waits for a death already figured by his position and Abdul JanMohammed’s furtherance that the slave must be willing to die to overcome a social death, is challenged by *I, Tituba* and the Caribbean sentiment that death is not equivalent to “the end.” Rather memory facilitates immortality and the promise of an existence that strengthens familial ties, that can interact with the mortal world to right injustice, and that ultimately, reestablishes a subject’s honor.¹¹⁴

This idea is mirrored within the plot itself as Tituba becomes increasingly

¹¹⁴ This articulation of the afterlife diverges significantly from Winkler who does maintain more closed boundaries between the living and the dead. He figures the afterlife as an entirely separate space that as we saw earlier requires some effort to get to (climbing through a culvert and taking a minibus). Yet his novel as a testimony of a dead person returned to the living does indicate the possibilities for interacting between the two spaces, however limited.

interested in her immortalization through song. She inquires of Christopher, her maroon lover who seeks immortality through song and spell, “And what about me, is there a song for me? A song for Tituba?” (Condé 153).¹¹⁵ Condé’s novel then provides that song for Tituba in the novel’s publishing and within the text itself. Tituba’s song is revealed in the epilogue when spirit Tituba gleefully remarks, “I hear it [the song] from one end of the island to the other...It runs along the ridges of the hills. It is poised on the tip of heliconia” (175). The satiric curse of this novel lies in its critique of the process with which Tituba’s story was erased. It critiques how her subjecthood was marked as demonic because of her skin, and furthermore, how her name remains in the present record only connected with the label of “guilt.” The satiric blessing lies in the creative process of composing a fictional account, which undoes and performs the improvised work of the West African griot’s song. Within the bounds of the narrative, fictional Tituba finds affirmation, and then on a broader level, the novel validates Tituba’s right to a complete story and place in our present memories.

It is this duality that I find to be the key to Condé’s politics. Just like Winkler’s suggestion that pleasure is the key to utopia, I believe that it is memory and entertaining the idea that the dead may go on existing and interacting with our world that Condé’s novel identifies as the key to utopia. If we imagine that the “immensity of time” and its multiple ways of overlapping and joining with the present might be accessible after we die, then perhaps the constraints on the body controlled by pain and death are not so

¹¹⁵ The song has a particular resonance in Afro-Caribbean communities in large part due to the tradition of the griot in West African cultures. The griot is an oral storyteller or singer who carries a community’s history and memories, telling and retelling these histories to community members. The griot must not only be able to recount important community histories but must be able to “riff off” of these histories, improvising the tales to the needs of the present. For some great resources on the figure of the griot in the Caribbean, see *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: English and Dutch-speaking Countries* and *Reimagining the Caribbean: Conversations among the Creole, English, French and Spanish Caribbean*.

binding.

Permeable Lines: Between the Living, the Unborn, and the Dead

Abdul JanMohamed defines the dialectical synthesis of death, “symbolic-death,” as the slave’s subversive choice of death as a way of escaping the bind of social and biological deaths as controlled by the master (17). He argues, “if the slave is willing to die, if he is willing to risk actualizing his postponed death, then that actualization will totally negate his social-death or enslavement” (17). Thus, for JanMohamed it is the willingness of the slave to resist and accept death that is powerful. I dwell again on Patterson and JanMohamed because their scholarship points to an influential idea in Caribbean and African American scholarship that rationalizes what might be called “suicidal” behavior in enslaved black subjects by thinking about the subversive elements of being willing to risk one’s life for subjecthood and freedom. The complicated relationship of the slave to his/her death can be found too in scholarship on enslaved black mothers’ choice to end the lives of their unborn children, saving them from the cruelties of slavery and racial violence.¹¹⁶ Condé’s novel engages with these ideas explicitly, first in Tituba’s choice to have an abortion, and second in her move toward making death the ultimate liberation for Tituba.

However, Condé’s novel diverges from this thinking on social and biological death in its framing of the issue. The structure of the novel suggests that no matter what the circumstances of a slave subject’s death, they take on the form of a spirit when they die. Yes, Abena, Tituba’s mother resists sexual assault and is hanged thereby making her

¹¹⁶ In particular the work of Barbara Bush and her monograph, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society* is of note.

master's investment a bad one. True too is that Tituba is hanged for her participation in a slave revolt. She is, thus, willing to run the risk of death in order to overthrow the plantation system in Barbados.¹¹⁷ However, other characters such as Man Yaya die of natural causes and illness, and they still become spirits. Thus, there is a structural component to Condé's novel, which undermines the slaver's absolute sovereignty by suggesting that one's afterlife cannot be owned by the living slave master and thus the afterlife is a utopic space of freedom. Furthermore, it shifts the onus of subjecthood from the space of a slave's intervention—he or she must commit suicide to gain subjecthood—to space of structural inclusion. It is my contention that this structural possibility is made possible by the satiric mode of the novel, which kills the power of the slave master in its curse and critique of his oppressive epistemology while creating new possibilities for subjectivity, connection to family, and a community history by incorporating an untouchable spiritual space that coincides and interacts with the mortal world.¹¹⁸ Satire's biting curse and yet comic indirection both asks the reader to take seriously the afterlife as a utopic space and leads the reader to wonder what strategies of resistance Tituba's playful spirit and afterlife might have to offer the living.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Of course, the example of Tituba is more complicated as she does little to forward the slave revolt beyond incite it. She herself admits, "Iphigene no longer consulted me on anything. I let him do what he wanted while I drifted lazily into the delights of pregnancy" (Condé 161).

¹¹⁸ One might consider marking Tituba as a martyr for racial equality and the center of this novel's politics. However, what I want to argue is that Tituba is the vehicle through which the reader recognizes the power of the worldview that Condé constructs, one where no matter the circumstance, the dead subject finds subjectivity in the afterlife. A martyr dies for and is witness to his or her belief. Thus, I read the narrative of the martyr as forwarding an individualism that I do not see happening in *I, Tituba*. In fact, Tituba can be a mock-heroine or an imperfect heroine because the satiric structure of the novel does not place the burden "witnessing," if we want to use the root word for martyr, entirely on her shoulder.

¹¹⁹ I believe the strategy of believing in the enduring presence or the power of remembering those who have been erased from history does have a political force. However, I am less sure of what is to be made of choosing to die in order to enter into this utopic space. Perhaps an argument could be made that the comic component of Condé's narrative might be accounting for the foolish decision to end one's life in order to find solace in a utopic spirit world.

Tituba remarks before she is hanged while listening to her “crimes” read by the slave masters of Barbados, “At this point in the inquisition I almost screamed out that it was all untrue... Then I thought otherwise. What was the point? Soon I would reach a kingdom where the light of truth burns bright and unrelenting” (Condé 172). In asserting the absurdity and pointlessness of protest, Tituba highlights how the satiric mode modifies the drama that the plantations owners sought to perpetuate in their performed “inquisition” of Tituba’s crimes by resolving their words and her mortal protests to the simple question: What was the point? This is not to say that her anger was pointless but that the very performance the plantation owners hoped to enact in hanging her was only so powerful when in the land of the living. Ironically, in ordering her death, they unwittingly disempower themselves. They allow her to enter a kingdom “where the light of truth burns,” rather than the fires of hell. Thus she is no longer subject to enslavement in their world. In the face of infinite time in the afterlife, what is really the strength of controlling the living?

Orlando Patterson, pushing against other scholars of slavery, looks to the concept of honor as the key feature in the mechanism of slavery. He writes, “slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons” (13). Thus the mortal life of a slave is marked by the erasure of a kinship or cultural lineage as well as an experience of dishonor. He furthers, “We must show not simply that slaves are a category of persons treated as property objects, but as Moses Finley cogently demonstrates, that they are a subcategory of human proprietary objects” (as cited in Patterson 20). If such a relationship is put into place, of the large-scale erasure of the subject and their solitary position within society reinforced, what does it mean for Condé

to imagine a space where those kinds of boundaries are no longer a guarantee? What if the physical site of natal alienation had no control over non-physical or alternative spaces? Does the question of slavery and the stranglehold of threatening a life become meaningless, if we imagine that mortality is transitory and spiritual existence is eternal?

Cursed Subjectivities

The paradox of death bringing “life” in *I, Tituba* is not so simply stated. In particular the way the novel engages with suicide troubles such a pat reading as I have just produced. For example, while in prison, Tituba befriends Hester Prynne who shares her cell with Tituba. Yes, you read that right. Hester Prynne meets Tituba while she is in jail awaiting her trial. Prynne largely espouses what might be called “Western feminists” ideas and acts as a sounding board for Tituba’s understanding of her relationship to her gender, husband, and sexuality. This is, of course, an instance like Samantha from *Bewitched* where Condé is having fun with history, fiction, and temporal condensation. As with Samantha, Hester’s position is not solely one of passing entertainment but as my reading of her suicide suggests, she is a figure through which the reader comes to understand the cyclic and complicated dynamics between the living and dying.

During their stay in the cell, Hester Prynne describes her affair, her relationship to Western feminism, and imagines her own utopia where women governed society (Condé 110). Inspired by Hester, Tituba begins to interrogate her own relationships to men and the world more broadly. Later when Tituba must stand trial for witchcraft, she makes use of Hester’s advice about performing her role as a witch. When Tituba returns to her prison cell, having been convicted, she finds that Hester has committed suicide. Hester

Prynne's suicide sends Tituba into what might almost be called a "prenatal" state. She describes her despair as the despair of a fetus, one in which she "screamed down the doors of my mother's womb."¹²⁰ My fist broke her bag of waters in rage and despair. I choked and suffocated in this black liquid. I wanted to drown myself" (Condé 111). Here Tituba's reaction positions her as both a fetus forcefully being born and also drowning much like Hester's actual unborn child who through her suicide dies before she is ever born. Hester's suicide breaks some boundary between the living and the dead, not only in her passage, but also in sending Tituba mentally into an interstitial space. Tituba's empathic experience of being entombed in her mother's womb, drowning and yet being born seems to suggest an interconnected and permeable boundary between characters, life, and death. It is here that I think Condé most forcefully asserts a connection between mortal life and being unborn, as if she is shifting the cycles of life one step back. In so doing, she seems to favor the idea that the death of a subject is an entrance into life—being birthed into the spirit world. Tituba's empathic moment can be read as her brush with the realities of living—as the underdeveloped body and confining space of co-dependent but incomplete growth. The suicide of Hester both articulates Tituba's

¹²⁰ Condé's use of the word "womb" in connection with a feeling of drowning and birth recalls Glissant's figure of the open boat in *Poetics of Relation*. The open boat aligned with his three abysses articulates the ways in which the trans-Atlantic slave trade is both a moment of erasure, of bodies weighed down by green ball and chains, forgotten by future generations (6), and also the site of new kinds of knowledge—including creole languages. He meditates, "Thus, the absolute unknown, projected by the abyss and bearing into eternity the womb abyss and the infinite abyss, in the end became knowledge" (8). Thus the suffering Tituba experiences and her understanding of Hester's suicide begins to suggest this relationship of knowledge to the abyss that bursting from the "ashes" of injustice and loss is the means for the unintelligible spiritual world to be a site of ethical knowing and ways of being.

profound sense of loss while also showing, if in a confused way, the mode through which Tituba will find her triumph—through enacting her full subjectivity in the afterlife.¹²¹

The notion of the unborn mortal is repeated in her description of the Barbadian landscape. Tituba notes, “Night on our island is a womb that renders you atremble and powerless again, but paradoxically unleashes the senses that catch the slightest whisper of things and human beings” (Condé 64). Night, then, is the time when spirits do the majority of their work. The powerlessness of enslavement runs parallel to the “unborn” nature of mortal life. It leaves characters a tremble and vulnerable, yet it offers something more than enslavement: hypersensitivity and engagement with one’s environment. This environment creates another parallel in its similar position to the mother’s body. Thus, the aborted babies of this novel, Hester’s unborn child who dies with her and Tituba’s aborted pregnancies exist figuratively on multiple planes. Ultimately the novel seems to be suggesting that death is some sort of final birth into unmediated subjectivity and knowledge and that the parallel confinements of the womb and the mortal world, while at times comforting, eventually pass as a subject moves from a cursed state into a blessed one.

Herein lies the paradox of this novel; knowledge is gained in death but death is in fact, a rebirth. Tituba describes mortal life as a “hurry,” an “impatience that is peculiar to mortals” (Condé 178). The short incubation of life, enveloped in the womb of the mortal world, gives way to the knowledge of “the immensity of time” where one’s spiritual life is a kind of fulfillment unknown to the living. The role of the afterlife in this novel seems to suggest that perhaps the true curse is the limited nature of the white slave master’s

¹²¹ Further, the question of suicide raised in Hester’s character acknowledges the stickiness of being willing to end one’s life in order to enter into the alleged utopic space of spirits. It showcases the trauma of suicide for those who are left behind and the risk of taking one’s life.

control-- much like Winkler's vision of the limited nature of American imperialism. In both novels, American efforts to control the world around them and to assign arbitrary meaning to the color of one's skin or practice of religion is thwarted on a larger level by the "universe" whose structure equalizes subjects in the afterlife. In Condé's novel, death works structurally as a cosmic writing of wrongs that functions differently than Winkler's cosmology, oddly gaining the same result. The satire of this novel both curses the slave masters while overriding their curse of blackness. It is, moreover, attentive to Caribbean traditions of the afterlife that look toward memory as a way of keeping those who have passed "alive." Condé makes use of the novel as such a memory object to suggest that beyond enslavement there is more; there is knowledge, freedom, and rebellion—all of which, ultimately, are more important than the petty and oppressive ideas of the slave master.

Conclusion

My investigation of satire, and really the themes of this entire dissertation, have sought to explore the ways in which comedy—whether a laugh, a language, or a genre—produce and engage with the unexpected in a postcolonial situation. This unexpected feeling or moment emerges as laughter and comedy navigate spaces of "non-reality" that are incongruous with lived experience. By extension then, my investigations of comedy have yielded a sense in which reveling in the unexpected allows for possibilities—ways of being in this world or the next—that are in some way beyond what is imaginable at present. This is to say, if literary satires create an alternative world that feature utopic ideas alongside nefarious ones, if they both curse those who are wicked and create

possibilities for their marginalized characters to thrive, they beg the question of the limits of the literary imagination to simply encase ideas between covers. What is so incongruous about these “non-real” worlds and what must the readers of comic postcolonial works do in order to shift those non-realities into the present world?

If Condé’s memory object, her homage to Tituba’s “lost” history, imagines Tituba as a revolutionary and playful spirit who escapes her enslavement through the beyond, then is it possible to imagine “real” spaces—beyond our imagination—that might yield the same sense of empowerment? Do these literary works both inspire us and give us the tools to think radically? The very fact that Condé makes use of the Caribbean concept of a memory object of mourning points to potential crossover points between literary spaces and real spaces. Another answer to that question might lead us to Winkler who gives us an exaggerated politics of pleasure, made possible by a benevolent God who just wants everyone to feel good all of the time. He asks us to wonder, is it possible that pleasure might hold the key to change in a mortal landscape? Although two completely different responses, both authors make use of a certain kind of genre, a comic one, in order to explore those answers—to take them seriously while also having a bit of fun.

Satire as a comic genre, then, models the ability to imagine and create fantastic spaces structured to mirror, as Foucault might articulate it, utopic, epistemological differences with which we are unfamiliar. Satire serves the dual purpose of showing readers what is wrong with the world while providing an extravagant—although potentially possible—remedy to inequality. Perhaps, we will all meet again in a world just different enough from what we know as to make that which we hope for possible.

Coda: A Look at What Space of Non-Reality Can Say to the Question of Gender

Isn't laughter the first form of liberation from a secular oppression? ---Luce Irigaray

(This Sex Which is not One 163)

The Urtext for this dissertation is Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and that iconic moment when Jane hears Bertha Mason laughing through her door at night. For me, no figure of laughter in a colonial setting is more poignant. Jane narrates,

A dream had scarcely approached my ear, when it fled affrighted, scared by a marrow-freezing incident enough. This was a demoniac laugh—low, suppressed, and deep-uttered, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber-door. The head of my bed was near the door and I thought at first the goblin-laughter stood at my bedside—or rather, crouched by my pillow: but I rose, looked round, and could see nothing; while, as I still gazed, the unnatural sound was reiterated: and I knew it came from behind the panels. (Brontë 169-171).

Jane's description of Bertha's laugh relies upon sound rather than sight to facilitate its horrific description. Such a fact might seem unremarkable, except that Bertha has been connected by literary scholars to Victorian understandings of physiognomy and phrenology.¹²² Despite the prominence of the physical in scholarship, the absence of a body and the presence of sound is significant because it helps the readers and characters of *Jane Eyre* write a demonic or haunted quality onto Bertha even before they fully encounter her. The aural adjectives used to describe Bertha's laugh-- "demoniac," "low," "deep-uttered," and "goblin-like"—attempt to erase her humanity.¹²³ As the novel progresses, Bertha's laughing demonic nature slips in to signify animality, savagery and then finally, insanity. When Jane actually sees Bertha, she is hunched over with wild

¹²² This is not to discount the role of facial structures and Victorian science. For more information on the use of phrenology and physiognomy in *Jane Eyre*, see Elizabeth J. Donaldson's *The Corpus of a Madwoman*. For an interesting account of Bertha's influence on 19th century conceptions of madness, see Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980*.

¹²³ Interesting to consider as well how Bertha's voice becomes distinctly masculine with the repeated emphasis on her speaking in a lower register.

black hair, screaming, biting and scratching her brother, Grace Poole, and Mr. Rochester. The trajectory of Bertha's characterization is carefully marked in the narrative to position her as an unsuitable wife. Brontë's demonic laugh justifies Bertha's exile in her dark attic room. It prefigures Brontë's implied argument about the need for a stable domestic space, which is impossible in a mixed marriage between a creole, colonial subject, and a gentleman of Empire. As scholars have noted, Brontë's novel favors the marriage of the power of the aristocracy (Rochester) with the morality of the emerging middleclass (Jane) in 19th-century Britain.¹²⁴

Such a move is familiar to feminist scholars like Kathleen Rowe who discusses in regard to the film *A Question of Silence* the way laughter transforms a woman into a "spectacle that is incomprehensible and frightening," which in turn makes her "vulnerable to ridicule and trivialization" but is also reminiscent of the ambivalence of Bakhtin's carnival (2, 3). Mary Russo observes Bakhtin's omission of the question of gender in his understanding of the carnivalesque and the grotesque (219). Yet she and Rowe perceive the spectacle of feminine exposure in public to be behind why vulgarity and laughter is grotesque (219, 2). Rowe further adds, that Frye's discussion of comedy makes space for a feminist reading of the comic entrance into a new world order, if one modified how that world order is achieved. It is not achieved through patriarchal and heterosexual understandings of how a new world order is created (marriage and family), but rather through this notion of spectacle and public exposure (92).

¹²⁴ For example, see Susan Meyer's "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*" and M.E. Gibson's "Henry Martyn and England's Christian Empire: Rereading *Jane Eyre* through Missionary Biography." To that end, Rowe articulates, "for many women, the social contradictions of gender had been played out most compellingly in artistic forms centered on their victimization and tears rather than on their resistance and laughter: the domestic novel, the Gothic novel, the women's weepy film, the television soap opera, the made-for-TV movie" (4).

Such a spectacle is present here powerfully because Bertha's laugh remains unattached to a body for nearly 150 pages of the novel.¹²⁵ Bertha is far more terrifying, the novel suggests, when she is simply a sound--her laugh terrifying in its opacity and ambivalence.¹²⁶ Moreover, in keeping her bodiless, the novel suggests that the laugh of the colonized subject is a sound that needs to be manipulated. It should be populated with significance and pinned down when need be; the colonial body made and that body's laugh written into transparency. Philip Glenn notes the overarching discrepancy of seeing laughter as a behavior and not a means of communication. One simply ignores "how [laughter] is offered, placed, accepted, rejected, treated, and shared" (Glenn 162). Brontë's manipulation of the laugh, then, argues that there is nothing more incomprehensible and spectacular than the supernatural sound in the middle of the night, and no easier way to trivialize and demonize an articulation than to detach it from a body, from a face. You must simply forget what it offered. And yet (and this will be more important in later sections of this conclusion), even though Bertha is meant to be terrifying, she escapes that fate for a number of readers who could see her, much as Jean

¹²⁵ The idea of the danger and threat of laughter occurs frequently in African American literature, particularly during the Harlem Renaissance. Mike Chaser explains, "As McKay, Brown, and Hughes understood, the noise of a combative rather than humorous, comedic, or funny black laugh could go where the physical black body in many cases could not and thus could uniquely challenge white control of public space while also mapping or territorializing that space as a field for further political action" (58). Therefore the regulation of non-white voices became essential to maintaining control of the soundscape and by extension society as a whole.

¹²⁶ In using the term "opacity," I gesture toward Glissant's discussion of the ethics of "knowing" or interacting with the "other." It is my contention that the impulse of *Jane Eyre* is to make known or *transparent* Bertha in order to compartmentalize her as an obstruction to the "right" marriage of Rochester and Jane. However, her laugh, which Jane attempts to mark as ghoulish or demonic, has a texture of meaning that is not entirely intelligible or foreign to the reader. Therefore, although Brontë is perhaps not ethically employing this opacity, it exists in the laugh, whose absence of a stable "meaning" give it additional force as a narrative device.

Rhys will, as a figure whose voice is pregnant with meaning.¹²⁷ In her laugh, we can read a number of possibilities from feelings of jealousy, irony, anger, amusement, warning, and pain; this is not a singular kind of laugh, but one that is irreducible.

As scholars have argued, Bertha's role in *Jane Eyre* is articulated as a bogeywoman that foils, perplexes, and terrifies Jane. This doubling is made all the more obvious by Jane's laugh, which is described a few pages prior to Bertha's as "merry" and "natural" (159). Thus, the juxtaposition Brontë creates across a few pages of Jane's positively-coded laugh and Bertha's terrifying laugh exemplifies what Gayatri Spivak most famously proposes: that Bertha's literary purpose is to act as the foil for the Western feminist plot. Spivak contends that Western feminism, because it is implicated in an individualist (read: capitalist) ideology, defers to an imperialist logic in order to accomplish its goals. Therefore, Bertha as "other" wife must immolate herself for the sake of Jane's entrance into the realm of "family-in-law" (mother and wife) rather than "counter family" (governess to a ward). Spivak notes that Bertha Mason is a figure produced by imperialism; she is of the white settler class, her family's money comes from plantations, and her ambiguous racial background might be marked as an example of the *métissage* that is perceived to be a corrupting force in the novel and more broadly, British imperial endeavors.

If Bertha's laugh is taken more broadly as an emblem of Caribbean laughter, it then articulates how the Caribbean space is perceived as wild, creepy, supernatural, and nonconforming by Brontë and other Victorian authors. They might argue that the Caribbean is a place that produces the world's sweetness as manifest in sugar only to let

¹²⁷ Although as Spivak will make clear, the redemption of Bertha/Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Seas* is only partially effective in critiquing the imperialist project. The remainder of Christophine haunts Rhys's feminist ethics.

it go sour by utilizing the slave trade as a means of labor production and, by allowing racial hybridity or *métissage* to occur. This very racial hybridity produces a wild, white-but-not-quite figure like Bertha. Mr. Rochester points out that, in fact, he cannot excuse Bertha for her madness because its origin is in her excessive drinking and sexual appetite (335). Rochester, like many forgotten second sons of Englishmen, is forced to marry her for the sake of his family who hasn't enough fortune to keep him comfortable. Spivak concludes, "Rochester's role in the West Indies is one of a civilizing mission within this paradigm, he has 'done his duty' so now can return to Europe, break ties with Bertha, the not quite human other, and marry Jane" (246). Thus this relationship to sweetness and then discovery of the demonic underneath points to the failings of Empire (as embodied by Mr. Rochester and his family) to ignore its complicity in the destruction of the colonial space through the introduction of the slave trade, the rape of colonial subjects, and the extraction of raw materials from the landscape. Bertha's laughing madness with its animal-like quality and demonic nature implies that the fortune she brings to marriage shouldn't be hers, just as the colonies' resources are not theirs. It also implies there is something very wrong with the English that should be remedied by the quiet, very English Jane.

This dissertation has sought to articulate the importance of comedy and laughter in postcolonial literature and scholarship. The most significant reason for studying laughter and comedy comes from these images of colonial laughter—moments when the colonized subjects' forms of expression are coopted for the colonial project rather than seen for what they are, a call for recognition. Like Hélène Cixous's *Medusa*, part of this study's turn toward comedy and laughter is an interest in how texts and figures become

transformed as vehicles for authors to take back self-expression, and subsequently, as Rowe would suggest, how the “glimpses of utopia” that are written on laughing (women’s) faces gain a greater significance (2). Cixous proudly proclaims:

We’re stormy, and that which is ours breaks loose from us without our fearing any debilitation. Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from all our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; and we’re not afraid of lacking. (878)

Cixous’s formulation of Medusa speaks to the gendered postcolonial situation and the ways that Bertha and Medusa are feminine figures of power that are demonized and feared; their laughter ignored and perverted. Her language speaks to the possibilities available with a recuperation of the corporeal—of glances, smiles, laughs, and blood in our veins—and a celebration of the body as the beginning of linguistic expression.¹²⁸

Cixous laments, “I wished that that woman would write so that other women, other

¹²⁸ The question of narrative and the potential for change (through the body in particular) has loomed over the work of many scholars, such as Fredric Jameson, Teresa de Laurentis and as mentioned here, H  l  ne Cixous. Yet the presence of laughter and comedy has featured largely in feminist writing, particularly French feminist works. Feminist and queer scholar Ruby Rich articulates the power of comedy and humor by asserting “its revolutionary potential as a deflator of the patriarchal order and an extraordinary leveler of and reinventor of dramatic structure” (353). Further Rowe more forcefully claims, “it is the genres of laughter that most fully employ the motifs of liminality. From romance to satire to the grotesque, these genres are built on transgression and inversion, disguise and masquerade, sexual reversals, the deflation of ideals, and the leveling of hierarchies” (Rowe 8-9). The potential of mimicry arise as a mode of comedy in the work of Mary Ann Doane as well. The question of laughter articulated in psychoanalysis as solely a response to taboos and repressed desires has been problematized. Some of the most robust discussions of laughter in African American scholarship and literature occur in reference to the works of Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Sterling Brown, and Ralph Ellison. Scholars have argued that the rise of laughter in African American literature is a result of the limitations placed on soundscapes during American slavery (Mark Smith). Further the cultivation of a particular kind of “black” laugh in minstrelsy advanced an understanding of the soundscape as still controlled by the master, even when a black subject made a sound (Chaser). Mike Chaser writes, this “loud high-pitched laugh was debasing to Africans, part of a performance to master” (60). Yet the adaptation of that high-pitched laugh by comedians, contemporarily by people like Chris Rock (Jack Chung) and earlier by Ralph Ellison’s image of the laughing barrel, problematizes the dynamic between the black performer and the white audience. Thus, the re-appropriation of laughter as a tool to express anger at and recount the story of American slavery and racial injustice came to the fore. Dexter B. Gordon argues that African American humor is different than humor associated with Plato and Aristotle, who both advocate for good-natured humor (1). Instead, he sees bitterness in their humor that is unapologetically critical (2-3).

unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs” (876). The essay resists Freud’s assertion that female sexuality is a dark continent, coopting Henry Morton Stanley’s characterization of Africa.¹²⁹ The series of clauses quoted above, bookended by semicolons, begins with the smile and laugh and ends in “our signs, our writing” (5). Thus, Cixous articulates how possibility and change enter the world through articulation produced and rooted in the body. She presents a vision for how the Other’s voice enters a conversation, through self-expression, primarily in language but ultimately also, through laughter. Bertha as a figure becomes more than *Jane Eyre* and her characterization by Rochester and Jane; her laugh reaches beyond their narrative.

Such a reading is in line with the concepts and theories explored here. This dissertation develops a postcolonial theory of comedy and laughter that emphasizes a return to the body, the incongruities of our world, and the potential of comedy and laughter to generate future and utopic *space of non-reality*. It resists the fear that demonizes figures like Bertha Mason and instead builds on the Saidian method of counterpunal reading, listening to the comic and laughing tones that complicate the melodies of Western and tragic discourse. It imagines that spaces of non-reality exist across multiple platforms-- in the body and imagination, and ultimately, extending into reality. The use of spatial parameters highlights the importance of utopia as a place and an orientation—something to strive for. Furthermore, it shows the dynamism of utopia as articulated by multiple authors, each of which saw a variety of ways to resist the status

¹²⁹ For a good introduction to the figure of Medusa and Cixous’s essay, see *The Medusa Reader* edited by Margerie B. Garber and Nancy J. Vickers. Their introduction, in particular, has a section on Medusa, psychoanalysis, and how Medusa is seen as castrating and also a phallic woman. The 2003 *Dark Continent* by Ranjana Khanna calls for the reintroduction of psychoanalysis into feminist postcolonial discourse.

quo and imagine something new, rewriting the narrative that transforms a laugh into a *demonic* laugh. In order to establish these utopia-oriented, ethical spaces, this dissertation breaks comedy down into parts—characters laughing, comic language, and comic genre--to show how spaces of non-reality might function on a variety of levels in postcolonial literature. This study also works broadly in terms of genre, regional affiliation, and linguistic variety to show how laughter and comedy apply to a number of rhetorical situations within a broadly conceived postcolonial context.

I establish why an investigation of the connections between comedy and postcolonial studies might be a valuable enterprise. This project counters the understanding of postcolonial literature as making greatest use of tragic registers. It shows that the tragedies of colonialism can be compellingly explored through comic tones, and it is the comic tone that lends itself to the imaginative process of yearning for something else—that space of non-reality. Both fields—comic theory and postcolonial studies-- are interested in what is perceived as “normal” or “right” and how those ideas are complicated. They privilege an attention to language and the ways that it asserts and resists cultural norms. In particular, moments of resistance articulated in literary artifacts and comedic articulations revel in the ironies of power and society. Finally, I highlight the prevalence of a canon of postcolonial characters waiting to be explored.

The recent special issue of *Critical Inquiry* on humor and comedy might question such a positive approach. Authors of the introduction, Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai, argue that it is impossible to separate the ugly side of comedy from its empowering side (its racist laughs and its antiracist laughs as their Hulk example shows). They assert, “Pressed a little, enjoyment is not always, hardly ever, unmixed; but in the moment, the

feeling of freedom exists with its costliness. There's a relation between the grin and the chagrin" (248). While I recognize the truth in their argument, it seems to me that the political valiance of many of the comic texts included in a postcolonial canon need not just an attention to this nuance, but also to the Bakhtinian net-positive effect of how they use comedy, humor, and laughter in order to imagine a world that is otherwise to the one their characters live in or the realities that the authors themselves write from and about.

Each of my chapters tackles a different set of issues. The first chapter looks at Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Myriam Chancy's *The Loneliness of Angels* and two of Grace Nichols's poems in *The Fat Black Woman* to discuss how the violence of laughter as a physical and psychological mechanism helped facilitate for characters alternatives to the realities they faced—whether in looking for a new kind of humanism (Fanon), turning toward a spiritual sisterhood (Chancy), or the empowerment of the black woman through her body. The second chapter explores ways one might think differently about expression and language use by focusing on how comedy and the gesture, as theorized by G.V. Desani, categorize expression/language by message and method, rather than medium. It explores the ways that comedy combats what might be seen as the oppressive epistemic violence of English by manipulating language in a gestural way (using misdirection, evasion, and an embodied understanding of language). Finally, my last chapter takes a closer look at satire from both a theoretical and historical perspective. Accordingly, this chapter finds that the understanding of satire as a genre that curses (in a more superstitious/magical way) and also is a generative genre (due to its rooting in fertility rituals) allowed Anthony Winkler's *The Duppy* and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* to critique

American imperialism in the Caribbean. They both did this through an engagement with the afterlife as an explicitly utopic place.

But what directions might a project such as this take in the future? As I mentioned in my introduction, the extensive use of comedy in public spaces—in print, film, television, and standup—makes the development of a postcolonial theory of comedy timely. The baffling array of comedians talking about and mediating our understandings of society continues to grow. Sitcoms, and importantly sometimes prime time sitcoms, now engage directly with the immigrant experience in America (*Fresh Off the Boat*) and mediating what it means to be a racial minority (*Master of None*, *Blackish*, *Atlanta*, *The Carmichael Show*). Longstanding and new political satires (*Saturday Night Live*, *The Daily Show*, *The John Oliver Show* and *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*) are considered by many to provide us with the clearest and sometimes most honest source for our news. Comedians like Sarah Silverman, Chris Rock, Louis C.K., Mindy Kaling, Amy Schumer, Dave Chappelle, Lena Dunham, and John Stewart have become “go-to” voices to comment on the politics of the day.¹³⁰ They are our new public intellectuals. Moreover, our comedic critiques are integrated across media. Even if you do not see on television Samantha Bee’s discussion of President Donald Trump’s “nasty woman” comment in the presidential debate, you will likely see it on Twitter and Facebook. And at some point, you can buy your own “nasty woman” t-shirt so you can support Planned Parenthood (and women generally) financially and physically. You can quite literally wear your comic protest/heart on your sleeve. The integrated nature of wearing your politics across media platforms is remarkably expanded in our contemporary moment.

¹³⁰ See for example, the 2012 study of American political satire *Colbert's America* written by Sophia McClennen.

A study of literature might seem to pale in comparison to the significance of these other platforms which have received a good deal of attention.¹³¹ In fact, as the recent 2015 study of reading for pleasure conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts shows, pleasure reading has declined to its lowest level since the NEA began studying reading in 1982. As of 2016, 43% of Americans read literature in their leisure time.¹³² Even more discouraging is that this study defined “reading for pleasure” as reading *one* literary artifact (novel, short story, poem) a year. The dramatic increase in consumption of other forms of media such as television and movies, the use of digital platforms like Twitter and Facebook, and the rise of videogames, in contrast, is startling.¹³³ Yet the integrated nature of artistic and comic practice (as seen above with Samantha Bee) seems to assuage some of these anxieties, as there may still be a place for the literary arts to become more noticeably integrated into these spaces. For example, BuzzFeed has an entire section of its website devoted to "Readers." This page includes interviews with creative writers, meditations on cultural practices and issues, and published poems and excerpts from novels. The pieces are included alongside more overtly political, journalistic pieces.

The next step, then, is to see how a literary and postcolonial theory of comedy might be expanded to encompass other artistic practices. How can we take what we know about laughter and comedy in the postcolonial literary space and put it in conversation

¹³¹ See the work of Gilbert, Krefting, Bishop, Jones, and Willett.

¹³² For more information about this study, please see the National Endowment for the Art's website (<https://www.arts.gov/artistic-fields/research-analysis/arts-data-profiles/arts-data-profile-10>).

¹³³ There are exhaustive resources and news articles for the rise of digital media consumption that range from considering how much is spent on digital advertising (Pringle and Marshal 2011), the change of publicist type jobs to include management of social media, books on childhood development and "screen time" (Davis and Johnson), and general changes in reading trends in a digital age (Mangen and Van der Weel).

with televised political satire, memes, film, Twitter feeds, Facebook, and “nasty women” t-shirts? There are already models to do interdisciplinary and inter-media oriented scholarship in literary studies. From Jonathan Swift to Kurt Vonnegut, literary scholars have had to attend to writers who work in several genres and who serve as very public figures of comedy and critique. Casting a wider and more interdisciplinary net will expand this dissertation’s theory of comic spaces of non-reality. Thus our understanding of postcoloniality, literature and comedy might become more dynamic in its approach, much like the multitude of laughter and comic theories that currently exist.

Meera Syal's body of work provides a clear articulation of how the arts intersect and make use of comedy to comment on the legacies of colonialism, albeit Syal speaks to the British context and not the American one explored in this conclusion. Meera Syal is a well-known British comedian whose work includes several comedic novels, films, radio programs and television sitcoms, most notably, *Goodness Gracious Me*. Christiane Schlote has described the television program *Goodness Gracious Me* as employing

‘Universally appealing’ sketches (e.g. featuring intergenerational family conflicts), intertextual parodies of British, American and Indian television and movie formats, as well as ‘reversal’ sketches, which are mainly employed for the exposure of overt and covert racism and xenophobia within British society. (181)

I bring Syal into this conversation because she is known primarily as a comedian whose work bleeds into literary spaces. The *India Times* review of her novel *Life Isn't All Ha Ha hee hee* by Sudeep Chakravarti argues, “But it's a little jangly sometimes as a read. *Ha Ha Hee Hee* has ‘screenplay’ written all over it, and the book often moves in editing cuts, close-ups and wide-angles as if playing to a camera.” Although the insinuation that a novel has “screenplay written all over it” might seem a little dismissive and suggestive of

Syal's shameless pandering to production studios, I believe there is something else going on here. Syal blends genres in ways that mirror the blended lives of her characters. The editing cuts and cinematic quality of the novel mirror in particular Tania's perspective, one of the main characters. Tania is a documentary filmmaker who already "sees" the world in film shots. Moreover, the reigning influence of "storybook romances" and romantic comedies is often parodied by the novel in order to expose how the three main characters' British Indian experience in London does not map onto the silver screen. *Life Isn't all Ha Ha hee hee* focuses explicitly on the ways that British Indian women negotiate their intersectional identities not only in its story but also its style. Thus, she provides a good example for us of a writer whose comedy bridges genres and makes that bridge work for the hybrid subjectivities that she is so interested in. As a way to end this conclusion, I want to turn to one of Syal's characters, Tania.

Life Isn't All Ha Ha hee hee looks a lot like a typical romantic comedy—in reverse. Such a fact might gesture toward Rowe's comments about the shift in feminist comic works away from marriage/family and toward spectacle. It begins with main character Chila's wedding to Deepak, a match that the novel will describe as a miracle. The wedding inaugurates the spectacle of romance and its false promise. Chila is perceived by other characters to be mildly intellectually disabled and too dark to be desirable. Deepak is not only handsome and rich but also from a good family. No matchmaker could have seen this wedding coming, and as Chila notes, she spent many years hearing the mantra chorus of her mother's friends: "No man will ever want that one, the plump darkie with the shy stammer" (14). But surprisingly for those who are expecting a romantic comedy, Chila and Deepak's marriage is not the focus of the novel.

Instead it is Chila's close relationship with two childhood friends Sunita and Tania—the other main characters of the novel-- that will take center stage. Much like Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City*, this story purports to be about couples but is, radically, actually about female friendship and solidarity. Deborah Chambers has noted that comedy is often used to help express what could be called “non-normative” feminine roles, such as in situation comedies like the previously mentioned, *Sex and the City*. Importantly, she argues that humor frequently “functions to perpetuate the prejudice against single women” (163) and that “singleton sitcoms are, accordingly, inherently polysemic” (165). The polysemic nature of the novel is a key feature. Although not a singleton sitcom, the work is indebted to Syal's experience working with sitcoms.

To that end, the wedding foreshadows the main motivation for the plot to move forward: Tania is tasked by her boss to create a documentary on perfect marriages in her old East London neighborhood, which is in a predominantly British Indian area. In shooting her documentary, Tania is faced with the terrible task of losing her job and hard-fought status as a filmmaker (and not an “exotic” or “Indian” filmmaker) or exposing the fissures in her friends' marriages. She chooses her career, and for a period afterward is alienated from them. She also begins an affair with Deepak, whom she was seeing before he married Chila. In fact, the novel will reveal that their tumultuous relationship was his impetus to seek out a simpler and more innocent partner in Chila.

Tania is an important figure on which to focus for a number of reasons. Most importantly, she represents another generation of “Berthas” in England. She is the “first wife” for Deepak, the first woman he loved and the one with whom he intended to spend the rest of his life. As with Bertha, her perceived volatility results in Deepak replacing

her with a more passive partner—one who submits to his desires without question. Both Deepak and Rochester are wealthy, although Deepak is independently wealthy and not marrying for money. They have giant homes and are the most eligible bachelors in their respective novels. Tania is also like Bertha in that she is a hybrid subject. Although she is not racially mixed, Syal goes through great trouble to show how Tania is the only one of her friends to attempt to leave her Punjabi culture completely behind. Tellingly, Tania describes returning to her childhood neighborhood in East London with anxiety. “The predictability of it [what she would find in her neighborhood] all depressed her suddenly and she revved up impatiently, feeling, as she always did on this stretch of road, that she should have brought her passport” (Syal 39). The significance of the words “always” and “passport” is one of irreversible alienation from Tania’s Punjabi roots. Tania sees her neighborhood as a foreign country in which she is no longer a citizen. Just like Bertha, Tania, too, will “burn the house down,” although with her documentary film, rather than flame.

Of course, the entire novel does not map onto *Jane Eyre*. It concludes very differently in that the figure of Bertha (exemplified in Tania) and Jane (exemplified in Chila) are and remain best friends. They both ditch the worthless Deepak/Rochester and instead seek feminine solidarity. Moreover, the “pure” culture being threatened in the novel is Punjabi, which stands to be infiltrated by a perverse English culture. Finally although both novels reach their conclusions through the death of one of the characters, the significance of this death is different. As Spivak points out, Bertha immolates herself upon the burning pier of Rochester’s country estate. The ruined estate and first wife lead

to Jane and Rochester's married lives in the ever-so-pastoral Ferndean.¹³⁴ Jane famously asserts, "Reader, I married him," and the rest is history. *Life Isn't All Ha Ha hee hee* instead ends with Tania's father dying, an event that helps reunite Tania with her friends after she makes the colossal mistake of an affair with Deepak. Instead of Tania being sacrificed for the novel's resolution, Syal presents her readers with a sense of the "changing of the guard" with her father (a representative of an older immigrant generation) giving way to a new multicultural generation of Londoners. Thus, instead of the image of Jane nestled into Rochester's lap, Syal gives us an image of three women in white, arms linked, walking to the cremation of Tania's father. This is, like Myriam Chancy's laughing women explored in the first chapter of this dissertation, an image of sisterhood and support. Finally, both novels feature a laugh associated with feminine madness and savagery. However, Syal gives her readers the satisfaction of hearing the self-expression behind the madwoman. She puts the mad laugh in a face and body, giving voice to Tania's perspective and interpersonal relationships with others.

Tania's wild woman laugh occurs after visiting her father in the hospital, learning that Chila is pregnant and giving birth, and that Deepak wants her to help him earn back the favor of his wife. In response, Tania begins to walk through a park wildly screaming—a scream that oscillates between laughter and frustration, but not fear.

The Madness of a Seduced Woman- was that a song or a book? Hell hath no fury; You done me wrong and killed mah dog... I ran through all the phrases I could muster to try and name what was propelling me along the pavements. I recalled some country and western song titles, which despite everything, make me laugh, in a braying dislocated way. 'I Gave Her a Ring, She Gave Me the Finger', 'Walk

¹³⁴ Interestingly, here Rochester's disembodied voice is what spurs Jane to return to his estate, rather than accompany St. John to India. The disembodied voice then not only signals Jane's inevitable entrance into the role of wife, but the particularly English country wife that she is destined to be. Her life does not lie in the fraught imperial endeavors in India (even if her good fortunes are a result of the financial boost that empire brings).

Out Backwards so I Think You're Coming Back'. Except I did it out loud. Very loudly. I howled and keened and rent my fleecy top and I didn't give a shit. I spat out gobs of bile until I went hoarse, I shouted whatever I remembered in no particular order: a leg resting on mine, my brother's Adam's apple bobbing in his throat, a baby punching its way out into the world, glass winking in my heel, my dad's surprisingly clean fingernails. Do you know how little we scream, as adults? Children do it all the time, never alarmed or worried by the decibels they produce. I frightened myself for the first few seconds, then I got used to the roaring and the skin tearing in my throat. Then I turned it into some kind of song, a mantra my old ma would no doubt call it, and I told my story to myself, to finally believe it, because no-one else would. Not then. (Syal 313)

Tania marks herself as a madwoman seduced by the wiles of a no-good but charming man. She tries some language on, quoting clichés and song lyrics purported to expound on the experience of seduction and scorn. She even tries to recall if “the madness of a seduced woman” is a book or a song. Yet she is left wanting with language and the Western literary and musical artifacts available to her. In fact, the language of seduced love leaves her laughing, “in a braying dislocated way.” Tania is figured as not only mad but also like Bertha, an animal. She brays. But quickly, this screaming becomes more than the ravings of a madwoman or animal. It becomes a mantra, sound without linguistic meaning, meant to free her.

Laughter enters again in the passage through Tania's sarcasm as she narrates her experience. The reader is pulled into the moment through questions directed at her—“Do *you* know how little we scream, as adults?” (Emphasis mine). The reader laughs at each of the stages progressed through in this moment, from the literary and music reference to the screaming child, and finally at Tania's sarcasm which has a bite to it. Moreover, her scream, which I argue is a laughing scream, does what de Laurentis advocates for: it “[constructs] other forms of coherence, to shift the terms of representation, to produce the conditions of representability of another—and gendered—social subject” (109). Tania's

laughing scream comes from within, from a place where thoughts and expression need not be wrapped up in in the language of others, a key feature of the gestural expression. This is not a repetition of a Jane figure hearing Bertha laugh. This is Tania articulating herself, analyzing her behavior, and giving herself meaning. Furthermore, Tania satirizes the tired tropes that onlookers might place upon her. She “[doesn’t] give a shit.”

After her dramatic walk, Tania reflects on the status of troubled Indian women and the statistics that see them as risks to themselves. She exclaims, “Yeah, I’ve read all those reports about our propensity toward cracking up and self-harm” (313). She dismisses these reports and instead wishes she could make a documentary about these so-called “cracked”—an obvious pun on laughing, “cracking up”—women. She notes that her only regret in walking through the park screaming is that she might look like one of these women. She remarks that if she could respond to these allegations, she would “let them [viewers] in on the big secret, show them the hair-thin line that separates anger from despair, giving out from giving up, black-faced, demon-killing Kali from demure-eyed, long-suffering Sita” (314). Here Tania makes use of Hindu goddesses to articulate the experiences of cracked women such as herself. Just like Winkler and Condé, she turns to the spiritual realm in order to critique. Also like both those authors, she adapts religious traditions towards her own goals, imagining a more ethical and utopic understanding of “cracked” women in her documentary.

Such a move is framed by the two major gendered tragedies of the novel (although there are many moments worth examining): the kidnapping and murder/suicide of a Indian local woman’s children by their father and Chila’s child being kidnapped from the hospital by Deepak. Both these events are dealt with very seriously in the novel,

but I would argue that the comic tone of the novel as a whole turns the Western and white gaze back on itself. Instead of seeing the many Asian women in this novel as victims (Sita) or madwomen (Kali), the novel helps articulate how the films, images and artifacts produced about these women oversimplify them—much like *Jane Eyre* oversimplifies Bertha. As Tania states, there is a “hair-thin line that separates anger from despair” and it is precisely that line that she toes when screaming and laughing in the park and which she will continue to toe in the documentary she intends to make about Indian women.

The Kali figure is significant in Indian culture, as she represents a powerful feminine force that is unbridled by social constraints. Kali is the wife of Shiva and is often depicted as more destructive than he is. In iconography this manifests in her standing on her husband who must submit to Kali physically in order to stop her from continuing on her warpath. Only through his submission does Kali get beyond her rage. How Kali is read varies across time and different communities. As Kali scholars Rachel McDermott and Jeffrey Kripal have noted, modern Bengali devotees can interpret the goddess as a gentle mother goddess. Early 20th-century nationalists see her as violent and justifying resistance to the British Empire. Still others such as the medieval Tantrikas will view her as the embodiment of divine consciousness expressed in their erotic spiritual practice. Finally, modern studies will see her as a feminist icon and a figure of empowered and dangerous female sexuality (15).¹³⁵ Yet they assert that the unifying characteristics associated with Kali are as follows:

For all of these figures and all of their Kalis can be seen to represent together a kind of radical response to those many limit-situations of human experience in which the normal parameters of the world break down, frequently in the hope of something better or more adequate to the rich, often paradoxical textures of our

¹³⁵ See McDermott and Kripal’s edited volume *Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West* for a more sustained conversation of the varying interpretations of Kali.

lives (and deaths). Perhaps that is what we are after in the end—a new world to live and think and love in, a world big enough and honest enough to embrace the full scope and depth of human consciousness. (15)

For Tania, Kali represents anger, “giving out,” and demon killing. She sees Kali in her screaming laughter, in the anger she experiences and the irony of feeling empowered while looking “mad.” Thus it would seem appropriate to slot her version of Kali in with feminist readings of the goddess as a radical, paradoxical feminine force that does not submit to male figures in her world but rather violently battles and consumes her enemies.¹³⁶ Moreover, this idea of capturing the complexity of the lived experience and creating a more utopic version of the world through that complexity is in keeping with the arguments of this dissertation and Syal’s novel.

This conclusion sits with the question of identity, particularly the intersections of gender and race, and how identity is mediated through laughter and comedy. Such a question has loomed large over the project, even if not explicitly discussed. Other identity-oriented scholarly endeavors such as Feminist and African American writing have a more robust canon of critical work on comedy and laughter. Postcolonial studies could do with more scholarship on identity and comedy. Here, Syal provides at least one figure to add to such scholarship. Her link of Tania to Kali speaks to the figure of Medusa referenced at the beginning of the conclusion. These unruly women, as Kathleen Rowe and Natalie Zemon Davis might call them, are figures “of female outrageousness and transgression which often evoke such ambivalence—on the one hand, delight; on the other, unease, derision, or fear” (Rowe 30). Like Cixous, Syal adapts a “scary” feminine

¹³⁶ One significant example of this construction of her occurs as a result of her battle with Raktabija, whose blood drops on the ground and becomes clones of him. Like the hydra, he is incredibly difficult to kill. Kali manages to do so by consuming him and his clones, keeping his blood from hitting the ground but incorporating him into her body. For more about this story, see Seema Mohanty’s *The Book of Kali*.

figure and uses laughter to infuse that figure with critical vitality. These figures—Bertha, Medusa, Tania and Kali—speak to philosopher Anca Parvulescu’s question, “What does it mean to be a laugher, to anchor one’s subjectivity, however provisionally, in ‘I laugh, therefore I am (or am not)?’” (3). They might answer that in laughing we discover or return to an understanding of our being, our humanness, our identity. We begin to imagine new ethical spaces and ways to engage with the world we inhabit. We laugh and exist. We create something new.

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. London, Bloomsbury, 2007.
- Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. John Cummings. London: Verso, 1997.
- Ahmad, Ajaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, London: Verso, 1992, p. 128.
- Ahmad, Dohra. "This fundo stuff is really something new": Fundamentalism and Hybridity in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. *The Yale Journal of Criticism*. Vol. 18.1 (2005). 1-20.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Akpome, Aghogho. "Dancing Masquerades: Narrating Postcolonial Personhood in Three Novels." *English in Africa*. Vol. 40.1 (May 2013). 139-159.
- Albanese, Catherine L. *American Spiritualities: A Reader*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Alexander, Jeffery C., Ron Eyerman, Gernard Giesen, Neil J Smelser and Piotr Sztompka. . *Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Allen, Valerie. *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages*. New York: Palgrave McMillian, 2007.
- Amarasingam, Amarnath. *The Stewart/Colbert Effect: Essays on the Real Impacts of Fake News*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2011.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Is the Post in Post-Modernism the in Post-Colonial?" *Critical Inquiry*. 17:2 (Winter 1991), 336-357.
- Aravamudan, Srinivas. *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Argenti-Pillen, Alexandra. "The Discourse on Trauma in Non-Western Cultural Contexts."

International Handbook of Human Response to Trauma. London: Springer, 2000, 87-102.

Aristotle, *Parts of Animals* III. 10, 673 a 8 (London–Cambridge, MA) 1961.

Arnold, Albert James and Julio Rodriguez-Luis, Michael Dash. *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Vol. 2: English and Dutch Speaking Regions*. Ed. Albert James Arnold.

Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 1992.

Attardo, Slavatore. *Humorous Texts. A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001.

Bahri, Deepika. *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics and Postcolonial Literature*.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Baker, Stephen. "You Must Remember This: Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Vol. 35.1 (March 2000). 43-54.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Barbour, Sarah. *Emerging Perspectives on Maryse Condé: A Writer of Her Own*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006.

Beavers, Staci. "Getting Political Science in on the Joke: Using "The Daily Show" and Other Comedy to Teach Politics." *PS: Political Science and Politics*. Vol. 44: 2 (April 2011), 415-419.

Bergenholtz, Rita A. "Toni Morrison's *Sula*: A Satire on Binary Thinking." *African American Review*. 30:1 (1996). 89-98.

Bergson, Henri. *Laughter*. Trans. C.B.F.R. Lexington, Kentucky, 2013.

- Berlant, Lauren and Sianne Ngai. "Comedy Has Issues." *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 43 (Winter 2017), 233-249.
- Bérubé, Michael. *The Secret Life of Stories: From Don Quixote to Harry Potter. How Intellectual Disability Transforms the Way We Read*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.
- Bewitched*. Ashmont Productions. Los Angeles, 1964-1972.
- Bhabha, Homi. *Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Bishop, Ryan. *Comedy and Cultural Critique in American Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013
- Bloom, Harold and Black Hobby. *Bloom's Literary Themes: Dark Humor*. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2010.
- Bohnert, Christiane. "Early Modern Complex Satire and the Satiric Novel: Genre and Cultural Transportation." *Theorizing Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism*. Ed. Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe. New York: St. Martins, 1995. 151-172.
- Boyd, Brian. "Laughter and Literature: A Play Theory of Humor." *Philosophy and Literature*. 28.1 (April 2004): 1-22.
- Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Bonner Strafe: Konemann, 1997.
- Brown, L.W. "The Mask that Grins: The Calypso Tradition in the West Indies." *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Wiley Online, 4(3), 1970. 683-690.
- Bush, Barbara. *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838*. London: Heinemann Publishing, 1990.
- Butler, Samuel. *Erewhon*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1917.

- Cantor, Paul. "Tales of the Alhambra: Rushdie's Use of Spanish History in *The Moor's Last Sigh*." *Studies in the Novel*. Vol. 29.3 (Fall 1997). 323-341.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1996
- Casey, Maryrose. "Laughter and Trauma: Making Sense of Colonial Violence." *Performing Ethos*. Vol. 4:1 (2013), 9-23.
- Chakravarti, Sudeep. "London Calling: Syal scripts an Asian drama beyond tandoori takeaways." *India Today*. Sep 20, 1999.
- Chancy, Myriam. *The Loneliness of Angels*. New York: Peepal Tree, 2010.
- Chaser, Mike. "The Sound of Black Laughter and the Harlem Renaissance: Claude McKay, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes." *American Literature*. Vol. 80:1,2008. 57-71.
- Cheung, Jack. "The Burden of Laughter: Chris Rock Fights Ignorance His Way." *The Boothe Prize*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Chlopicki, Wladyslaw. "An Application of the Script Theory of Semantics to the Analysis of Selected Polish Humorous Short Stories. Unpublished M.A. thesis. West Lafayette, In: Purdue University, 1987.
- Christian, Laura. "Fanon and the Trauma of the Cultural Message." *Textual Practice*. Vol. 9:3 (2005), 219-241.
- "chuckle, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 12 December 2015.
- Cicero. *Pro Marko Caelio*. Ed. Andrew R. Dyck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa". *New French Feminisms*. Harvester Press: Hertfordshire, 1981. 245-264.

- Colletta, Lisa. "Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart." *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol. 42:5 (Dec 2009). 856-874.
- Coburn, Thomas. "The Structural Interplay of Tantra, Vedanta, and Bhakti: Nondualist Commentary on the Goddess." *The Roots of Tantra*. Ed. Katherine Anne Harper and Robert L. Brown. Syracuse: State University of New York Press, 2002. 77-92.
- Coetzee, J.M. "Palimpsest Regained." *The New York Review*. March 21, 1996.
- Condé, Maryse. *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Trans. Richard Philcox. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009.
- Connery, Brian A. and Kirk Combe. Introduction. *Theorizing Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism*. Ed. Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, 1-18.
- Cornford, Francis M. *The origins of Attic Comedy*. London: Edward Arnold, 1914.
- Critchley, Simon. *On Humor*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- "Simon Critchley." Authors@Google. 2008.
- "damme, int. (and n.) and adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2016. Web. 10 July 2016.
- Davis, Angela. "Foreword." *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Trans. Richard Philcox. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009. Print. Xi-xv.
- Davis, Darien. *Slavery and Beyond: The African Impact on Latin America and the Caribbean*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995.
- Dayan, Colin (Joan). *Haiti, History and the Gods*. Berkeley: University of California, 1995.
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)." Trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 28.2 (Winter 2002). 369-418.

Desani, G.V. *All About H. Hatter*. New York: New York Review, 2010.

---“ Difficulties of Communicating an Oriental to a Western Audience.” *Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*. Ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah. New Delhi: Sterling, 1978. 401-407.

www.desani.org. July 2015. Web. June 10, 2016.

Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on the Method*. Prod. Ilana and Greg Newby. Project Gutenberg, 1 July 2008.

Deszcz, Justyna. “Salman Rushdie’s Attempt at a Feminist Fairytale Reconfigured in *Shame*.” *Folklore*. 115:1, 2004.

Dickenson-Carr, Darryl. *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane Novel*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001.

Doane, Mary Ann. *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s*. Bloomington Indiana University, 1987.

Donadey, Anne. “‘Y’a bon Banania’: ethics and cultural criticism in the colonial context.” *French Cultural Studies*. Vol. xi (2000), 9-29

Donaldson, Elizabeth. “The Corpus of the Madwoman: Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Embodiment and Mental Illness.” *NWSA Journal*. Vol. 14:3 (Autumn 2002), 99-119.

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perf. Peter Sellers, George C. Scott, Sterling Hayden. Columbia Pictures Corporation. 1964.

Dube, Musa. *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000.

Duby, Madhu. "The 'true lie' of nation: Fanon and Feminism." *Differences*. 10 (Summer 1998), 1-29.

Dubois, Lauren. *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. New York: Picador, 2013.

Dundes, Alan "Preface." *Mother Wit and the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore*. Ed. Alan Dundes. Tuscaloosa: University Press of Mississippi, 1990.

During, Simon. "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism Today." *Textual Practice* Col. 1.1 (1987). 33-54.

Dutt, Romesh Chunder. *A History of Civilization in Ancient India*. New York: Adamant Media Corporation, 2011.

Ebewo, Patrick. "Satire and the Performing Arts: The African Heritage." *Pre-colonial and Postcolonial Drama and Theatre in Africa*." Ed. Lokangaka Losambe and Devi Sarinjeive. South Africa: New Africa Books, 2001. 48-59.

Eco, Umberto. "Possible worlds and texts pragmatics: un drame bien parisien." *Versus*. 19-20 (1979). 17-33.

Ellison, Ralph. "An Extravagance of Laughter." *Going to the Territory*. New York, Vintage International, 1995.143-200.

Elliott, Robert C. *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960.

Emig, R. "The Empire Tickles Back: Hybrid Humour (and Its Problems) in Contemporary Asian-British Comedy." *Hybrid Humor: Comedy in Transcultural Perspectives*, London: Rodolpi, 2010.

- Erichsen, Ulrike. "Smiling in the face of adversity: How to use humour to defuse cultural conflict". *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*. Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2005. 27-42.
- Ermida, Isabel. *The Language of Comic Narratives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markman. London: Pluto Press, 2008.
- Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Book, 1967.
- Frantz Fanon: Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté: textes réunis, introductis et présentes par Jean Khalfa et Robert Young*. Paris: La Decouverte, 2015.
- Felman, Shoshanna. *The Juridical Unconscious. Trials and traumas in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Feuerstein, Georg. *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy*. Boston: Shambala Press, 1998.
- Fisher, Jean. "A Distant Laughter: The Poetics of Dislocation." *Intercultural Aesthetics*. Ed. Antoon Van den Braembussche, Heinz Kimmerle, Nicole Note. Brussels: Springer Netherland, 157-176.
- Fischer, M.M.J. and M. Abedi. "Bombay Talkies, the Word and the World: Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses." *Cultural Anthropology*. 5 (1990). 107-159.
- Flood, Gavin. *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Fodor, Jerry. *LOT 2: The Language of Thought Revisited*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." *Architecture/Movement/Continuité*. Trans. Jay Miskowiec. Oct 1984, 1-9.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. New York: Norton, 1960.

- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Fulton, Dawn. *Signs of Dissent: Maryse Conde and Postcolonial Criticism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008.
- “Eating Well, Reading Well: Condé Ethics of Interpretation.” *Feasting on Words: Maryse Condé, cannibalism and the Caribbean Text*. Ed. Vera Broichhagen, Kathryn Lachman, Nicole Jeanette Simek. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.
- “Novelists of the 1930s and 1940s.” *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*. Ed. Arvinda Krishna Mehrotra. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 168-192.
- Garber, Margerie and William R Kennon. “Introduction.” *The Medusa Reader*. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Gibran, Khalil. *The Prophet*. New York: Alfred A Knopf Publishing, 1923.
- Gibson, M.E. “Henry Martyn and England’s Christian Empire: Rereading *Jane Eyre* Through the Missionary Biography.”
- Gilbert, Joanne. *Performing Marginality: Humor, Gender and Cultural Critique*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004.
- Glenn, Philip. *Laughter in Action*. Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Glissant, Edouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Tran. Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997.
- Goldstein, Donna. *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013.

- Gopal, Priyamvada. *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration*. Cambridge: Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literature, 2009.
- Greenberg, Jonathan. "The Base Indian' or 'The Base Judean'? *Othello* and the Metaphor of the Palimpsest in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*. *Modern Language Studies*. Vol. 29.2 (Autumn 1999). 93-107.
- Gordon, Dexter. "Humor in African American Discourse: Speaking of Oppression." *Journal of Black Studies*. Vol. 29:2 (Nov 1998), 254-276.
- Gordon, Lewis R. "A Questioning Body of Laughter and Tears: Reading *Black Skin, White Masks* Through the Cat and Mouse of Reason and a Misguided Theodicy." *Parallax*. Vol. 8:2 (2002), 10-21.
- Gordon, M.H. "Caribbean Cultural Expressions: A Sociohistorical Analysis of Humor". *Emerging Perspectives on Black Diaspora*. UP of America, 1990.
- Giraud, Pierre. *Les jeux de mots*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976.
- Gulberg, Marianne and Steven G. McCafferty. "Introduction to Gesture and SLA: Toward an Integrated Approach." *SSLA*. Vol. 30 (2008). 133-146.
- Gutleben, Christiane. "English Academic Satire from the Middle Ages to Postmodernism: Distinguishing the Comic from the Satiric." *Theorizing Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism*. Ed. Brian A. Connery and Kirke Combe. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. 133-147.
- Guttman, Anna. "People set apart": Representations of Jewishness in the Fiction of Salman Rushdie." *Ariel: a review of international English literature*. Vol. 42 No. 3-4 (2012). 103-120
- Haraway, Donna. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

- Harper, Graeme. *Comedy, Fantasy, and Colonialism*. New York: Continuum, 2002.
- Harrex, S. C. "G.V. Desani: Mad Hatter Sage." *Miscellany*. Vol. 92 (1979). 11-48.
- Hart, Joyce, ed. *Come Weep with Me: Loss and Mourning in the Writing of Caribbean Women*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.
- Henighan, Stephen. "Coming to Benengeli: The Genesis of Salman Rushdie's Rewriting of Juan Rulfo in *The Moor's Last Sigh*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Vol. 32. 2 (1997). 55-74.
- Hernandez, Guillermo. *Chicana Satire: A Study in Literary Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991.
- Hmielowski, Jay and R. Lance Holbert, Jayeon Lee. "Predicting the Consumption of Political TV Satire: Affinity for Political Humor, *The Daily Show*, and *The Colbert Report*." *Communications Monographs*. Vol. 78:1 (March 2011), 96-114.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*. New York, Penguin Classics, 2000. ---*Leviathan*. Ed. C.B. Macpherson. New York: Penguin Classics, 1968.
- Holcomb, Chris and Stanley Dubrinsky. *Understanding Language through Humor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Hurley, Matthew M., Daniel C. Dennett, Reginald B. Adams. *Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011.
- Hutchinson, Frances. *Thoughts on Laughter*. Glasgow: Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1758.
- Irigaray, Luce. *The Sex Which is not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Jackson, Alvin. *Ireland 1798-1998: War Peace and Beyond*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Jalalzai, Zubeda. "Historical Fiction and Maryse Conde's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*."

African American Review. Vol. 43:2 (Summer/Fall 2009). 413-425.

Jameson, Fredric. "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text*.

Durham: Duke University Press, Vol. 15(Autumn 1986), 65-88.

JanMohamed, Abdul R. *The Death Bound Subject: Richard Wright's Archeology of Death*.

Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

Janssen, Joanne Nystrom. "'Feeling Fine': The Transatlantic Female Body in Grace Nichol's *The*

Fat Black Woman. "Macromere. Vol. 7 (2005), 32-52.

Jones, Jeffery P. *Entertaining Politics: Satiric Television and Political Engagement*. Lanham:

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010.

Kant, Immanuel. "Laughter." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Ed. John Morreall.

Syracuse: State University of New York Press, 1987.

Khalifa, Jean. "'Corps Perdu': A Note on Fanon's *Cognition*." *Forum for Modern Language*

Studies. Vol. 40 .3 (2004), 426-437.

Kierkegaard, Soren. The Laugh is on My Side. Ed. Rodger Poole. Princeton: Princeton

University Press, 1989.

---*Philosophy of Religion*. Ed. Daniel Conway and K.E. Glover. London: Routledge,

2002.

Kiley, Frederick and J.M. Shuttleworth. *Satire from Aesop to Buchwald*. New York: The

Odyssey Press, 1971.

Kimmich, Matt. "Offspring Fictions: The Family Romances of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's*

Children and *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Ed. Irene Visser. *Family Fictions: The Family in*

Contemporary Postcolonial Literature in English, 2004. 41-52.

- Kincaid, Jamaica. *Lucy*. New York: Penguin, 1991.
- Kipling, Rudyard. *Kim*. London: Puffin Classics, 2011.
- Krefting, Rebecca. *All Joking Aside: American Humor and Its Discontents*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.
- Kundera, Milan. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Trans. Aaron Asher. New York: Perennial Classics, 1996.
- "Laughter, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 8 December 2015.
- Lewis, Bernard. *Music of a Distant Drum: Classical Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hebrew Poems*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Loichot, Valérie. *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Lopez, Ana Bringas. "Representations of Black Omen in Grace Nichols's Poetry: From Otherness to Empowerment." *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*. 14 (Nov 2003), 6-46.
- Lynn, Vera. "We'll Meet Again." Decca, 2009.
- MacDonnell, Arthur A. *A History of Sanskrit Literature*. London: Heinemann, 1900.
- al-Maleh, Layla. *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Literature*. London: Rodolphi, 2009.
- Mama, Amina *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity*. London: Routledge, 1995
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization*. New York: Beacon Press, 1974.

Marley, Jason. "Misunderstanding is Universally Rampant": Misinterpretation, Mistranslation and Colonial Authority in G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr*." *College Literature*. Vol. 43.4 (Fall 2016), 668-692.

Marlowe, Laura. "Contending Faiths Shape Reactions to Catastrophe." *Irish Times*. Dublin. 26 January 2010.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *Communist Manifesto*. London: Penguin, 2011.

McBain, Helen. "Challenges to Caribbean Economics in the Era of Globalization." *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context*. Ed. Franklin W. Knight, Teresita Martinez-Vergne. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. 17-42.

McDermott, Rachel Fell and Jeffrey J. Kripal. *Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West*. Ed. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Mda, Zakes. *Ways of Dying*. London: Picador, 1995.

Metz, Helen Chapin. *Dominican Republic and Haiti*. Country Studies. Research completed December 1999 (3rd ed.). Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. pp. 288–289.

Meyers, Susan. "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*."

Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics, and Self-Representation*. London: Routledge, 2009.

More, Sir Thomas. *Utopia*. London: Bibliolis Books, 2010.

Morgan, Lloyd. *An Introduction to Comparative Psychology*. London; W. Scott Ltd., 1903.

- Morin, Violette. "L'histoire dr'ole." *An alise Estructural da Narrativa*. La Dessin Humoristique Communications, 1987. 110-131.
- Morreall, John. *Taking Laughter Seriously*. State University of New York Press: Albany, 1983.
- Morreall, John, Ed. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Mowat, Ryan. "Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things* (In) *Fusion Approach: Theory, Contestation, Limits: Infusionising a Few Indian Novels*. Ed. Ranjan Ghosh. Lanham: University Press of America, 2006. 253-266.
- Naipaul, V.S. *A House for Mr. Biswas*. New York: Vintage International, 1989
- Narain, Mona. "Reimagining History: Rewriting the Early Modern in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*." *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*. Vol. 6.2 (Fall/Winter 2006). 55-68.
- Nash, Walter. *The Language of Humor*. New York: Routledge, 1985.
- Nicholls, David. *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Color, and National Independence in Haiti*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996.
- Nichols, Grace. *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*. London: Virago, 1984.
- "non, n. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, February 2016. Web. 15 February 2016.
- Oden, Thomas C. "Introduction." *The Humor of Kierkegaard: An Anthology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Ogborn, Jane and Peter Buckroyd. *Satire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001.
- Olaniyan, Tejumola. "On Post-Colonial Discourse." *Callaloo*. Vol. 16.4(Autumn 1993), 743-749.

- O'Neill, Patrick. "On Dark Humor in Literature: 'The Comedy of Entropy: The contexts of Black Humor.'" *Bloom's Literary Themes: Dark Humor*. Ed. Harold Bloom, Blake Hobby. New York: InfoBase Publishing, 2010.
- "Order" a., n., and adv." *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd edition, 2015. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press. September 15, 2015.
- Orlando, Valerie and Sandra Cypress. *Reimagining the Caribbean: Conversations among the Creole, English, French and Spanish Caribbean*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014.
- Orwell, George. *1984*. London: Penguin Books, 2013.
- Palmeri, Frank. *Satire, History, Novel: Narrative Forms, 1665-1815*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003.
- Parashekvova, Vassilena. "'Falling Off' the Urban Map: Cartographic Divisions and Travel in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Vol. 31.2 (Spring 2009). 44-56.
- Parnell, Tim. "Salman Rushdie: from colonial politics to postmodern poetics." *Writing India 1757-1990: The Literature of British India*. Ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996. 236-262.
- Parvulescu, Anca. *Laughter: Notes on a Passion*. Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2010.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparison*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Philip, Marlene Nourbese. *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*. Toronto: Mercury Press, 1991.

- Plato. "Excerpt from the Dialogues." Morreall, John, Ed. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Pordzik, Ralph. *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopias*. London: Peter Lang International Academic Publisher, 2001.
- Prabhu, Anjali. "Narration in Frantz Fanon's *Peau noir masques blancs*: Some Reconsiderations." *Research in African Literature*. Vol 37.4 (Winter 2006). 189-210.
- Pringle, Hamish and Jim Marshall. *Spending Advertising Money in the Digital Age: How to Navigate the Media Flow*. London: Krogan Page Publishers, 2011.
- Provine, Robert. *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*. New York: Penguin, 2000.
- Radesky, Jenny and Dimitri A. Christakis. "Increased Screen Time: Implications for Early Childhood Development and Behavior." *Childhood Development and Behavior: An Issue of Pediatric Clinics of North America*. Ed. Kathy Davis and Chet. D. Johnson. Philadelphia: Elsevier Health Sciences, 2016.827-841.
- Ramchand, Kenneth. "Comedy As Evasion: The Later Novels of Sam Selvon." *The Comic Vision in West Indian Literature*. Ed. Roydon Salick. Printex: San Fernando, 1994- 31-48.
- Reichl, Susanne and Mark Stein. "Introduction." *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*. Ed. Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005.
- Rich, Ruby. *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Ridanpää, Juha. "Politics of Literary Humour and Contested Narrative Identity (Of a Region with No Identity)." *Cultural Geographies*. March, 2007.

Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Robinson-Walcott, Kim. *Out of Order: Anthony Winkler and White West Indian Writing*. Jamaica: UWI Press, 2006.

Rowe, Kathleen. *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011.

Rushdie, Salman. *The Moor's Last Sigh*. London: Vintage, 1996.

---"Introduction." *Mirrorwork*. Ed. Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West. New York: Owl Book, Henry, Holt and Co., 1997. Vii-xx.

---*Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. New York: Granata Books, 1991.

---1990 Herbert Reading Memorial Lecture, "The novel... is a literary manifestation of cultural syncretism" (59).

—*Midnight's Children*. London: Random House, 2006.

Russo, Mary. "Female Grotesque: Carnival and Theory." *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*. Ed. Teresa de Laurentis. Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1986. 231-229.

Ryde, Judy. "Working with Difference: The Political Contexts of Psychotherapy with an Intersubjective Dialogue." *The Politics of Psychotherapy*. Ed. Nick Totton. London: New Perspectives, 2006.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2005.

---*Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books 1993.

Salisbury, Laura. "The Comic Timing of Irish Jokes." *Comedy, Fantasy, and Colonialism*. New York: Continuum, 2002.

Scanlon, Mara. "The Divine Body in Grace Nichols's *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*." *World Literature Today*. Vol. 72: 1 (Winter 1998), 59-66.

Scarboro, Ann Armstrong. "Afterword." *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Trans. Richard Philcox. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009. Print.

Schabio, Saskia. "Peripheral Cosmopolitanism: Caribbeanness as Transnational Utopia." *Futurescapes: Space in Utopian and Science Fiction Discourses*. Ed. Ralph Pordzik. Berlin: Rodopi, 2009.

Scharf, Peter. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Linguistics*. Keith Allen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 227-258.

Schlote, Christane. "'The sketch's the thing wherein we'll catch the conscience of the audience': Strategies and pitfalls of ethnic TV comedies in Britain, the United States, and Germany". *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*. Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2005. 177-192.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. "Laughter." Ed. John Morreall. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987

Schultheis, Alexandra. "Postcolonial Lack and Aesthetic Promise in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*." *Twentieth-Century Literature*. Vol. 47.4 (Winter 2001). 569-595.

Selvon, Sam. *The Lonely Londoners*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1956.

Sharrad, Paul. "The Post-Colonial Gesture." *A Talent(ed) Digger: Creations, Cameos, and Essays in Honour of Anna Rutherford*. Ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek.

- Shaw, Andrea Elizabeth. *The Embodiment of Disobedience: Fat Black Women's Unruly Political Bodies*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980*. New York: Virago, 1985.
- Siddiqi, Yumna. "Bombay noir: violence, intrigue, and politics in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*." *Textual Practice*. Vol. 27.7 (2013). 1217-1236.
- Simek, Nicole. "Introducing Maryse Condé." *Feasting on Words: Maryse Condé, cannibalism and the Caribbean Text*. Ed. Vera Broichhagen, Katheryn Lachman, Nicole Jenette Simek. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Smith, Eric. "'Ambiguity at its Best!': Historicizing G. V. Desani's *All About H. Hatter*." *Ariel: a review of international English literature*. Vol. 40.2-3 (2009). 111-134.
- Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth*. London: Vintage International, 2003.
- Singh, Amardeep. "More than 'priestly mumbo-jumbo': Religion and authorship in *All About H. Hatter*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. Vol. 46.1 (Feb 2010). 89-100.
- Spenser, Herbert. "Laughter." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Ed. John Morreall. Syracuse: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry*. 12:1 (Autumn 1985), 235-261.
- Stenger, Elizabeth. "Another Look: Relearning to Laugh." *Hypatia*. Vol. 15:4 (Nov. 2000), 41-54.
- van Stipriaan, Alex. "Watramama/Mami Wata: Three centuries of creolization of a water spirit in West Africa, Suriname and Europe." *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society*. 27/28 (2005), 323-37.

- Syal, Meera. *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*. London: Picador, 2001.
- Sylvain, Patrick. "The Macoutization of Haitian Politics." *Politics and Power in Haiti*. Ed. Kate Quinn and Paul Sutton. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.
- Tekin, Kugu. "Images inside Words." *Wasafiri*. Vol. 28.1(2013). 68-74.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. New York: Dover Thrift, 1995.
- Tierney, Jessica Dockter. "It Wasn't Like We Were Serious': Laughter in the Mediated Action of Race Talk." (Dissertation). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2013.
- Tomkin, Silvan. *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. New York: Springer Publishing, 2008.
- Totton, Nick. "Introduction." *The Politics of Psychotherapy*. London: New Perspectives, 2006.
- Trousdale, Rachel. "'City of Mongrel Joy': Bombay and the Shiv Sena in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Vol. 39.2 (2004). 95-110.
- "un, n 5, 6." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. February 2016. Web. 15 February 2016.
- Vasquez, Sam. *Humor in the Caribbean Literary Canon*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Visser, Irene. "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Studies." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. Vol. 47:3 (April 2011), 270-282.
- wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (Heinemann Educational, 1986).
- Walcott, Derek. *Omeros*. London: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1992.
- Wegner, Phillip. *Utopia, the Nation and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*. 2002.
- Wenning, Mario. "Utopia, Reconciliation, and Criticism in Hegel's Philosophy of History." Ed. Will Dudley. *Hegel and History*. Syracuse: State University of New York Press, 2009.
- Willett, Cynthia. *Irony in the Age of Empire*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008.

- Willi, Andreas. *The Language of Aristophanes: Aspects of Linguistic Variation in Classical Attic Greek*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 1-2. Print.
- Williams, H.M. *Indo-Anglian Literature 1800-1970: A Survey*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1976.
- Wilson, Janet, Cristina Sandru, Darah Lawson Welsh. "General Introduction." *Re-Routing the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*. Ed. Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru, Sara Lawson Welsh. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Winkler, Anthony C. *The Duppy*. New York: Akashic Books, 2008.
- Going Home to Teach*. Kingston: LMH Publishing, 1995.
- "What do Jamaicans Mean by *Ole Negar*?" *Small Axe*. 29 (July 2009), 118-127.
- Young, Robert C. *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.