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Self-consuming Fictions: The Dialectics of Cannibalism in Modern Caribbean Narratives

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Abstract
Howling words of fresh blood to spark the sacred fire of the world, Aime Cesaire in 1939 claimed kinship with madness and cannibalism. In Cesaire's view, colonialism and western rationality had imposed a falsely barbaric identity--or, in effect, a non-identity--upon the peoples that Europe had uprooted, subjugated, enslaved and otherwise mastered. Against the Eurocentrist representation of American otherness, Cesaire, within his poem's ritual of parthenogenesis, prophetically identified with that otherness, subsuming it into his apocalyptic redefinition of Afro-Antillean selfhood. By such iconoclastic gestures, Cesaire and numerous other writers of the region have demonstrated the manner in which poetic self-identification can mean empowerment in providing the starting point for resisting the cultural annihilation of colonialism. My aim in this essay will be to account for some of the ways in which Cesaire's "cannibalisme tenace" has indeed persisted, tenaciously and obsessively, in modern Caribbean narratives concerned with the question of critiquing and constructing a post-colonial cultural identity.

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Self-consuming Fictions: The Dialectics of Cannibalism in Modern Caribbean Narratives

Eugenio D. Matibag

Parce que nous vous haïssons vous et votre raison, nous nous réclamons... du cannibalisme tenace.

—Aime Cesaire,
Cahier d'un retour au pays natal

1. Howling words of fresh blood to spark the sacred fire of the world, Aime Cesaire in 1939 claimed kinship with madness and cannibalism. In Cesaire's view, colonialism and Western rationality had imposed a falsely barbaric identity—or, in effect, a non-identity—upon the peoples that Europe had uprooted, subjugated, enslaved and otherwise mastered. Against the Eurocentrist representation of American otherness, Cesaire, within his poem's ritual of parthenogenesis, prophetically identified with that otherness, subsuming it into his apocalyptic redefinition of Afro-Antillean selfhood. By such iconoclastic gestures, Cesaire and numerous other writers of the region have demonstrated the manner in which poetic self-identification can mean empowerment in providing the starting point for resisting the cultural annihilation of colonialism. My aim in this essay will be to account for some of the ways in which Cesaire's "cannibalisme tenace" has indeed persisted, tenaciously and obsessively, in modern Caribbean narratives concerned with the question of critiquing and constructing a post-colonial cultural identity.

2. Cesaire's affirmation of a unique Caribbean identity raises certain questions that remain to be addressed. The Afro-Antillean self of negritude is constituted on the violent exclusion of all other cultural elements that have formed Caribbean culture, including the contributions of indigenous, Asian and even European inhabitants. (One is led to ask if a truly Caribbean discourse of decolonization must negate or devalue all such contributions.) The privileging of an African otherness furthermore entails the risk of reiterating the categorizations and exclusions inscribed in colonial discourse, for it was indeed the latter that hollowed out the representational space for what
colonialism associated with "Africa" (the irrational, savage and infrahuman). Moreover, the concept of "identity" has itself become suspect in recent anti-essentialist theorizations that have problematized the Cartesian notion of the subject. Jacques Derrida has displaced the subject along with other "transcendental signifieds" that have supposedly governed the play of signification within a cultural system from an assumed metaphysical center (249). Jacques Lacan has demonstrated the "subversion of the subject" as a function continually constituted and undermined in the chain of signifiers and in the "dialectic of desire" to which the self is subject-ed by its accession to language.

3. The post-structuralist attack on the unified, self-present and self-transparent cogito thus puts in question the simplistic assumptions underlying a call to define a specifically Caribbean identity, but I would argue that it does not in the end disqualify that call. Within a Third-World context in which we could situate such a claim to original identity, the postmodern announcement of the "death of the subject" sounds premature and betrays a complicity with world-capitalist systems that have already dispersed and canceled out individual subjectivity. In an emergent culture like that of the Caribbean nations, the subject may represent a refuge and a source of resistance to hegemony. Andreas Huyssen in "Mapping the Postmodern" raises the questions of what subjectivity could mean precisely in the face of capitalist modernization:

Hasn't capitalist modernization itself fragmented and dissolved bourgeois subjectivity and authorship, thus making attacks on such notions somewhat quixotic? And ... doesn't poststructuralism, where it simply denies the subject altogether, jettison the chance of challenging the ideology of the subject (as male, white, and middle-class) by developing alternative and different notions of subjectivity?

A certain Caribbean discourse of decolonization, I would argue, has held out for a counter-movement to modernist fragmentation and dissolution in very its tendency to "develop alternative and different notions of subjectivity." In this discourse, far from having become obsolete, the subject has yet to come into its own.
4. Appeals to integration of the divided colonial self have preoccupied Caribbean writers who have attempted to vindicate their right to self-definition. This vindication itself joins the broader question of cultural syncretism and synthesis endemic to Caribbean culture. In the "post-negritude" approach of Edouard Glissant, for example, this identity is acknowledged to be an identity-in-process, a "becoming-Antillean" through the operations of cultural synthesis creating an identity that is specifically a local production, not imposed from the outside. Before Glissant, Edward Brathwaite in his essay "Timehri" (1970) articulated the experience, shared by a generation of West Indian (principally British Caribbean) writers in the early postcolonial period, of the individual's "dissociation of sensibility" and "rootlessness" in a fragmented creole culture incapable of grounding a firm sense of self (30). In Brathwaite's account, such figures as C.L.R. James, George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul reflected on the dilemma of a post-plantation society in which the cultural contributions of Africans, Indians, Europeans and Asians had never been completely synthesized; in which individuals, living in such a heterogeneous, disunified world dominated by persistent colonial structures, feel cut off from any history and community they could call their own (29). In a more recent, "second phase" of Caribbean "artistic and intellectual life," however, Brathwaite sees an attempt on the part of Caribbean writers to "transcend and heal" the problem of dissociation, the nonidentity and fragmentation produced by and under colonialism (31). Brathwaite's solution for cultural rootlessness calls for a search and reintegration of forgotten origins, such as those "inscriptions" which are the timehri themselves: these are "rock signs, painting, petroglyphs; glimpses of a language, glitters of a vision of a world, scattered utterals of a remote Gestalt; but still there, near, potentially communicative" (40).

5. But the timehri remain ambiguous, indecipherable and scattered. They alone cannot found a distinct Caribbean identity, although they may serve as a point of departure. It is another Caribbean trope, that of "cannibalism" and its ramifications, as I hope to show, which provides a more fruitful focus on the manner in which recent Caribbean texts have undertaken a search for identity in the traces left by Antillean "forerunners," while at the same time ironizing the implicit search for origins. In claiming this, I do not mean to elevate cannibalism into a master trope but rather to use it as a sign of radical difference whose reinscription, in Caribbean discourse, opens up new
approaches to the question of identity.

6. As "the mark of unregenerate savagery" (Hulme 3), "cannibalism" displays the uncanny quality of binary oppositions: it is a sign both of animalistic nature and cultural practice; of affection and aggression; of transgression and consecration; of indigenous custom and European imputation. In remarking "cannibalism," Caribbean texts participate in a common intent (1) to invert and reinscribe the hierarchies implicit in a colonial discourse on cannibalism; (2) to create a synthesis of disparate cultural elements, but especially those linked with the Caribs as ancestors, in the common impulse to decolonize an autocthonous cultural identity; (3) to critique the metaphysics of that synthesis precisely by ironizing the notion of synthesis; and (4) to open up, by that critique, to new and empowering articulations of the subject. Points (3) and (4) imply that the mestizaje or transculturation in Caribbean discourse leads first not so much to a synthesis or a plenitude but to an annihilation of the subject, a strategy that constitutes the first defense against the colonial imposition of identity and which in turn produces what Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria has called "a void where elements meet and cancel each other to open up the question of being" (10). What is lost in such a cancellation is a mystified notion of identity as grounded in primordial origins; what is gained is a certain self-consciousness and freedom for a process of identity-creation that establishes subtle links with latent social forces in the present.

7. Within the European discourse of colonialism, the very name of the Caribbean has linked the region and its peoples with the image of cannibalism. Working within a framework more encompassing than that of the Eurocentrist perspective, Antonio Benitez Rojo evokes a "grandiose epic of the Caribs" as a part of "Caribbean discourse," an epic in which are projected

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\text{las islas arahuacas como objeto de deseo caribe ... las matanzas, el glorioso canibalismo ritual de hombres y palabras, caribana, caribe, carib, calib, canib, canibal, Caliban; y finalmente el Mar de los Caribes, desde la Guayana a las Islas Virgenes.}
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(xviii)

Note that in Benitez Rojo's linguistic morphology, whose transformations are catalogued above, the European impositions are mixed in with the native self-
designations. Together, they suggest the "discursive morphology" of "cannibalism" pursued by Peter Hulme in *Colonial Encounters* (16).

8. This discursive morphology may be continued in an examination of those modern Caribbean texts, among others, that address the legacy of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, in which the New World cannibal makes his appearance as Caliban. In his influential *Caliban* (1971), Roberto Fernandez Retamar asserts that "El caribe, por su parte, dura el canibal, el antropofago, el hombre bestial situado irremediablemente al margen de la civilizacion, y a quien es menester combatir a sangre y fuego" (14). This image of the American as Carib/Caliban/cannibal served as a weapon of ideological legitimation within colonial discourse. As manifested in *The Tempest*, the dichotomy opposing the "natural" Caliban against the "cultured" Prospero assured the European audiences and readers of the superiority of their civilization and the legitimacy of their drive to colonial expansion.

9. To reverse the hierarchy of values implicit in this vilification, Latin American intellectuals, in Fernandez Retamar's view, should realize that it is not Rodo's Ariel but rather Caliban who is to be "asumido con orgullo como nuestro simbolo," and consequently rethink their history from the viewpoint of this "otro protagonista" (*Caliban* 1971; 29, 35). "Cannibalism" thus receives a new function in this negation of the negation; the dialectic of cannibalism merges into the dialectic of Calibanism. The latter dialectic has already been discussed at length elsewhere, but what is pertinent to the present re-reading is the way in which the image of cannibalism is remade, in Calibanism, into a trope of writing which redefines the Latin American self's relation with what is now a European other, precisely by a valorizing and recharging of the denomination of alterity it had received from Europe. What was mistakenly accepted as a literal reference to barbaric practice or its "authentic" image is becoming refunctioned as a literary figure.

10. Despite the possible pejorative associations to which this refunctioning may give rise, Calibanism does not imply neo-primitivism or misology; on the contrary, it may involve the most sophisticated internationalist viewpoint, one capable of mastering and then relativizing or deflating all partial nationalist or ethnocentric viewpoints from a more systemic or global perspective. Fernandez Retamar is conscious of this epistemological advantage when, in 1985, he cites the remarks of his Mexican commentator Jorge Alberto Manrique:
It would be well to remember, as Borges himself has said, that vis-a-vis... [the] reading of Europe, he takes the sniping stance of an ironist, "from without." The best of his work is made of that: and in it can be recognized an attitude of Caliban...Z

11. George Lamming had already refitted Caliban to other roles in his recounting of Caribbean history from this once subjugated, now revindicated perspective. "If Prospero could be seen as the symbol of the European imperial enterprise," writes Lamming in The Pleasures of Exile, "then Caliban should be embraced as the continuing possibility of a profound revolutionary change initiated by Toussaint L'Ouverture in the Haitian war of independence" (6 [unnumbered]). Indeed, the figure of the Haitian revolutionary leader effected and continues to represent both an overturning of the European-imposed hierarchies and a disruptive intervention in the continuum of colonial oppression, as the novelist proposes in the very title of his chapter on Toussaint and C.L.R. James's The Black Jacobins, namely, "Caliban Orders History" (118).

12. On the other hand, "cannibalism" persists in the early modern period as an image of either barbarity or aggression associated with rebellious African slaves as characters. Among Cayetano Coll y Toste's Leyendas puertorriquenas (1924-1925) is the story of "Carabali," the runaway plantation slave who may have resorted to cannibalism in order to survive in his mountain cave and who became a kind of avenging phantom in the Puerto Rican popular imagination. In the folktales of Lydia Cabrera's Cuentos negros de Cuba (1940), most of which are Yoruban in origin,8 cannibalism is presented as a primitive practice associated with the animal realm ("Noguma") or an unacceptable form of sacrifice ("Tatabisako"). In Alejo Carpentier's El reino de este mundo (1949), the slave Ti Noel fantasizes a cannibalistic feast of white and bewigged heads served up by "un cocinero experto y bastante ogro" in what amounts to an anticipation of the imminent Saint-Domingue revolt (10). In Coll y Toste and Carpentier, cannibalism symbolizes black defiance or rebellion against the white colonial world; in Cabrera's tales set in an Afro-Cuban context, it symbolizes evil and social otherness. Whether practiced, imagined or rejected, "cannibalism" in these narratives also serves to define the particular identity of individual African slaves (or their descendants) as literary characters whose psychic and linguistic resources for survival
provide a paradigm for the possible Caribbean self.  

13. Whereas such writers have sought to incorporate the African contribution into a syncretic Caribbean identity, later writers have sought origins for this identity in a recollection of the original Caribs and their descendants. What nevertheless stands out in a re-reading is the remoteness or virtual absence of true Carib ancestors. In Carpentier's *El Siglo de las Luces* (1962) the protagonist Esteban, meditating on the possible foundations for an American selfhood, recalls the legend of the pre-Columbian Carib migration to a "promised land" lying northward of the continent. The recollection suggests a search for alternatives to the debacle of "enlightenment" in the New World. Finding himself at the Venezuelan Bocas del Dragon, where the fresh water meets the salt, Esteban remembers the migration as another search for the Promised Land, an American Exodus of "the horde" under whose conquest of the islands "[t]odos los varones de otros pueblos eran exterminados, implacablemente, conservándose sus mujeres para la proliferación de la raza conquistadora" (172). The northward migration is of course thwarted by the encounter of the aboriginals with the Europeans: "Los invasores se topaban con otros invasores . . . que llegaban a punto para aniquilar un sueno de siglos. La Gran Migración ya no tendría objeto: el Imperio del Norte pasaría a manos de los Inesperados" (173). Esteban's account of "la Gran Migracion fracasada"--an alternative history decentering the historical narrative of the West--reminds us that the Europeans were themselves as much a conquering tribe as were the aboriginal forefathers. The Caribs stand for an unrealized historical possibility, but also suggest that the struggle for freedom and self-determination is as much motivated by utopian or messianic impulses as by class or "tribal" antagonisms.

14. In any case, the Caribs of Esteban's late-eighteenth-century present provide no unequivocal model for resistance against colonialization, for a Carib delegation has already come to Guadeloupe in order to apply for citizenship in the French Republic. The application prompts Commissioner Victor Hugues to show

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una mayor simpatía hacia los caribes que hacía los negros: le agradaban por su orgullo, su agresividad, su altanera divisa de 'Solo el caribe es gente'--y mas ahora que llevaban cucardas tricolores en el amarre del taparrabo.  
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Representing a beleaguered people in the process of submitting itself to the colonial order, the delegation becomes a walking myth, wearing the very symbol of the French Republic (the tricolor cockade) on their breechcloths, their very pride and aggressivity accommodated into the self-representation of hegemonic discourse.  

15. The beginnings of this incorporating process, by which colonial discourse itself cannibalized the specificity and strength of its indigenous adversaries, are revealed in Carpentier's *El arpa y la sombra* (1979), a fictionalized biography of Christopher Columbus. In the novel, the "real" Caribs are conspicuously absent from Carpentier's "transcriptions" of Columbus's diary and ship's log--the first productions of colonial discourse. Columbus of course believed that he had reached the lands of the Great Khan, already anticipating the discovery of "islands without men, people without hair, and inhabitants born with tails," all previously "described" by Marco Polo (Williams 19). Carpentier's Columbus records that he heard "Indian" reports of "tierras pobladas de canibales que tenían un ojo solo en cabeza de perros—monstruos que se sustentaban de sangre y carne humana" (138). This seminal misreading may have originated in a linguistic misunderstanding on Columbus's part: for Columbus, who did not understand the Indian language, native references to the hostile *Cariba* may have suggested *Caniba*, or, the people of the Khan, but also cane, the Spanish word for "dog, suggesting, as Tzvetan Todorov puts it, that "these persons have dogs' heads ... with which, precisely, they eat people" (30). Carpentier thus retraces the process by which the India of Spices becomes, for Columbus, the India of the Cannibals, although nowhere does Columbus claim to have observed native acts of anthropophagy (162). Yet it is precisely this imputation which justifies, both in Columbus's mind and in discursive practice, the Indians' conquest and enslavement in the following manner.

16. As the historical Columbus gradually came to realize that the true wealth of the West Indies lay not in gold but rather in the labor they could provide to the expanding empire, he would eventually describe the "cannibalistic" Caribs as

* a wild people fit for any work, well proportioned, and very intelligent, and who, when they have got rid of their cruel habits to which they have been accustomed, will be better than any
other kind of slaves.

(Cited in Williams 31)

The West Indian slave trade begins on Columbus's third voyage in 1498 with the transport of six hundred Indians to Spain (Williams 32). At about the same time, the Spanish monarchs, enjoined by the Pope, issued a decree providing for the conversion of the Indians to Catholicism and for the consideration of converted Indians as subjects of the Spanish crown. These Indian converts could then be considered "free" to be hired as wage laborers within the encomienda system, although not finally exempted from its inhuman demands and conditions. The decree paved the way for the legalization of the slave trade by the Requisition, for it implied that the "cannibals," those bellicose Indians who refused conversion and resisted Spanish rule, could be legitimately punished with enslavement (Williams 32; Arens 44-54; Todorov 46-47).

17. In Carpentier's reconstructions of the nineteenth-century postulation for Columbus's canonization under Leon XIII, the Devil's Advocate of the Vatican's Congregation of Rites cites Jules Verne's opinion that Columbus identified cannibals in the West Indies without having encountered a single one; the postulation for sainthood was finally denied on the basis of Columbus's monumental misreading and on the grounds of his having instituted a slave trade in the New World ( _El Arpa_ 207). Columbus has been posthumously chastised, but not without having initiated a discourse practice relegating the Caribbean natives, by denomination and defamation, to an infrahuman realm.

18. In _Voyage in the Dark_ (1934) by the Antiguan emigree Jean Rhys, the Caribs become a symbol of colonial subjugation and figure the psychological and transcendental homelessness of Rhys' protagonist, Anna Morgan. In this novel, the process of constructing a post-colonial feminine subject is seemingly foreclosed by a history that has offered no effective escape from colonial domination. Anna is a dance-hall girl of Caribbean birth living in England. Jobless, nearly penniless, often intoxicated, she drifts from affair to affair as the sexual toy of affluent and influential men. On one occasion, while lying sick in bed, writing and drinking vermouth, she pauses to recall the words of a song she once heard in a Glasgow music hall: "And drift, drift / Legions away from despair." In her subsequent free-association, the words link up with a reference, apparently taken from an encyclopedia, to the Caribs:
It can't be 'legions'. 'Oceans', perhaps. 'Oceans away from despair.' But it's the sea, I thought. The Caribbean sea. 'The Caribs indigenous to this island were a warlike tribe and their resistance to white domination, though spasmodic, was fierce. As lately as the beginning of the nineteenth century they raided one of the neighbouring islands, under British rule, overpowered the garrison and kidnapped the governor, his wife and three children. They are now practically exterminated. The few hundred that are left do not intermarry with the negroes. Their reservation, at the northern end of the island, is known as the Carib Quarter.' They had, or used to have, a king. Mopo, his name was. Here's to Mopo, King of the Caribs! But, they are now practically exterminated. 'Oceans away from despair. . . .'

The passage suggests that the Caribs might have served as a symbol of defiance, and even of feminine defiance, against a patriarchal system of domination that has extended itself across the seas. But because the Caribs are "now practically exterminated," their king a sad figure of mockery, history has lost a chance at redemption. The Caribs have been vanquished, drastically reduced in numbers, thereafter relocated on the northern end of what is probably Dominica, where their resistant ferocity has been successfully contained. The weight of the past hangs like a nightmare on Anna's brain; the fate of the Caribs prefigures the protagonist's own victimage and despair when her lover decides to abandon her just before she must seek an abortion.

19. The historical pattern of Carib resistance and European conquest provides the unconscious subtext for Anna's forlornness. The first attempt of the English to settle in the West Indies in Saint Lucia in 1605 met with the fierce opposition of its Carib inhabitants, as occurred in Grenada in 1609 (Williams 79; cf. Arens 45). But the colonizers succeeded in defeating numerous Indian uprisings in the islands and in exterminating the Caribs or removing them to Dominica or St. Vincent. In Grenada, the last group of Caribs to resist the French invaders hurled themselves from the top of a hill that would henceforth be known as Le Morne des Sauteurs (Williams 95). In both Anna's experience and that of the Caribs, as this juxtaposition suggests, history provides no viable means for challenging to domination other than the self-
destructive alternatives of suicide and infanticide (cf. Lamming 123-124).

20. Attempts to revive the Carib heritage in other Caribbean texts may be read as attempts to redress the defamation the Caribs received in colonial discourse. But in a present that is, like Anna Morgan's, cut off from all autochthonous origins, such efforts serve more certainly to re-open the dialogue on national culture and identity and therein entertain possibilities of new articulations of the self with its others. The novel *Beka Lamb* (1982) by the Belizean author Zee Edgell tells us that members of the black creole community "seldom married among the Caribs, although these two groups shared, in varying degrees, a common African ancestry" (31-32). Edgell's attribution of a "common African ancestry" to Carib and creole alike may seem surprising, but the narrator later explains that those called "Caribs" by the Belizeans are in fact the descendants of escaped African slaves who arrived in St. Vincent. Contradicting Rhys' assumptions concerning the Caribs' refusal of miscegenation, Edgell's blacks in St. Vincent "mingled with the Caribans, originally from South America, adopting much of their language and some of their ways, but keeping many of their African traditions" (68, my emphasis). Such an intermingling of races and cultures suggests the possibility of a generalized synthesis originating in the very displacement and confusion of origins.

21. But Belizean resistance to such a synthesis persists. Beka's mother shares the creole prejudices against the present-day Caribs; for her, the Caribs of Stann Creek are a corrupting influence on Beka and her Aunt Tama for having taught them *obeah*, or magic arts. Granny Ivy, somewhat more generous with the Caribs, says that "I don't believe Carib people sacrifice children!" and reminds the other women that the Stann Creek families sent food up to Belize during the 1931 hurricane, although she must add that "I am not saying I could marry a Carib man..." (67). The women's prejudice toward the Caribs puzzles Beka, and when she asks her mother why creoles refuse to mix with them, her mother ventures to explain that "Maybe it's because Carib people remind us of what we lost trying to get up in the world" (70). Representing a primitive and ignominious past for the creoles, the Caribs have been excluded from the mainstream of Belizean society, marginalized and contained within isolated pockets of the country, called "the bush" (70). Whereas the narrative keeps the Caribs at a distance, the schoolgirl Beka has at least made an initial attempt to reconnect with the cast-off part of her Belizean
heritage they represent, an issue that is especially significant as the Belizeans approach the dawning of their own nationalist independence. Beka's questions, however, lead not to an immediate synthesis of cultural elements within a projected Belizean cultural identity, but to a certain transcendence in the awareness that Belizeans, in living a unique history that has been preconditioned but not totally imposed from the outside, are different from the British. Defining this difference would largely consist recognizing the Belizeans' difference from the Caribs within the national community but also in recognizing common interests shared with minority group.

22. The Caribs reappear in *The Whole Armour* (1982) by the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris, but, again, they are no more than a representation, this time played by a band of roving carnival rousters. These rousters dressed as Caribs are encountered in the jungle by the protagonist Cristo, who is a fugitive from the law, accused of a murder he did not commit. Cristo later reveals to his lover, Sharon, that his brief meeting with "the Caribs" has thrust him into a strange shifting play of identification with the social other. Covered with mud during his flight and remembering himself as misrecognized by the "Carib" players, Cristo wildly reflects that "In the flying rush they assumed I was one of them . . . one of this . . . shattered tribe. A terrible broken family" (340). The encounter with the "shattered tribe" has shaken the structure of Cristo's sense of identity. Cristo's reflection in the stream momentarily restores him to his old self, but he later insists that "I was the last member, remaining behind, of the flying band. Every guilty body rolled into one. Vanquished as well as slave, rapist, Carib, monster, anything you want to think . . . ." (345).

23. Caught up in the flying constellation of images, a disoriented Cristo identifies his alleged criminality with an entire history of Caribbean enslavement and injustice. The vision of vanquished ancestors furthermore catalyzes Cristo's sense of belonging to a community or "tribe" imperilled by its own violent irresponsibility, in which originated the murders for which he is falsely accused. Although believed dead, Cristo will return, Christlike, to his Pomeroon village in order to establish his innocence and to restore his community's shattered equilibrium with what amounts to his own sacrifice.12 Whereas the Caribs are absent, even parodied in this account, they provide, under conditions of rootlessness and chaos, a simulacrum of an imagined community that supplants the actual fragmented community, and thereby ground a necessary
As other Caribbean writings reveal, the remembrance of the Caribs suggests another, possibly more provocative association with the cannibalistic act itself. The true extent to which cannibalism was practiced by the Caribs remains unclear, the anthropologist W. Arens, relying upon historical accounts and noting the imperialist biases and confusions, probably overstates his case in pointing out the absence of "adequate documentation of cannibalism as a custom in any form for any society" (21). Regardless of the existence or non-existence of such documentation, a number of twentieth-century Caribbean narratives have taken up the image of cannibalism that has been handed down in Caribbean discourse and turned it into a trope of identity and a literary mechanism of self-individuation. These narratives in general bear out the anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday's assertion that although cannibalism is not a "unitary phenomenon but varies with respect to both cultural content and meaning" (x), it is predicated upon the symbolic oppositions by which "self is related to the other" (xii). Cannibalism in Sanday's view is a "cultural system" and "primarily a medium for . . . messages having to do with the maintenance, regeneration, and, in some cases, the foundation of the cultural order" (3). Its symbolism participates in a dynamic of "dialectical opposition" (35); seen cross-culturally, it may symbolize a social evil, express a desire for revenge against one's enemies, renew a generation's ties with its ancestors, provide a mythological charter for the social order, or function as "part of the cultural construction of personhood" (25-26).

Freud provides a bridge between anthropology and psychoanalysis in drawing an analogy between cannibalism, as he understood it, and the oral stage of psychosexual development. In oral incorporation and its correlates of desire, destruction and the installment of the object within the self, the established object-relations and phantasies harken back to a prehistoric stage of human social development. Phylogeny prefigures ontogeny especially in the "totemic meal" of Totem and Taboo, whereby the primal father is murdered and devoured by the sons of the "horde," who, in the act of patricidal consumption, incorporate and sublimate his desire, strength and authority into their own structure of identity.13

One story among Lydia Cabrera's Cuentos Negros de Cuba, "Bregantino Bregantin," illustrates this Freudian dialectic with a form of cannibalism exemplifying none
other than self-consumption. The story tells of el Toro, the Bull, who after capturing and hanging the king from a tree, imprisons the queen in a "dungeon or latrine" without giving her any means of sustaining herself save that of eating cockroaches. When the supply of these runs out, she sees herself

reducida al extremo de devorarse a sí misma, comenzando por los pies, de difícil masticación, y rindiendo el último suspiro por envenenamiento, en el colmo de la indignación más justa.

(17)

An impossible cannibalism, but nonetheless a paradigmatic one that foregrounds both the literariness of its treatment and the possibility of considering anthropophagy as an act of autophagy. El Toro takes the place of the now executed king and queen and becomes a tyrant in his own right, claiming all the women of his kingdom for himself, killing all of his male sons, outlawing the use of masculine-ending nouns, and shouting from his mountain top: "—«Yo, yo, yo, yo. Yo, yo, yo, yo, yo, / No hay hombre en el mundo más que yo. . .!»" (25). The sovereign self of el Toro reigns supreme until the day one of his sons, saved from the usual infanticide, rises up to defeat him in bloody combat. "Y con esto," the stories concludes, "la naturaleza recobró de nuevo sus derechos y nacieron varones en Cocozuma" (28). Here, the Freudian dialectic adumbrated in *Totem and Taboo* is redistributed into new functors: one son stands in for the primal horde but does not literally consume his own father, for indeed it is the latter who has defeated the king and allowed the queen to consume herself. But true to the Freudian Ur-plot, the "father's" law and tyranny is installed in the symbolic order perpetuated by el Toro, leaving the task of restoring a "natural" cultural order to his righteously rebellious son.

27. This ritual—combining aggression, incorporation, negation and individuation—provides a new kind of anchoring point for the definition of identity. Its dynamic is reinscribed in Caribbean narratives appearing in Brathwaite's second phase of "transcending and healing," novels in which I will now remark the dialectical oppositions motivating cannibalism as a trope of cultural devalorization and reordering.

28. In his prologue to the novels comprising *The Guyana Quartet*, which includes *The Whole Armour* and *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), Wilson Harris avers that the concrete
metaphor validating the particular violations of realist convention in the latter novel is none other than a "Carib/cannibal bone-flute" which was "hallowed from the bone of an enemy in time of war":

Flesh was plucked and consumed and in the process secrets were digested. Spectres arose from, or reposed in, the flute [which] became the home or curiously mutual fortress of spirit between enemy and other . . . .

(9-10)

A symbol of "transubstantiation in reverse,"14 here the flute codifies and thereby mediates the subject-object polarities within a projected cultural system. Sanday's exemplification of how "a self is made" in cannibal practice elucidates this mediation:

The flesh or bone marrow is a tangible conduit of social and psychological attributes that constitute the subject by either affirming or negating the relationships that join or separate the subject vis-a-vis the other. Thus, parts of the body may be consumed to imbibe the characteristics or the fertile force of the other; or, consumption may break down and destroy characteristics of the other in the self.

(36)

Harris's bone-flute becomes, in the light of this explication and his own, a figure of relational self-making and unmaking, one of the "convertible imageries" serving to motivate a ritual of "complex regeneration" enacted in all four novels of The Guyana Quartet. What Harris refers to as "the second death" in his prologue is the death of the reader's or character's self that undergoes a ritual sacrifice in "a fiction that seeks to consume its own biases through many resurrections of paradoxical imagination" (9). Palace of the Peacock in particular is a phantasmagorical narrative in which a crew of conquistador-like colonizers arrive at their first destination only to discover that "not so long ago this self-same crew had been drowned to a man in the rapids below the Mission" (37). Upon this violation of realist verisimilitude, the narrative establishes an "unreal" and psychologically unsettling perspective that shuttles back and forth across the barrier separating life and death, self and other. Faced with a "second death" when their boat
threatens to capsize in the rapids, the crew members confront, in effect, the imminent dissolution of their own monadic subjectivities:

The monstrous thought came to them that they had been shattered and were reflected again in each other at the bottom of the stream.

The unceasing reflection of themselves in each other made them see themselves everywhere save where they thought they had always stood.

29. Grasping himself as both dead and alive and as self and other in the specular imago of the self-as-other, each character gradually loses hold on his former sense of a self-sufficient or autonomous identity. As the crew members pursue a fleeing Amerindian tribe they intend to capture (and which symbolizes for Harris an eclipsed other to be reincorporated into the tradition [7]), they find themselves stripped of the egoistic fictions of self that motivated the pursuit, swept away from themselves in a turbulent stream of becoming: "They saw the naked unequivocal flowing peril and beauty and soul of the pursuer and the pursued all together" (62). In the "second death," pursuer and pursued are now embraced in what the narrator can only stammeringly refer to as "the truest substance of life," "the unity of being" in which "fear is nothing but a dream and an appearance" (52).

30. The novel's conclusion presents the apotheosis of a blind conquistador-captain Donne who, paradoxically, can see more clearly than ever before:

[Donne] looked into himself and saw that all his life he had loved no one but himself. He focused his blind eye with all penitent might on this pinpoint star and reflection as one looking into the void of oneself upon the far greater love and self-protection of the universe.

Here is the poetry of a cosmic self that sees its objectified and distanced former self as both a "void" and a kind of door of perception, now cleansed and opened upon the infinite. Its transcendent vision of "love and self-protection" has dissolved the fragile structure of earthly desires and, with that structure, the fictive boundaries of
the narcissistic self. In an ecstatic identification with otherness and others, the higher self realizes that it had always been an other to itself and that the imagined riches of El Dorado were in reality the spirit's patrimony. This identification is affirmed by novel's last sentence: "Each of us now held at last in his arms what he had been for ever seeking and what he had eternally possessed" (117).

31. "Cannibalism" in Palace of the Peacock thus mediates a nostalgic desire or spiritual aspiration to incorporate oneself into a lost primordial unity. A similar nostalgia or aspiration motivates the plot of Felices Dias, Tio Sergio (1986) by Magali Garcia Ramis, but that desire progresses within a more historically determinate setting and toward a more explicitly political statement of commitment. In Garcia Ramis's novel a young girl named Lidia narrates her experience of growing-up middle-class in the Puerto Rico of Munoz Marin and amidst the entrepreneurial "fat cows" of the Operation Bootstrap era. Lidia's family expresses a typically bourgeois desire to be Prospero in their unreflecting imitation of European culture and scorn for all things Latin American; they inhabit a house where, because "todo lo heredado era europeo y todo lo porvenir era norteamericano, . . . no podiamos saber quienes eramos" (153). The family's adults are proud of their hard- won success, intolerant of homosexuals and atheists, and fiercely suspicious of the nationalists and communists. One could add that the "nordomania" uncritically embraced by Lidia's family exemplifies a more general process operant "inside" a dominant culture that pushes all that it perceives as "outside"--primitive, inferior and other--into the margins defining its own closed cultural space. The family's constant preoccupation with cleanliness and hygiene, as well as repeated references to the adults' medical professions, parallels a fear of contamination by unorthodox ideas that would challenge the manichean distinction between Good and Evil upon which their own sense of identity is based (28).

32. And suddenly, into this "perfectly ordered and unchangeable world" (153) comes Tio Sergio, who signifies for the narrator a stimulating and disturbing presence in the Santurce household. Soon it is Sergio who initiates the children in their study of art, including the painting of Ollers; who learns to communicate with them in their "Simian-Spanish" dialect drawn from Tarzan comic books; and whose frustrated affair with the family's maid-servant introduces the mysteries of sexuality to the spying Lidia. It is Sergio, too, who arranges a funeral service for a disappeared cat named Daruel. The funeral
service is followed by a "mortuary meal" that includes cookies in the shape of a cat and Sergio's explanation, that

algunos salvajes se comian a los jefes de otras tribus y a los misioneros para adquirir su sabiduría y su fuerza; nos dijo que era algo simbólico y muy antiguo el que nos comísemos las galletitas como si estuviesemos metiéndonos por dentro todo lo que queríamos a Daruel.

Aside from parodying the catholic communion ceremony, the mortuary or totemic meal anticipates the manner in which Lidia will have seen in Tio Sergio a new ego ideal that she will incorporate into her personal identity. For once Sergio has left, Lidia discovers that he was "un hombre casi al margen de la sociedad," one who discussed literature with Trotskyites and attempted to form a labor union, one who collected funds for the Algerian resistance and was probably, in addition to everything else, a homosexual (154). Above all, Lidia recalls, Sergio was a man who nurtured a dream of Puerto Rican independence but despaired of doing anything to realize the dream. Having brought into the closed conservative household an element of otherness and an example of tolerance for difference that the conservative matriarchs of the family would not have otherwise permitted, Sergio has introduced to Lidia and her cousin Enrique an expanded language of "native" possibilities with which to forge an identity. Having symbolically acquired "his wisdom and his strength," the cousins go out on their own to discover who they are:

Con todas nuestras contradicciones, . . . ibamos a círculos de estudio, comprábamos libros de historia y poesía puertorriqueña, sonábamos con descubrir yacimientos de los indios tainos, pegábamos pasquines que anunciaban marchas, y marchábamos lentamente en busqueda de nuestra puertorriqueñidad.

(152-153)

By the time that Lidia is caught up in the dream of discovering her "puertorriquenidad," she has incorporated the rebellious anti-colonial spirit of Tio Sergio into her own, renewed sense of Puerto Rican selfhood.

In recodifying and decodifying the bourgeois ideology concretized in Puerto Rican institutions, Garcia Ramis's
novel rehearses a repeatable process by which Caribbean discourse may be seen as demythifying the language of Prospero and giving a hearing to Caliban. George Lamming anticipated this move when he wrote that

We shall never explode Prospero's old myth until we christen language afresh; until we show Language as the product of human endeavour; until we make available to all the result of certain enterprises undertaken by men who are still regarded as the unfortunate descendants of languageless and deformed slaves.

(118-119)

Far from "languageless," it turns out, Caliban does speak, and his profit on language is more than that of knowing how to curse. In the resurrection of the Carib epic, some of whose linguistic transformations and discursive ramifications have been traced in this essay, "cannibalism" explodes the myth of Prospero by devouring, engulfing and digesting his secrets, christens language afresh by giving voice to collective memory and subjugated others.

35. A metaphor of incorporation and/or differentiation, of subjective self-divisions and mergings with respect to an other, cannibalism thus de-defines and re-defines the divisory line between self and other, with the consequence of transforming what was considered an antinomy into a dialectical opposition to be canceled and subsumed into a higher level of transindividual unity. In re-priming the nature-culture dialectic that had been fixed by colonialism to Prospero's (and Ariel's) advantage, the discourse of cannibalism furthermore ironizes its own search for origins by thematizing the irrecoverable loss of the Caribs or other "cannibals" as exemplars of rebellious subjectivity. Yet the Caribs--introjected as a disturbing element of difference into the metonymic series of displacements, interrupting the flow of colonial discursive self-reproduction--serve to open up the "search for identity" to new, often unexpected articulations of the self with an other and with others. Forming a sort of counter-tradition, cannibalism thus re-defined and re-elaborated grounds a new, founding myth of Caribbean identity and dynamic self-definition by proposing alternative ego ideals or object-choices: the tribal or cosmic self of Wilson Harris; the nationalistic self of Garcia Ramis.

36. The issue is of course not merely academic. When Ernesto "Che" Guevara called for the development of an
organic individual willing to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of the collective good, Guevara called for nothing less than the creation of "el hombre nuevo del socialismo." In Guevara's conception, such an individual would be committed to the revolutionary struggle to leave behind the realm of necessity for the realm of freedom:

a pesar de su aparente estandarizacion,
es mas completo; a pesar de la falta del mecanismo perfecto para ello, su posibilidad de expresarse y hacerse sentir en el aparato social es infinitamente mayor.

Guevara here undermines the old dichotomy of "bourgeois individualism" vs. "socialist standardization" by the qualifier of an "apparent" standardization. The individual's self-sacrifice to the interests and ends of a social group in reality entails the transcendence of individualism, but such that this transcendence means the cancellation and sublation of "individuality" in its illusory autonomy and limited rationality and the attainment of an authentic freedom through a more clearly comprehended collective praxis. Both anticipating and elaborating Guevara's notion of "el hombre nuevo," a dialectics of cannibalism works through one of the paths by which fiction consumes fictions, including the reigning fictions of selfhood. Devouring such fictions in the process, we may, like Harris's boatmen, come to see ourselves everywhere save where we thought we had always stood.

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Notes

1. Here I rely on Paul Brown's definition of "colonial discourse," exemplified in his reading of The Tempest, as "a domain of field of linguistic strategies operating within particular areas of social practice to effect knowledge and pleasure, being produced by and reproducing or reworking power
relations between classes, genders and cultures" (69, n.3).


3. For an overview of postmodern perspectives on the subject and a theory of the subject's persistent efficacy despite its deconstruction, see Ihab Hassan, *Selves At Risk: Patterns of Quest in Contemporary American Letters*, especially the chapter on "The Subject of Quest: Self, Other, Difference" (32-45).

4. In *Les discours antillais*, Glissant insists that synthesis is not a "bastardization" or adulteration of cultures; it is rather "un devenir antillais" and an inseparable part of "le drame planetaire":

\[
\text{La vocation de synthese ne peut que constituer avantage, dans un monde voue a la synthese et au «contact de civilisations». L'essentiel est ici que les Antillais ne s'en remettent pas a d'autres du soin de formuler leur culture. Et que cette vocation de synthese ne donne pas dans l'humanisme ou s'engluent les betas.}
\]

(16)

5. For Peter Hulme in *Colonial Encounters*, colonial discourse is a "monologue." To give an example, Hulme makes reference to the engraving by van der Straet depicting the encounter between the masculine, civilized, clothed and armed Amerigo Vespucci with the feminine, primitive, naked and unarmed indigenous figure representing the New World. Hulme comments that "Such a monologic encounter [as here represented] can only masquerade as a dialogue: it leaves no room for alternative voices" (9). But this view of colonial discourse is too monolithic and self-defeating, for it leaves no chance for the opening of the text to a reading of its "unconscious" substrata or to the encounter of different voices that the text must master. My interpretation of colonial discourse, supported by Paul Brown's definition of the term,
would stress, rather than its monologic nature, its
conflictive plurality and dynamic of self-repression
which only at a later moment result in the effect of
monologism.

6. In the glossary of *Les discours antillais* (1981),
for example, Edouard Glissant includes the
following entry: "CALIBAN, cannibale.
Shakespeare nous a donné le mot, nos écrivains
l'ont re fait" (496). In Glissant's view, Caribbean
writers have questioned the colonial "sanction of
the nature-culture equilibrium" posed in the
hierarchical identification of Prospero with culture
and Caliban with nature. Inasmuch as the culture­
nature hierarchy implants a mimetic desire in the
"natural" Caliban, *The Tempest* reveals the way in
which European colonial values, once
institutionalized and naturalized within colonial
practice, set the norm for social behavior and
thereby alienate the consciousness of those whom
the colonizer has mastered and seduced to his way
of thinking. For Caribbean writers who repudiate
this European prescription of identity, the
alternative would be to acknowledge and affirm the
appellation *Caliban*, once a term of opprobrium,
and to transform it into a symbol of a new, non­
colonized self. In the movement of black
affirmation called *negritude*, African and
Caribbean writers, as Charlotte Bruner has
explained, "christen themselves as Caliban and
reshape this image, this Black mask, to fit
themselves" (245).

7. Jorge Alberto Manrique, "Ariel entre Prospero y
Caliban," *Revista de la Universidad de Mexico*
(February- March 1972), 70. Cited in Roberto
Fernandez Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*
(54).

8. According to Fernando Ortiz's introduction to the
collection (10).

2. Wilson Harris makes this argument in *Tradition,
the Writer and Society* when he writes that the
individual slave may be visualized "as possessing
the grassroots of Western individuality" (33),
which means an emphatic rejection of "the
sovereign individual" who lives an illusion of
freedom and self-sufficiency "by conditioning
himself to function solely within his contemporary
situation more or less as the slave appears bound
still upon his historical and archaic plane" (34).

10 The historical precedent for this assignment of a role to the Caribs in the protection of French colonial interests can be found in Colbert's war against Dutch trade in the West Indies. As Colbert, Minister of the Marine with colonial jurisdiction, suggested to a colonial governor in 1670, one way of defending the French monopoly against the Dutch could be that of "secretly aiding the Caribs against them in case of a war, or by secretly inciting them to attack the Dutch by furnishing them firearms and munitions" (cited in Williams 161).

11 One is reminded of Roland Barthes' analysis in *Mythologies* of the photograph in which a black colonial soldier salutes a French flag. As this association suggests, my use of the word "myth" remits to Barthes' explanation: like bourgeois ideology, "myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (142).

12 Marianna Torgovnick's gloss on the meaning of sacrifice in Georges Bataille clarifies the connection between human sacrifice and cannibalism: "Human sacrifice is a symbolic version of cannibalism, in which the human body substitutes for the animal body, and killing for eating. It is a symbolic representation of our normal gustatory acts--but heightened, made less utilitarian, and hence 'sacred'" (189).

13 J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis summarize this analogy in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (55).


Works Cited


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