



**The Body, the Stage, and the Theory:
Unpacking the Body in Aime Cesaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe***

Winning essay of the 2009 undergraduate-level Baptista Essay Prize

by

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Baptista Prizewinning Essay

February 2010

BAPTISTA PRIZEWINNING ESSAYS

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Your carriage, ladies and gentlemen.
Watch your carriage. Let's not have angular
spasmodic movements...Well-
rounded gestures, that's what we need.
Neither the stiffness of a soldier on a
drillground nor the slovenly abandon of
African feet and Creole arms. Let your
manner be both dignified and natural...
natural and solemn...

Aime Cesaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*

Scholarly discussion surrounding the body is more or less polarized into two competing groups: those who 'read' the body as text and those who situate the body as body. This essay assumes the latter methodological model. Theorists such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have, while opening up the discussion of the body, simultaneously reduced it to metaphor while ignoring what the actual body, the breathing body and the visceral body might mean politically (Walker). Foucault, like Butler, writes endlessly about the body and his diction is charged with textual metaphors. In his book Discipline and Punish he contends that "the body is directly involved in the political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it; mark it; train it; torture it; force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (191). Foucault's practice is one of semiology. The body here is written on "mark[ed]" and is legible because it "emits signs"

(514).¹ J.L Austin and Richard Bauman, who are deemed the founders of performance studies, have also erased the body from their language-based analyses.² The need to (re)locate the body in scholarly

¹ In his essay "Foucault's Body Tropes," literary scholar Daniel Punday examines Foucault's use of the body "as a totalizing metaphor" (515). He argues that a major critique of Foucault is that "the body is [couched as] a palimpsestic space...[that] enables Foucault to observe the discursive conflicts that are the hallmark of his historical analysis" (514). Thus the body is reading material. He also argues that "all of Foucault's work ultimately discusses books that describe bodies; at no point does it actually observe physical bodies" (514). Punday situates him within a larger scholarly tradition that uses the body to condense, explicate and represent social and historical phenomena (514). Hierarchical social/class systems have long been organized along lines of the body. Bakhtin assigns the upper body, controlled, rigid and contained to the upper class. The lower body that is open, oozes, defecates and discharges is connotatively linked to a base, hedonistic lower class (Rabelais and his World 1984).

² Bauman's theoretical approach to verbal art is ironically in direct opposition to Austin. According to Bauman, academics who "read" folkloric performance as "text" for its aesthetic and linguistic qualities only, lose something fundamental about the text, its performative aspects. Bauman argues not for a reading or analysis of linguistic features but rather for an approach to the text as performance, as a "communicative mode" or moreover as art in dialogue. Bauman is interested in recognizing that "performance represents a transformation of the basic referential" (9). In laymen's terms, a word/utterance is made new through the "communicative interchange" of speaker and audience (9). Bauman calls for a move away from a literal and transparent conception of an utterance in favour of verbal art as a dynamic process. While certainly expanding notions of performance he also narrows it considerably by falling prey to the same error of Austin in that he excludes the corporeal from the analysis. Although the verbal is certainly a crucial element of performance it fails to register meaning that is simultaneously being produced through dance, movement and gesture.

analysis is what Julia Walker takes up in her essay “Why Performance? Why Now?” She identifies what is a fundamental paradox in Butler’s theories, her close attention to the performative aspects that inhabit the body such as gesture and posture but her subsumption of these bodily activities into a system of verbal signification. Walker contends that this erasure of the body is largely symptomatic of our text-based culture.³ Moreover in terms of serious consideration for the actual body, literary studies is far behind theater and dance scholars such as Sally Ness who interrogates the phrase “gesture as inscription” (1). She argues that the body is not written on but is rather written in. While the term written remains problematic it is a useful point of departure for my analy-

³ In “Why Performance? Why Now? Textuality and the Rearticulation of Human Presence,” Julia A. Walker explores the oppositional relationship between performance and performativity through a critical examination of Judith Butler’s theories and their theoretical shortcomings. Walker rearticulates inscribing practices as “the textualization of culture” what she thinks may be responsible “for the underlying metaphor of culture-as-text [which] include[s] an anti-performative bias” (156). Walker’s main contention is that Butler, whose theories are occupied with the performance of gender, situates the body and its performances as an Austinian type of “‘speech act’ whereby bodies performatively enact sexed or gendered identities according to socially sanctioned codes...Butler nonetheless persists in understanding acts of non verbal signification as if they were verbal utterances” (162). She later defines these acts of “non-verbal signification” as “dress, comportment, gesticulation, and vocality” (165). Walker’s goal is “to expand and complicate [Butler’s] theory of performativity by identifying ways that subject positions are lived in the body”(169). Congruently, I hope to expand Walker’s theorizations by actually looking at how these lived subject positions are enacted out in Césaire’s *The Tragedy of King Christophe*. Like Connerton, Walker argues that “the material body has all but disappeared from official cultural discourse” (171).

sis. What does it matter that we situate the body as body and not as text? What is lost in the text-based model? These are some of the questions that this essay addresses through two lenses, that of (post)colonialism and that of theorist Paul Connerton. This essay fleshes out the relationship between corporeal behaviour and the continued colonial domination of Haiti in a (post)colonial context, the milieu in which this play is staged was in 1804 the first to claim its independence through a violent slave revolt.

The above epigraph was chosen from Césaire’s play for its keen attention to gesture, posture and the production of seemingly “natural” behaviors. In *How Societies Remember*, social theorist Paul Connerton, drawing on the work of Maurice Halbwachs, looks at how collective memory is transferred and communicated. His response is that it is through “(more or less ritual) performances” and to an extent, embodied performances (author’s brackets 4). In *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, Aime Césaire exposes how this same process of transference can also function to erase or silence a collective memory, which importantly takes place primarily through the control and honing of gesture and posture. Connerton also theorizes what he calls “inscribing” (73) and “incorporated” practices (72), the latter being of primary concern here. According to Connerton, incorporated practices are “mnemonic” (84) devices that inhabit the body and function to naturalize gesture, posture and manner. It is a performance that is unbeknownst to the performer because it is so deeply rooted in hegemonic structures. Connerton further divides incorporated practices into three subdivisions: “ceremonies of the body, proprieties of the body, and techniques of the body” (79). *Techniques* of the body are culturally specific gestures. *Proprieties* of the body function as a means of containing

and controlling the body. *Ceremonies* of the body function to delineate rank through claims of genealogical superiority. For ceremonies of the body, Connerton employs the metaphor of the French courts, the inspiration for Césaire's parodic material. Connerton, like Walker, calls attention to the problematic lack of scholarly theorization of physical bodies:

[T]he body is seen to be socially constituted in the sense that it is constructed as an object of knowledge or discourse; but the body is not seen equally to be socially constituted in the sense that it is culturally shaped in its actual practices and behaviour. Practices and behaviour are constantly being assimilated into a cognitive model. (104)

Despite the increasingly growing demand for a return to the body there is surprisingly little analysis of bodies on stage, most notably in drama and literary studies which continue to privilege the text over the performance.⁴ There is likely another cause for this scholarly lacuna that stems

⁴ It is important to define the terms drama, theater, performance, and performativity. These are certainly not mutually exclusive terms, which is why their division in academic disciplines remains problematic. These definitions are also not exhaustive. Drama is understood as the study of literary texts or what Richard Schechner calls "the domain of the author" (qtd. in Shepherd: 154). Theater is the staging of a performance, often within a demarcated space and often involving hours of preparation and rehearsal. Performance, due largely to scholar Schechner and his extensive anthropological, historical and social studies, has been expanded to include ritual, protest, ceremonies, carnival, among a myriad of other things. Performativity is according to Judith Butler a series of repetitive acts that are socially constituted and work to give the illusion of a stable, static and authentic self.

from the divide between performance and what Walker notes is its "anti-performative" counterpart, performativity (150). The performance of the actors in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* works to expose, through hyperbole and meta-theater, the performativity of race and class. Césaire's employment of Brechtian techniques of *alienation* necessitates a closer look at bodies in theater since it calls attention to the performed and the performing body. This essay takes up several bodies: the body politic, the racialized body, the social body, the nation/land as body, the normative body and finally the body on stage. In Aime Césaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe* how does Césaire use the body to show how memories are colonized? How does the body function as a site of the politics of power that work not on but in and through the body? What does the use of meta-theatre achieve in terms of calling attention to actual bodies on stage? What does the body have to do with nation formation? How does the overt satirizing of bodily movement and gesture expose the intricacies of colonial power and its inextricable relationship to the body?

Césaire's play demonstrates that the colonial project and its entailing ideologies of the civilizing mission occur at the level of embodied performances. Slavery was based on the commodification, capturing and movement of bodies. The slave economy was based on the physical labour of bodies. Colonial attempts at assimilation were rooted in the training, honing, and control of the body in order to mimic the European body and thus uphold it as the normalized body. It is partially my goal to open up and expose the spaces in which theater, performance and performativity overlap and this occurs at the level of the body. I enter the discussion not wanting to merely sustain or perpetuate the binaries of theater/drama,

performance/text, performance/ performativity, body as text/body as body but only in hopes of complicating these binaries and more importantly investigating what the actual breathing body might mean if released from its theoretical paralysis.

In Sally Ann Ness' essay "The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations of Dance" she interrogates the term "inscription of gesture" which she pushes to its literal extreme before becoming oxymoronic. Ness examines how, through repetitive motions and behaviours, the tissues and musculatures of the body are literally trained and transformed into what is essentially body memory. Body memory is also likely why the workers in Aime Césaire's play, whose bodies remember the labour of slavery, are so resistant to labour under a new regime "when we threw the whites into the sea, it was to have this land for ourselves, not to slave for other people even if they're as black as we are" (2.1.48). Ness unpacks the word inscription as an etching, carving or marking onto an object that has to have some element of "[p]ermanence [which] is a defining feature of inscription" (3). For Ness the body of the dancer is not written on but written in "after years of embodying this movement term, their skeletal-musculature gradually comes to bear its 'mark.' A gesture-or in this case-, a postural term- has been inscribed not upon them but into them" (12). She concludes the essay, however, by exploring why a linguistic or text-based approach to dance is limited and like Bauman she argues for a performance centered approach.⁵

⁵ By analyzing various forms of dance training such as classical ballet, Ness examines how rigid, stable and meticulously aimed movement work to encode social/cultural hegemonies. She writes that ballet "[i]n its principle structure...may extend to any activity in which targeting a goal might be involved or idealized...It is

Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis examine more explicitly bodies on stage since "although a play can be read as a coherent script, its performance is pre-eminently an activity of bodies" (191).⁶ Like Césaire and Connerton, Shepherd and Wallis are also cognizant of proprieties of the body "actions do not so much express individual intention as social education of the body" (192). What is of primary interest to us here is the relationship that Shepherd draws between the performance of a social body and the performance of the body of the actor on stage. This is the connection that Butler refuses to make. Proprieties of the body are taken up in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* in that the body is closely monitored, regulated, re-aligned and trained which is also paralleled by the same processes that an actor undergoes in order to perform on stage. In Césaire's play *Haiti* is posited as a stage, whose audience is comprised of

difficult to imagine a value more core in western cultures than the value placed on being able to achieve a single, identified goal and hold on to it indefinitely" (18). Consequently the dictates of bodily comportment at work in Ballet are produced and encouraged by larger systems of power: the micro and the macro collide.

⁶ In their book *Drama/Theater/Performance* theatre and performance scholars Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis work to unpack these disciplines and also to locate the body in theater. According to Shepherd "Performance studies derives one major sense of 'performativity' from speech act theory," (220) a theory espoused by Austin. Shepherd also notes how Austin's theories are intrinsically anti-theatrical "Austin had confined speech acts to direct speech. Literary and theatrical forms were 'parasitic': their utterances are mere acts of citation, having a mimetic relationship to 'real' speech acts" (220). In other words, theater is merely an artificial form that mimics speech.

white Europeans for which the citizens of Haiti must perform civility “The whole world had its eyes on us, citizens, and the nations think black men have no dignity. A King, a court, a kingdom, that’s what we’ve got to show them if we want to be respected” (1.2.18). This is Christophe’s motivational drive toward establishing a court, nobility, and monarchy. Shepherd points out that “while all bodies display their social education, bodies on stage also display their theatrical education. Performers are often explicitly trained in muscular disciplines...externally imposed regimes are internalized and thoroughly inhabited” (192). Within a theatrical performance, often accused as a modality used for upholding the status quo, “the body in the performance is both socially and theatrically produced...the greater its concern with the exchange of corporeal techniques, the more political and historical it becomes” (Shepherd 193). It is this exchange that is of primary concern for Césaire and in the play it is a politicized exchange “Whom did Europe send us when we applied to the International Technical Aid Organization for assistance? Not an engineer. Not a soldier. Not a professor. A master of ceremonies. Form is what counts my friend. That’s what civilization is...the forming of man” (1.3.21). It is the exchange and mimesis of corporeal behaviour that takes precedence over what are the potentially threatening institutions of urban centers, a military and an education system. The physical absence of colonial administration does not signal the dissolution of colonial relations of power. Césaire’s overt political engagement works to disavow the common couching of theater as, to quote Shepherd once more, “a kind of engine to drive an unfair system of privilege...that snares its audience into an unconscious acceptance of a status quo” (152) a statement, Césaire counteracts

through the Brechtian employment of the *alienation* effect.

Aime Césaire’s play *The Tragedy of King Christophe* was first staged in Austria in 1964. In order to fully comprehend the intricacies of the play’s meanings it is important to situate the play and its playwright within the historical and social conditions in which the play emerged. Césaire was born in Martinique in 1913 and was one of the main proponents of the Negritude movement, a movement that sought to reclaim and re/affirm the black subject. In his book *Shaping and Reshaping the Caribbean*, scholar Martin Munro tracks Césaire’s career as poet, playwright and politician. He notes that Césaire’s texts generally grapple with major themes of: displacement, decolonization, nation formation, myth, Africa (as both mother and victim) and the historical movements of history (not linear or progressive nor tautological). A question that one might ask is why Haiti? Haiti is often evoked by authors both within and outside of the Caribbean such as Derek Walcott and Edouard Glissant. Given that Césaire was born in Martinique what are his interests in Haiti? Munro correctly points out that “the choice of Haiti and Martinique as the points of comparison is an obvious one, as they represent the polar opposites of the Caribbean situation: the one the first independent Caribbean republic and the other a department *d’outre mer*, still politically, economically (and perhaps culturally) dependent on its former colonial metropole” (2000 2). To extend on Munro’s reasons for Césaire’s choice of Haiti as milieu is not only his fascination or perhaps dream of freedom from colonial rule but also to use Haiti for a didactic end and to challenge whether we can read Haiti as in a state of postcolonialism. Moreover the play was first staged in 1964 at the height of the civil rights movement in the United States as well as during the

process of decolonization in Africa, which unfortunately produced a myriad of Christophe like leaders. Accordingly, the triangular political outreach of this play across chronoptic divides cannot be ignored. Césaire's theater is first and foremost political "[un] theatre, avant tout politique" (qtd. in Munro: 35).

The Tragedy of King Christophe chronologically follows the post-revolution period in Haiti from 1806-1820. Working within the tradition of the tragedy and the tragic hero yet also subverting this structure through hyperbole and comedy, Césaire traces both the rise of Christophe, the king of Haiti, and his downfall. Christophe, who is initially driven by good intent to unite a people and form a nation, is soon transformed into a despot who more or less upholds the colonial structures of power that the revolution sought to undo. In this sense he is compared to Napoleon since both crown themselves and both (re)institute monarchical structures. All of the analyses of *The Tragedy of King Christophe* that I have come across, and the analyses are sadly limited, have sought to unpack the colonial and political discourses in which the play is centered. John Conteh-Morgan notes the important and re-curing image of the builder. Munro makes mention of *The Tragedy* but the play is not sufficiently unpacked. Both scholars attend to the play's imagery and language. The glaring absence of the analysis of the body, however, is slightly confounding especially because Césaire positions the body at the forefront of the play. An analysis of Césaire's use of language and imagery should certainly not be discarded, however, a strictly literary analysis forecloses an equally valuable and revealing reflection of the play's materiality.

The Tragedy of King Christophe is highly metatheatrical in that it calls atten-

tion to itself as a play, as a construction, as a mediated staging. The play opens with a cockfight in which the two combating cocks are comically named after Petion (the mulatto President of the South) and Christophe (the black King of the North). Not only does this work to foreshadow the battle between these two leaders, it also works to subvert expectations set up by the title. Césaire also employs a character named "THE COMMENTATOR... [who] is dressed like a European gentleman of the period" (Prologue 8). This commentator has two functions: the pragmatic function of contextualizing the narrative, since an Austrian audience may lack in this historical knowledge, and also to deconstruct, through direct address to the audience, what is referred to in theater as the *fourth wall*. To clarify, that is the proscenium style stage that visually resembles a picture frame and works to divide the audience from the events on stage and position them as passive voyeurs. The commentator's remarks are not disengaged however. His monologue ends with "[a]nd like every king, every true king, every white king I mean, he created a court and surrounded himself with a nobility" (10). This monologue is a political move on Césaire's part that purposefully colours all of the ensuing events. A similar metatheatrical technique is also used again to bookend the play when the character Hugonin, dressed as "Baron Saturday" or in French Baron Samedi, "the voodoo guardian of cemeteries," (seminar 05/14/09) addresses the audience directly and offers a clever pun "Forgive me ladies and gentlemen, if I'm late. I'm the character who always comes in at the end" (3.6.92). The primary function of metatheater is theorized by Brecht in his essay "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting," the actor "expresses the awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusions" (92). The

illusion he refers to is that of a reality, uncontested and complete as advanced by the school of realists and naturalists and propounded by Stanislavski. Theorizing the role of the actor, Brecht asserts “he does not conceal the fact that he has rehearsed it, anymore than an acrobat conceals his training...he can pick a definite attitude to adopt towards the character...in this way his performance becomes a discussion (about social conditions) with the audience he is addressing” (139). Brecht’s theories, while having been criticized for their abstraction and optimism, still retain value because they do call attention to bodies on stage and to the performative nature of theater which extends into everyday social-historical performances.

Cesaire sets up a series of concentric circles in which performances are situated within a performance. The entire play is centered around embodied performances of cock fights, ceremonies such as the coronation, the performance of civility and the performance of race and class (the monarchy is hastily erected and is therefore constructed). As was previously mentioned, Haiti is couched as a stage, the revolution and post-revolutionary period are/were performances and the spectators are the colonizers whose physical absence is replaced by an equally potent presence attained by what Foucault calls “surveillance” (191). According to Foucault, surveillance is “a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible” (189). Cesaire infuses *The Tragedy of King Christophe* with images of eyes and the vocabulary of surveillance is the driving force for the erection of a court in the belief that the audience (colonizers) will be impressed and thus affirm the Haitian nation on the world stage. The

tangible absence/presence of the French colonial powers almost functions like a character in the play and Vastey, Christophe’s assistant, is cognizant of this “[t]he whole world is watching us, citizens, and the nations think that black men have no dignity. A king, a court, a kingdom, that’s what we’ve got to show them is we want to be respected” (1.2.18). Foucault also employs the image of the panopticon, a structure theorized by Jeremy Bentham, in which the prison guards are in the center and elevated in a tower above the surrounding cells which are open and therefore the actions of the imprisoned can be closely monitored. Again this model is based upon “eyes that must see without being seen,” (189) in essence the mere knowledge or suspicion that someone is watching forces people to police their own behaviours and their own bodies.

The metaphor of appropriate performance for France’s and Europe’s spectators continuously resurfaces. The Master of Ceremonies reminds the nobility that the coronation “is a ceremony of the utmost importance, gentlemen. The whole world has its eyes on us” (1.3.20). Interestingly Haiti, because of its geographic location on an island, is positioned as a prisoner within a panoptic structure because it is visible from all sides: “Delirious clouds overhead, at our feet the sea foam vomited out by two worlds. That’s where God has put us. Our backs to the Pacific; before us Europe and Africa; on either side, the Americas...at the focal point of every ebb and flow. And what a view it offers from all sides!” (3.1.73). The reading of Haiti as prisoner however is also complicated. Despite being visible from all sides Haiti is also able to see all sides and is importantly rendered as center within the triangular slave trade structure. Part of Cesaire’s Negritude Project was to resituate the Caribbean as center.

Within the realm of performance, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* pays particular attention to the court as a site for both training the body and delineating rank and class. The attempt at order and control in Christophe's court are actualized in bodily practices. The processes of imposing etiquette are exposed as highly constructed because, unlike the insidious nature of the hegemonic and unquestioned adoption of bodily practices that both Connerton and Butler theorize, these practices are being overtly taught and the reception of those lessons are satirized through hyperbolic movements. The parodic nature of these lessons and thus the notion of the European body as the normal/ natural body are exposed as absurd:

Remember your carriage. The carriage is all important. (Assuming an academic manner.) Let me explain. To walk well, you must bear yourself erect, but without stiffness, you must advance both legs in a straight line, inclining neither to the right nor to the left of your axis; the entire body must participate imperceptibly in the general movement. (1.3.24)

Here the performance of the play (the actors on stage and their characters' movements) and the performativity of race at the level of the body overlap. When the character's cannot perform the movement appropriately Christophe is angered as noted in the stage directions "CHRISTOPHE (exploding): Damnation! Who cursed me with such a lot of slob...Good Lord, Stinkhole. Stop shuffling!...(Taking Candytown by the collar)...Is that a way to hand me the scepter?" (1.3.24). The failure for the character's to immediately grasp the movements speaks to their artificiality or what Connerton observes as the difference

between an 'ease' that is 'natural' and an 'ease' that is 'forced'. The ease that is called natural is perceived as natural because of its spontaneous casualness of manner and its even flow of performance. The ease that is called forced is perceived because of the evident presence in that behaviour which intends to display ease of 'false notes', mere signs of a manner of behaving: an anxious reference to what is considered a legitimate norm, an uneasiness about the correct manner to adopt, a respect for a cultural code that is recognized rather than known. (90)

What Cesaire presents is exactly the "ease' that is 'forced'" and he achieves this through a disrupted/ive, comical and "[un] even flow of performance" exposing the artificiality, contingency and performativity of European notions of civility. The supposed "natural" movements that the epigraph alludes to are denaturalized.

Another modality of bodily control is theorized by Connerton and explored in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*. This modality is clothing that not only codes, and again we return to the notion of signification, but also controls, constrains and shapes the body. Connerton offers as example

the apparel worn by Victorian women [that] not only conveyed decodable messages; it also helped to mould female behaviour...Tight skirts and sleeves, crinolines and trains, floor-length petticoats-they all arrested her locomotive power. But no encumbrance was more...constricting than the tight-laced corset...the defenders of tight-lacing spoke of

‘discipline’, ‘submission’, ‘bondage’, ‘confinement.’(33)

Christophe who sees one of his courtiers climbing the steps of Sans Souci in fours seeks to punish him by literally impeding his mobility “Just remember the dictates of etiquette, the duties incumbent upon your rank, the demands of the State. Fit him with silk stockings...The French call them chains. That will slow him down. That will show him to climb the steps of Sans-Souci” (2.4.58). He also reprimands another courtier for the practice of an African dance that involves wild and unrestrained movements “As for you Richard...your conduct at last night’s ball was ridiculous. I will not have my nobles playing the clown. At my court, sir, one does not dance the bamboola” (2.4.58-59). Bodily behaviour is policed in the former literally and in the latter ideologically at the expense of an African performance mode, which is supplanted by a European dance. Both metaphoric and ideological policings are also attempts at limiting and containing movement and both importantly are executed by the state. Césaire shows how the state can and does intervene at the level of the body.

The performance of the coronation and the anniversary of that coronation are also supplanted and adopted performances that function to legitimize Christophe’s power. The performances of the court are described as “perfect replica[s]” (1.3.21) of an “invent[ed] nobility” (1.3.22). The language employed at these ceremonies, primarily Latin, the use of Austin’s performative utterance “we proclaim you” (1.4.27) and the highly structured and stylized nature of the ceremony “the order of the presentation is as follows: the ring, the sword, the mantle, the hand of justice, the scepter” (1.3.24) mark it as performance distinct from everyday behaviour or speech. As Connerton notes,

rituals such as the transference of kingship can only hold cultural meaning if they are stored within a greater collective memory (8). The coronation ceremony can only be effectively legitimated if and only if the memories of Haitians have been successfully colonized. What they collectively remember and validate at this ceremony is the European conception of the body politic, or the king’s two bodies.

The coronation ceremony ultimately transforms Christophe’s body and endows it with an “aura of inviolability” (Connerton 8). After Christophe is crowned the crowd shouts “Long live Henry! Henry live forever!” (1.4.28). It is noteworthy however that there is opposition and that Christophe’s kingship is questioned by rebels such as Metellus who is killed for his dissenting voice and who is arguably a mouthpiece for Césaire. Metellus espouses a Negritude of sorts which is elevated from the rest of the text because it is written as poetry rather than prose “We were going to build a country/all of us together!/Not just to stake out this island!/A country open to all islands!/To black men everywhere. The blacks of the whole/world”(1.5.30). Césaire also takes up another usage of the body politic in which the king’s body is used to mirror the social, economic and historical conditions of his kingdom. By the play’s end Christophe is decrepit and diseased and his citizens/subjects are exhausted from unrelenting labour. He explicitly situates the people as an extension of his body “I will continue my work./You will be my limbs, since nature/Denies me the use of my own” (3.3.82). However the people do not ultimately comply resulting in Christophe’s suicide. It is worth mentioning however that Césaire re-writes the body politic in the image of the phoenix. This can be understood as a creolized body politic that not only stands in for the king but is more

directly related to Haiti, “Haiti was born from the smoldering ashes” (Prologue 9). Christophe’s turn to myth will later be discussed in relation to the gendered body.

The Tragedy of King Christophe pivots on the notion of nation building. The action verbs of building, molding and constructing continuously punctuate the play and function as an extended metaphor for the processes of nation formation. This process relies exclusively on bodies and their capacity for labour. The diction of construction is also framed against more naturalistic images of planting and growing thus Césaire sets up a tension between what is natural and what is artificial. Christophe’s project is akin to that of a builder. Haiti is couched as a “workshop” (1.7.37) in which the bodies of the citizens are molded and formed at will “[t]he human material needs recasting” (1.7.37). Christophe continuously privileges man-made materials “Stone, that’s what I want! Cement give me cement” over “dust...earth and straw” (1.5.32). The play suggests that this imagery stands in for an approach to nation building, in a letter that Christophe receives, Wilberforce warns him “You don’t invent a tree, you plant it. You don’t extract the fruit, you let it grow. A nation isn’t a sudden creation, it’s a slow ripening, year after year, ring after ring” to which Christophe replies “Ha, that’s a good one! Sow the seeds of civilization, he says. Yes, unfortunately, it grows slowly” (1.8.40). Christophe’s obsession with work and expediency has monstrous ramifications and ultimately leads to tyranny as the people are worked to the brink of exhaustion and forced to suffer a Sisyphean type of fate. Thus the rebellion of the people is not caused solely by the endless work but is exacerbated by their collective embodied memories of slavery.

Christophe’s nation building project is a project that is fundamentally concerned with bodies. Whereas the body within the court is structured and stylized, the body of the worker is commodified and metonymic. The colonial structures of power are upheld within the class division of civilized and uncivilized bodies. Christophe is ever present at the construction sites of the Citadel and Sans Souci, his palace, where he polices both the construction of the buildings but more so the behaviour of his workers. Through his telescope he comes across a sleeping peasant and orders his execution simply on the charge of slovenliness. He also evaluates the bodies of his potential workers in terms of their productive capacities which eerily echoes to slave auctions and the commodification of slave bodies “Prezeau, to all these big blacks, stout of body and limb, but bloated with eloquence, you will give picks and shovels. Our agriculture has need of arms” (2.4.61). Thus the black workers return to the fields where they so shortly ago laboured under colonial rule. Césaire also draws a palpable connection between bodily labour and nation building through allusions to blood and sweat “the people’s backs are still aching, and now their being incited to contribute their patriotic sweat to the building of a new castle” (3.1.72-73). Moreover Christophe frequently employs the metonym of hands “[e]xtravagant adventure with out bare hands! Insane challenge of our wounded hands!” (1.8.44) and again later “we will never let anyone overturn the edifice that we have built with our hands and cemented with our blood” (2.4.63). Loss of life is explained away as collateral damage necessary for his larger vision, an aide de camp informs Christophe that “the commandant and half the garrison are buried under the ruins” to which Christophe responds “It’s just another battle” (2.6.70). The play’s dichotomy of the natural

growth of a nation versus the constructed nation is eventually collapsed. The planting of seeds and growing of trees is assisted by the corpses amassed both during the revolution which was a fight for national independence and its entailing nation building project. The “black soil” of Haiti is described as being “redde[n]” and saturated with “fertile blood” (1.5.31). To put it crudely, Haitian bodies serve as fertilizer. Wilberforce’s romanticization of national growth is undercut by Haiti’s violent history.

Christophe also describes Haiti as a wasteland of sorts overrun by wilderness:

[O]ur good Haitian earth, an now look: wells overgrown with briars, charred shattered walls deep in wild banana thickets, cactuses thrusting out their swords...And the stench! Do you smell it?...this is what Haiti must be to the discoverer’s nostrils: this smell of dried blood...this smell of a holocaust...luckily the end is in sight. Tomorrow it will all be over. (1.5.31)

Ignoring the problematic term “discover” and the erasure of the indigenous population, Christophe is angered by the disorder of overgrowth. Also important is the olfactory imagery evoked by the lingering scent of the revolution and the smell of the bodies that haunt Haitian’s memories.

Another integral point that can be extracted from this quote is Christophe’s conception of history as linear and progressive, that Haiti is moving within a dialectic with a tangible end “in sight.” Christophe’s fixation with forward movement is inextricably linked and mutually determined by his memories of slavery and his attempt at revoking those memories. He recalls the “collective reduction to the lev-

els of animals” (1.8.42) but he also paradoxically adopts the ideologies of the colonial mission “I tried to unfold the enigma of this backward people” (3.4.83). Moreover Christophe attempts to bury the past by re-naming former slaves and simultaneously evacuating their memories “With names of glory I will cover your slave names” (1. 3.25). His project is not one of recuperation but one of progress in which the past is figured as parasitic to both forward and upward mobility. Comparatively, the Citadel holds not only the utilitarian function of protecting the island but also the symbolic function of “cancel[ing] out the slave ship” (1.8.45). The trope of the slave ship however is a pervasive force. Ironically, under the looming presence of the ship Vastey says to the peasants “Yours is work, free work, for you are free men, free to work for your country that is in danger” (1.2.17). Eventually the ship comes to stand in for Haiti “Haiti itself is a great ship, or to put it more bluntly, one big galley” (3.1.73). The political implications of this comment are far from subtle. Christophe misreads the supposed lethargy and resistance to work as a characteristic of Haitians for which he reprimands them:

Haiti has less to fear from the French than from itself. This people’s enemy is indolence, its efronterty, its hatred of disciplines...for the honor and survival of this nation...I won’t have the world so much as suspect, that ten years of black freedom, ten years of black slovenliness and indifference, have sufficed to squander the patrimony that our martyred people has amassed in a hundred years of labour under the whip...you won’t have the right to be tired. (1.2.19)

What is perhaps the ultimate failure of his reign is his inability to recognize/acknowledge the embodied memory of slavery, the excruciating memory of labour that to return to Ness is encoded in the muscles, tissues and fibers and therefore memories of the Haitian people. Christophe's approach to nation building is summed up in a paradox articulated by Vastey "What a delightful paradox! Do you mean to say that King Christophe employs the means of slavery to attain the ends of freedom?" (2.3.53). The question that Césaire ultimately begs is how then to approach the project of nation building in a post/colonial context when memories of the colonizer continue to inhabit the body?

The final body that is presented in Césaire's play is problematic. I use Césaire here to re-articulate my original point of the dangers of metaphorically "reading" the body. This body is the gendered body and furthermore a metaphorical body that stands in for Haiti and Africa. While, as has been discussed, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* is politically engaged in its exploration of both historical and contemporary concerns the ending moves away from the historical into the mythological. In the play's final performance Christophe's dead corpse is lifted high into the mountains imbuing him with mythological proportions and like the ceremony the diction employed is poetic, Yoruba gods are invoked and the audience is left with the image of a phoenix, a symbol of rebirth and regeneration. Scholar Martin Munro in his essay "Can't Stand up for Falling Down" reads Césaire's movement into myth as

a palliative comfort for Christophe, and by extension, for Haiti/Africa, as they confront the full complexity of their post independence realities. By invoking

myth, Césaire steps back from the immediacy and particularity of history, and...attempts to give the Haitian/African situation a wider, more universal resonance. (13)

To extend, the attempt at universality was a significant part of Césaire's Negritude project, however as Munro points out, this requires a decontextualization that doesn't address any of the difficult questions that the play poses. This is not to Césaire's discredit because these questions still haunt us not only forty years after the original conception of the play but two hundred and some odd years after the Haitian revolution. The invocation of Africa is not problematic in the sense that it denies closure; it is problematic because Africa is gendered as a woman and more particularly as a mother. Moments before his death Christophe calls out "Africa, help me to go home, carry me like an aged child in your arms. Undress me and wash me" (3.5.90). The gendering of the earth occurs at two other points in the play in which Haiti is couched as both mother and wife "when we threw the whites into the sea, it was to have this land for ourselves, not to slave for other people, even if they're as black as we are, but to have the land for ourselves like a wife" (2.1.48). This quote gestures at gender relations of power that are not fully developed in the play. The revolution was partially a quest for ownership of land, the employment of the simile "like a wife" suggests that women are also properties of sort that can be "had" as the verb "have" implies. The final gendering of the land appears in Metellus' speech in which the division of Haiti between the mulattos and the blacks is figured in terms of a mutilation of a female body "But then came politicians/cutting the house in two/laying hands on our mother/disfiguring her in the eyes of the world/making her into a crude pitiful puppet" (1.5.30). Not only do these

metaphors uphold the stereotypical roles of women as mother and wife they elide the bodies of actual women in the play who, save for a few lines from Christophe's wife and a brief scene with what are described as "two upper-class LADIES," (2.3.52) women inhabit a secondary role and are mostly without voice.

When women do appear they are eroticized, the stage directions note " (THE LADIES enter: full bodied black women dressed fit to kill. They curtsy to Christophe who taps some of them on their rear ends as they pass)" (1.3.24). In comparison to Christophe's larger than life character his wife insists on her mediocrity "I'm only a poor woman...A crown on my head won't make me/anything more than a plain woman/a good black wife who says to her husband:/ Take care, Christophe" (1.8.41). Hugonin, Christophe's assistant, also evaluates women for their procreative potential "she'll give us a work gang before she's through...the State needs soldiers" (2.4.56). Thus the adoption of French courts also signals the adoption of patriarchal systems of power. The nation is framed as a family unit with Christophe at the head " the great Haitian family of which I am the head" (1.4.28). The earlier exposure of the performativity of civility taught through the body and thus denaturalized does not ring true for the performativity of gender. Cesaire falls pray a common trap of subsuming gender issues under racial issues. Moreover the gendering of Haiti and Africa continues to elide the role of the exertions of power on and in women's bodies under colonial/postcolonial rule. What of the even more complex relationship between the performativity of race and gender and class? An expansion of this process would add another interesting dimension to a play that is so occupied with bodies but primarily male bodies.

A close analysis at the level of embodied practices and behaviors in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* demonstrates why attention to the corporality and physicality of the body is necessary especially when grappling with a text that is transformed into a performance "of bodies." It also demonstrates why an inter-disciplinary approach that couples literary, drama, theater and performance studies is able to open up meanings and tease out relationships that any individual discipline would limit or even omit. Drama/Theater and Performance/Performativity divides are counter-productive and do not necessarily have to be antithetical to one another. The dominant strain of postcolonial studies that attends to identity politics could also benefit from an attention to how constructions of the self are mediated and dictated by the workings of power in and on the body and what this implies in terms of "individual" agency. It is important to maintain an ongoing dialogue so that the body doesn't slip into the abyss of our text-based (Walker) culture once again. It is time to arrest the body from its theoretical paralysis and set the scholarly discussion in motion.

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