

THE LITERARY NATURE OF THE HISTORICAL TEXT:  
SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE POSTMODERNIST CRITIQUE OF 'REALISM' FOR  
CARIBBEAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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There has been a growing consciousness within historiographical circles in recent times that the relationship between the historical text and the reality which it purports to re-present is one fraught with difficulties. This has involved a grudging recognition in many quarters of the profoundly literary quality of the historical text, a view which compromises, even in its most innocuous forms, all efforts to draw a firm distinction between (the study of) History on the one hand, and (that of) Literature, on the other. Of course, literature has for a long time been considered by many (sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly) to be something of a less serious academic pursuit engaged in by those guilty of a retreat away from an engagement with the 'real' world and, thus, of an escape into the realm of fantasy. It has gradually come to be recognised, however, that language is at the heart of and thus inextricable from each and every one of the so-called Social 'Sciences' and that, accordingly, the processes by which we seek to know our world are inescapably literary in nature. Suddenly, literature is no longer quite the idle pastime that it seemed to be and linguistics and literary theory are (sometimes reluctantly) on almost everyone's lips not only in the Humanities but also in the Social Sciences.

This paper, largely philosophical in thrust, has three main objectives. Firstly, it attempts to provide an overview of the most important ways in which developments in the philosophy of language in this century have functioned to undermine the hitherto largely unquestioned notions of realism that have undergirded traditional approaches to the study of history in the modern academe. Secondly, it attempts to make its own intervention in the ongoing so-called 'History and Postmodernism' debate<sup>1</sup> by suggesting that it is possible to rethink the nature of the relationship between text and context without resorting to discredited mimetic notions of language. Thirdly, the essay is offered as something of a challenge to historians of the Caribbean in particular. I would like to know exactly

where they stand in the debate alluded to. Can Caribbean philosophers of language and/or historians refute in some substantial way the Postmodernist critique of traditional models of signification which informs the contemporary attempt to radically rethink the practice of history? Can they in this way justify a return to (or, in some cases, the maintenance of) traditional modes of historiography? On the other hand, if one accepts the validity of these Postmodernist arguments, can historians of the Caribbean afford to ignore the compelling epistemological consequences of these linguistic theories for the study of history? If the answer is no, how then should we proceed to rethink the study of history in the Caribbean? Alternatively, should we dismiss all this as so much sound and fury signifying nothing, and bury our heads in the sand like the proverbial ostrich in the hope that it will all go away, citing (as we so often seem to do) some unsubstantiated argument about the ‘irrelevance’ of all such theorising to our lives in the region?

## I

### CONVENTIONAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

At least since the rise of historicism<sup>2</sup> in the nineteenth century and the consolidation of history as an academic discipline in the twentieth century, historians may be roughly divided into two camps: those who have adopted what they themselves would like to think of as a purely inductive approach to their subject matter (e.g. G. R. Elton, Arthur Marwick or John Tosh)<sup>3</sup> and those who have adopted a largely deductive approach (such as Eric Hobsbawm)<sup>4</sup> to understanding the past. Those in the former camp are of the view that historical explanations must, in the words of Alun Munslow, be based upon “objective and forensic research into the sources,” the “reconstruction of the past as it actually happened,” and the freedom of the whole process from “ideological contamination,” “preconceived theories of explanation,” and what he terms, gesturing towards the so-called ‘linguistic

turn' taken by the Humanities and Social Sciences, "linguistic *a priori*sm."<sup>5</sup> Unlike R. G. Collingwood, historiographers like Elton are unwilling to grant that the past involves a reenactment in the historian's mind as a result of which 'impositionalism,' the imposition of the historian's preconceptions and prejudices on his/her object of study, is deemed to be a danger to be avoided at all costs.<sup>6</sup> In short, in the inductive scheme of historiography, one starts with the historical evidence to hand and works backwards to arrive at particular conclusions that allegedly reconstruct the past in all its autonomous particularity.

From the foregoing point of view, the imposition of explanatory paradigms on the evidence would prevent the historical past from ever being recapitulated independently of the historian seeking to sift through the evidence thereof. However, historians in the second camp, such as those influenced by the historical materialism of Karl Marx, argue that historians can explain the past only when, in the words of Munslow again, "the evidence is placed within a pre-existing explanatory framework" of historical change and/or the social formation.<sup>7</sup> An example of such an explanatory framework would be the use made by Marxist historians like Hobsbawm of the dialectical model of history originally inspired by Hegel in conjunction with Marx's Base/Superstructure model.<sup>8</sup> From this point of view, even those in the former camp necessarily deploy, but fail to acknowledge, specific conceptual apparatuses. It should be pointed out that historians in the deductive camp prefer to believe that what they glimpse and attempt to elucidate are the 'deep structures' per se immanent in the events themselves of the past and which are not imposed from without through the historian's personal biases. To historians in this camp, these deep structures are inherently discoverable and are merely reproduced or pointed out by the discerning historian.

Historians who adhere to the deductive approach may be divided in turn into several historical

schools of thought which differ according to the particular explanatory models, what Munslow describes as the “shared categories of analysis and conceptualisation if not actual ideological positioning” by which they are informed.<sup>9</sup> It is precisely this variety of paradigms which allows different schools to see the very same events as forming part of very divergent patterns. Moreover, by focusing on a particular aspect(s) of the social structure discerned (e.g. a specific class, nation and/or race), many historians in this group explicitly view written history as an “interventionist exercise of dissent and opposition,” that is, as a “form of political commitment to marginalised groups—racial and ethnocultural, gendered, class, colonial, sexual and regional” and upon whose behalf it is their duty to speak.<sup>10</sup>

These two camps together constitute the dominant historiographical discourse of the twentieth century. They are united by what Althusser would describe as a common epistemological and linguistic ‘problematic’ or theoretical framework.<sup>11</sup> Firstly, they are both basically empiricist in outlook. That is, they adhere to the notion that there is a singular past reality ‘out there’ simply waiting to be rediscovered by the discerning historian. They adhere, too, to the view that the truth of this past is objectively recuperable and can be clearly inferred from the ‘evidence’ once the distortions due to prejudice in the historian’s mind or the flaws in the deductive model applied, as the case might be, are eliminated. In such an absolutist scheme of things, knowledge is not in the final analysis a perspectival affair, truth not relative. This is because there is a clear demarcation between knower and known and because, once properly effected, the hermeneutic act engaged in by the historian is not thought in any way to impinge upon the results thereof. As a result, for both camps, historical ‘facts’ precede their interpretation and merely wait to be discovered or revealed, rather than discursively constructed or forcibly imposed upon the raw material of the past.

Secondly, both camps employ a basically referential/expressivist model of language. This model of the sign, the inevitable corollary of the epistemological model outlined above, consists in the view, traceable to Plato, that signs directly label corresponding referents (objects in the real world) and/or the Lockean view that signs express those ideas which the speaker/writer has about reality that have been impressed upon his/her consciousness by his/her intercourse with the world.<sup>12</sup> Admitting that the 'evidence' with which the historian engages consists for the most part in verbal forms of material handed down to the present day and that one necessarily gains access to the past by means of 'reading' these evidentiary texts, both camps agree that the hermeneutic process in which the historian engages is a largely unobtrusive one which, correctly performed, leads him/her to *the* truth about the past under investigation. This is because language is something akin to a translucent lens that does not, accordingly, place problems in the way of the reading process which is, as a result, a perfectly straightforward affair. Ideally speaking, the words which the historian reads provide a transparent window onto the reality of the past and his/her own words in turn clearly express the historian's ideas, hopefully pruned of all distortions through honest effort, about that past.

Moreover, the role played by narrative in historical accounts is not denied but downplayed. Admitting that historians necessarily turn historical events into stories (in a process that has come to be called 'emplotment'), both camps contend that the shape which such stories take (the plot, as it were) is immanent in the sequence of events themselves and not arbitrarily imposed from without by the investigating historian. From this point of view, the objective historian engages in a tautological exercise in which s/he merely retraces the precise form taken by a *given* sequence of events which, because 'naturally' or inherently ordered in a specific way, is significant in a manner that has little to do with the historian per se, if at all. Historians and their narratives are accordingly ranked according

to their fidelity to the historical past. This is done in a manner similar to how literary historians like the liberal humanist Ian Watt or the Marxist Georg Lukács seek to rank the great novelists of the nineteenth century, not insignificantly the golden age of Realism.<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding slightly different criteria, Watt and Lukács share the same basic conception of the correspondence of (literary) texts to social reality not only with like-minded critics but with historians of the realist school in general.

### **POSTMODERNIST HISTORIOGRAPHY: THE 'LINGUISTIC TURN'**

In the wake of developments this century in the philosophy of language (especially those under the aegis of French Structuralism and Post-Structuralism), the conventional view of the historian's practice adumbrated above has been severely problematised.<sup>14</sup> Contending that the central "question of classical epistemology from Descartes to Hume, from Locke to Kant" is "how to make congruous the order of representations in consciousness with the order of representations outside the self," Seyla Benhabib argues that the linguistic turn evident in Structuralism and Post-Structuralism has functioned to problematise both solutions traditionally proposed, empiricism and rationalism:

Either one reassured oneself that the world would be gained by the direct and immediate evidence of the senses (empiricism) or one insisted that the rationality of the creator or the harmony of mind and nature would guarantee the correspondence between the two orders of representations (rationalism).<sup>15</sup>

In knowledge, in short, whether empiricist or rationalist, "mind had to 'mirror' nature."<sup>16</sup> By critiquing the referential/expressivist model of language which subtends both the empiricist and the rationalist model of knowledge, that is, by dispelling the notion that the sign simply labels reality or expresses the self, Saussure and his heirs have undermined the assumption that there is such a thing as absolute truth or objective knowledge.<sup>17</sup> In other words, given the central role played by language in our apprehension of exteriority, it is difficult, in the wake of the Saussurean critique of traditional models

of signification, to be certain once and for all that the contents of our consciousness correspond accurately to that which lies external to consciousness in the real world. From this point of view, at best all we can admit to is the subjective or perspectival nature of all knowledge.

Over the next few pages, in an effort to demonstrate the compelling nature of their arguments as well as, thus, the inadvisability of ignoring them, I will summarise the main criticisms advanced by Postmodernist historiographers and try to trace these in turn to the theories of signification put forward by the major Postmodernist philosophers of language.

### **The Syntagmatic Axis**

It is the American historiographer/historian Hayden White who has done the most in recent times to popularise the view that the historical text is irredeemably literary in nature.<sup>18</sup> In his view, it is precisely because historians have long struggled to proclaim the scientific objectivity of the historical enterprise that there has been great reluctance to admit the manifestly literary nature of all historical narratives. These latter are, White argues, “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than . . . the sciences.”<sup>19</sup> From White’s point of view, any given historical text is merely a representation of the past and, as such, does not constitute objective access to *the* reality of that past. In Munslow’s useful summary, the past is “not discovered, but is produced in and through language-- as a text” as a result of which “there can be no reality shorn of presupposition, nor the interpretative shaping of historians.”<sup>20</sup> In a nutshell, White’s thesis is that, contrary to popular misconceptions, historical narratives do not offer straightforward mimetic portraits of the past. Rather, through the particular modes of what White terms 1) emplotment, 2) logical argumentation, 3) ideological implication, and 4) tropological prefiguration to be found in every historical narrative, historical texts

constitute specific interpretations of the past, none of which can be ontologically privileged. (A given historiographical style is the function of a particular combination of these four modes which may, in a single historian, coexist in relative harmony or exist in a relationship that might be described as one of dialectical tension.)

White foregrounds, firstly, the role played by plot in historical narratives. Arguing that there is no particular order immanent in events which have historically transpired other than a simple chronology, he is of the view that it is the historian who retroactively imposes a particular order and, thus, signification on events. This is then taken (or, as the case might be, rejected) as the gospel truth of what occurred. As such, historical narratives are less faithful mirrors held up to the historical changes which social formations undergo than “metaphorical statements which suggest a relation of similitude between . . . [historical] events and processes and the story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings.”<sup>21</sup> White openly declares his indebtedness in this regard to Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* and the latter’s view that all forms of narratives are ultimately, in White’s useful summary, “sublimates of archetypal myth-structures.”<sup>22</sup> The fundamental meaning of all fictions for Frye, White points out, consists in “‘pre-generic plot-structures’” as a result of which “we understand *why* a particular story has ‘turned out’ as it has when we have identified the archetypal myth, or pre-generic plot structure, of which the story is an exemplification.”<sup>23</sup> In short, historical narratives “‘liken’ the events reported in them to some form with which we have already become familiar in our literary culture.”<sup>24</sup>

It was R. G. Collingwood, of course, who was one of the first to draw an analogy between the art of the historian and that of the storyteller. He suggested that history writing consisted in the

capacity of the historian, in White's words, to make a plausible story out of a "congeries of 'facts' which, in their unprocessed form, made no sense at all."<sup>25</sup> Collingwood was of the view that historians come to the historical 'evidence' before them with a sense of "the *possible* forms that different kinds of recognizably human situations *can* take."<sup>26</sup> White argues that what Collingwood failed to see, however, was that historical events do not in and of themselves necessarily constitute a particular kind of story nor presuppose a particular form. At the most, all they offer are "story *elements*" which the historian then rearranges in the way that s/he, consciously or unconsciously, sees fit and in a manner analogous to that of the literary writer.<sup>27</sup> In White's words, these elements are

*made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative description strategies, . . . in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or play.<sup>28</sup>

The proof of all this for White lies in the fact that the very same historical events can be differently 'emplotted' in order to produce varying and sometimes drastically different interpretations, each of which may be in perfect congruence with the evidence to hand and thus make perfect sense.

White possesses a neo-Kantian view of the historian's craft, contending that how a particular historical situation is configured by a historian is largely determined by the *a priori* forms (cause and effect, etc.) which the human mind arguably imposes upon external phenomena.<sup>29</sup> In other words, if historical narratives are less about events in isolation than about perceived relationships between these events, White is at pains to state that these relationships are not immanent in the events themselves for "they exist only in the mind of the historian reflecting on them."<sup>30</sup> White's point is that narrative is one of the most important sense-making structures by means of which humans the world over attempt to comprehend the nature of reality. Culturally-specific sense-making strategies can be

glimpsed in those variations of narrative form peculiar to a particular culture. Both the historian and his/her reader share these plot structures by virtue of their common participation in what Hans Robert Jauss elsewhere terms the ‘horizon of expectations’ by means of which successful communication of the historian’s message is possible.<sup>31</sup> In White’s words, the

historian shares with his audience *general* notions of the *forms* that significant human situations *must* take by virtue of his participation in the specific processes of sense-making which identify him as a member of one cultural endowment rather than another. . . . The reader, in the process of following the historian’s account of those events, gradually comes to realize that the story he is reading is of one kind rather than another: romance, tragedy, comedy, satire, epic, or what have you. And when he has perceived the class or type to which the story that he is reading belongs, he experiences the effect of having the events in the story explained to him. . . . The original strangeness . . . of the events is dispelled, and they take on a familiar aspect . . . in their function as the elements of a familiar kind of configuration. . . . They are familiarized . . . because he has been shown how the data conform to . . . a plot structure with which he is familiar as part of his cultural endowment.<sup>32</sup>

White puts all this another way in *Metahistory*: emplotment is the way by which a “sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind.”<sup>33</sup> An appreciation of the precise nature of the four archetypal narrative forms of Tragedy, Comedy, Romance and Satire to be found in European culture offers one important way of understanding the different kinds of “explanatory affects”<sup>34</sup> for which historians strive precisely because each such pre-generic plot-structure “has its implications for the cognitive operations by which the historian seeks to ‘explain’ what ‘was really happening.’”<sup>35</sup>

The point that White is trying to make is that any work of history ought to be viewed as something akin to an extended metaphor. As a necessarily symbolic structure, it does not merely represent or reproduce in verbal form the historical events it purports to describe. Rather, it

tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about the events with different emotional valences. The historical narrative does not *image* the

thing it indicates; it *calls to mind* images of the things it indicates, in the same way that a metaphor does.<sup>36</sup>

This is precisely also Roland Barthes's point in his classic essay "The Discourse of History." He argues that in historical narratives, the "facts related function . . . as core elements whose very succession has in itself an indexical value" because, at least in European civilisation, the "process of signification is always aimed at 'filling out' the meaning of history."<sup>37</sup> As a result, the historian is "not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers; that is to say, he organises them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series."<sup>38</sup> Even if the facts are collated in an anarchic fashion, he points out, "they still signify anarchy and to that extent conjure up a certain negative idea of human history."<sup>39</sup>

As important, for White, as the explanation by emplotment is the historian's mode of logical argumentation. In fact, the one necessarily supplements and impinges upon the other. White is of the view, to be precise, that the process by which historians explain the "form of the events which he has imposed upon them through . . . emplotment" is supplemented by the construction of a deductive argument which usually takes the form of a syllogism.<sup>40</sup> Its major premise usually takes the form of the assertion of "some putatively universal law of causal relationships" (e.g. Marx's Base/superstructure model), its minor premise the "boundary conditions within which the law is applied," and the conclusion an assertion in which the "events that actually occurred are deduced from the premises by logical necessity."<sup>41</sup> White identifies the four paradigms which logical argumentation takes as Formist, Organicist, Mechanistic, and Contextualist.<sup>42</sup>

White's point is that the historian necessarily emplots the events of history in a particular way at the same time that s/he necessarily characterises those events as "elements in a matrix of causal

relationships.”<sup>43</sup> To put this the other way around, the nature of a particular premiss (i.e. a specific notion of causality) logically produces a specific conclusion which in turn favours the deployment of one of the plot-structures adumbrated earlier as opposed to the others. For example, White argues, a historian may “‘explain’ what happened in the historical field by identifying the law (or laws) governing the set of events emplotted in the drama as a drama of Tragic import.”<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, s/he may “find the Tragic import of the story he has emplotted in his discovery of the ‘law’ which governs the sequence of articulation of the plot.”<sup>45</sup> Either way, the “moral implications”<sup>46</sup> of a given historical explanation derives from the relationship imposed by the historian on the events under consideration. This relationship is itself overdetermined by the choice of plot-structure in combination with the logical form taken by the argument.

According to White, the combination of a particular plot-structure (an essentially aesthetic gesture) with a particular mode of logical argumentation (a cognitive operation) necessarily has ‘ideological’ implications. This is because the “very claim . . . to have determined some kind of formal coherence” in the events of the past implies a commitment to a “particular *form* of knowledge” which in turn “predetermines the *kinds* of generalisations which one can make about the present world, . . . and the kinds of projects one can legitimately conceive for changing that present or maintaining it in its present form.”<sup>47</sup> Defining ideology as a “set of prescriptions for taking a position in the present world of social praxis and acting upon it (either to change the world or to maintain it in its present state)”<sup>48</sup> (rather than as a synonym, as in the classic Marxian account, for the socially-moulded nature of human consciousness deriving from the individual’s location in the class-structure), White postulates that there are four basic ideological stances taken by historians: Anarchism, Conservatism, Radicalism and Liberalism.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Paradigmatic Axis**

White's emphasis on the emplotment and argumentation of the historical text is centred for the most part on what Saussure would term the syntagmatic axis of the historical text. Saussure's argument is that any utterance means only because it operates on the basis of two axes simultaneously: the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. The former refers to the sequence of signs that comprise a given sentence and, by extension, the sequence of sentences which comprise a narrative. (As such, it involves questions of syntax or grammar.) The latter refers to the fact that each sign in a given sequence has a relationship with the other signs which comprise the larger sign-system of which they are part and beyond that with 'reality.' (Roman Jakobson calls these axes the *metonymic* and *metaphoric* axes respectively.<sup>50</sup>) White's focus, in sum, is on the syntagmatic development (or diegesis) of the historian's thesis by means of the literary device of plot and logical processes of argumentation.

Equally important, however, in the historical text is the mode of tropological prefiguration deployed. White stresses that even before the historian attempts to turn a chronological sequence of historical events into a narratologically and logically construed series, s/he first must perforce conceptualise the events themselves. (At the very least, this is a simultaneous process.) In other words, the historical text, like any utterance, consists not only in a syntagmatic axis but also in a paradigmatic axis, as a result of which questions concerning the precise nature of the relationship which exists between the sign, other signs and, ultimately, the referent (what White describes as the "fundamental problem of 'realistic' representation") come to the fore.<sup>51</sup> This problem centres around the difficulty involved in determining the congruence that exists between the "thought about the object to be represented" and the "words to be used in representing either the object or the thought

about the object."<sup>52</sup> With this in mind, I want to consider over the next few pages the Saussurean/Derridean critique of traditional theories of linguistic referentiality as well as the implications thereof for language-use in general and for Caribbean historiography in particular.

Saussure's major interest is in the general rules by which any sign-system functions. His focus is on what he terms *langue*, that is, the abstract system or the basic rules by virtue of which all signification occurs. He is less interested in *parole*, his term for concrete applications or instances of these rules (i.e. particular utterances or discourses). Saussure's departure from traditional linguistics is significant. He dismisses both expressive and referential theories of meaning, rejecting the view that "ready-made ideas exist before words" and arguing that language does not consist in a "list of words each corresponding to the thing that it names."<sup>53</sup> Firstly, according to Saussure, "our thought--apart from its expression in words--is only a shapeless and indistinct mass."<sup>54</sup> Language is indispensable if thinking is to occur as much as sounds are in and of themselves inherently meaningless. Thus, language is, in his celebrated formula, a "series of contiguous subdivisions marked off on both the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas . . . and the equally vague plane of sounds."<sup>55</sup>

Secondly, at the most obvious level, signs do not simply label a prior reality. If signs do not mean by referring to real objects, exactly how, then, do they mean? According to Saussure, the nature of the sign is more complex than the traditional formula Sign ----> Referent would seem to suggest. Each sign consists of a *signifier*, which he defines as the 'sound-image,' that is, the phonic component of the sign (e.g. the sound made by c-a-t), which is attached in an *arbitrary* way to a *signified* which is itself, importantly, a concept of or idea about reality rather than reality itself. He compares signifier and signified to two sides of the same coin, pointing out that it is impossible to say or even write a signifier such as c-a-t without also simultaneously considering what it signifies (cat) and vice versa.

By arbitrary, Saussure means that particular signifiers are attached to specific signifieds by convention, rather than necessity. The proof of this is the existence of different languages which attach different signifiers to the same objects. If there were some natural, immutable bond linking a particular signifier to a particular signified, then there would not be different languages.

The crucial question that arises from the foregoing is the following: if signs do not simply refer to reality and if there is no necessary or immutable bond between a particular signifier and a specific signified, how then do particular signifiers come to be attached to particular signifieds? Why does c-a-t designate our conception of that furry little animal out there who almost certainly exists apart from our apprehension of it? For Saussure, the answer is quite simple. Each sign (i.e the attachment of a particular signifier to a particular signified) is part of a *sign-system* which in the course of its historical development has dictated which signifiers are to be attached to specific signifieds. To put it simply, c-a-t came to be attached to cat because other combinations of sound (e.g. d-o-g or b-o-o-k) came to be attached to our conceptualisations of other furry animals or reading objects, etc. In other words, a particular sign means what it does because it is part of a sign-system based on *differences* (or, to be accurate, distinctions) between signs. The signifier c-a-t means cat because d-o-g means dog and so on.

Saussure's indispensable contention in this regard is that language operates systemically rather than referentially. It is a "system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous *presence* of others."<sup>56</sup> Just as phonemes are not "characterised by their own positive quality but simply by the fact that they are distinct,"<sup>57</sup> so concepts are "purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not."<sup>58</sup> The most important

consequence of this is that in "language there are only differences without positive terms," language having neither "ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system."<sup>59</sup> In other words, both phonically and conceptually, c-a-t denotes 'cat' because it is not c-a-**p** nor **b**-a-t, each of which is attached to another signified. Of course, it is precisely because the language system operates differentially that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary rather than necessary. What one understands by the signifier c-a-t could have been denoted by any combination of sounds. This particular combination is used to this particular end precisely because other combinations are utilised to other ends.

There are a number of important consequences of Saussure's theory of signification. Firstly, language does not 'express' pre-existent ideas. Our consciousness does not pre-exist and is, thus, not autonomous of language. Consciousness is, in fact, totally circumscribed by the predisposition towards binary oppositions common to all language. In other words, due to the differential nature of the sign system ('cat' is 'cat' because it is distinct from 'dog'), human beings have a predisposition towards conceptualising reality in terms of binary oppositions (white versus black; good versus evil; etc.).

Secondly, language signifies, rather than re-presents, reflects, labels, mirrors or corresponds to what we understand by reality. The Real does not determine the meaning of words. Rather, language-systems 'articulate' (in the French sense of this word--i.e. divide up) on the basis of binary oppositions the Real which is, of course, in and of itself a continuum that, as such, has no boundaries, borders or divisions prior to the conceptualisations which humans impose upon it. It is from this perspective that Jacques Lacan accordingly suggests that, bizarre as it may seem, it is the "world of

words that creates the world of things."<sup>60</sup> The important point that Saussure is trying to make is that language does not provide us with unmediated access to or a transparent window upon 'reality.' Rather, language shapes how we apprehend reality, particularly in terms of binary opposites. We can never 'know' the 'real' as it really is--which is not necessarily to say that reality does not exist.

In "The Discourse of History," Barthes brings out the relevance of the foregoing to (Caribbean) historiography. He argues that the paradox of historical texts consists in the way in which any

fact can only have a linguistic existence, as a term in a discourse, and yet it is exactly as if this existence were merely the 'copy,' purely and simply, of another existence situated in the extra-structural domain of the 'real.' . . . [T]he referent is aimed for as something external to the discourse, without it ever being possible to attain it outside this discourse. . . . [T]he referent is detached from the discourse, becomes external to it, its founding and governing principle. . . . [T]he discourse offers itself as *historia rerum gestarum*. But . . . it is the signified itself which is forced out and becomes confused with the referent; the referent enters into a direct relationship with the signifier, and the discourse, solely charged with expressing the real, believes itself authorised to dispense with the fundamental term in imaginary structures, which is the signified. As with any discourse which lays claim to 'realism,' historical discourse only admits to knowing a semantic schema with two terms, the referent and the signifier.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, "in 'objective' history, the 'real' is never more than an unformulated signified, sheltering behind the apparently all-powerful referent."<sup>62</sup>

Like Saussure, Derrida's interest is in *langue*, that is, in the abstract principles by which any language operates, rather than *parole* (or actual uses of *langue*). In "Différance," Derrida attempts merely to draw out the truly radical implications of Saussure's model of language which Saussure himself failed to realise.<sup>63</sup> He proposes, in a nut shell, that his own notion of *différance*, itself derived from Saussure's concept of 'différence,' more accurately accounts for the true nature of signification. For Derrida, Saussure was right to argue that *langue* operates in a systemic fashion, in other words,

that signifiers, signifieds and, thus, signs are defined not by their positive content (i.e., the fact that they refer to a real object) but negatively (i.e., by phonic and conceptual differences which issue from the system). Derrida's goal is to underscore, however, what he term the *metaphysics of presence* which informs, paradoxically, Saussure's notion of 'difference *without positive presence*.'

According to Derrida, the true implication of Saussure's model of the sign is that, given its location within the sign-system, to be precise, its dependency upon other signs in order to generate meaning, the sign is not autonomous, that is, it is not a self-contained unit. As a result, meaning can never be fully present in any given sign. Meaning is not the result simply of the attachment of a given signifier to a particular signified. Rather, as we have seen, the attachment of a particular signifier to a given signified to form a sign is determined by the sign's relationship to other signs in the sign-system. For this reason, in order to mean at all, signifiers ceaselessly and endlessly gesture towards the other signifiers of a particular sign-system from which they are differentiated. As a result of this, meaning is less contained within a given sign than it is dispersed or disseminated among the other signs.

Derrida asserts that the relationship which actually binds a sign-system together is, therefore, not one of pure difference or distinction but, rather, what he terms *différance*. Derrida spells this word in this way in order both to stress his indebtedness to Saussure's concept of 'différence' and to signal that his own use of the term adds something extra or supplementary to it. Saussure's term 'différence' is predicated solely upon a spatial metaphor for conceptualising the sign-system. Within his scheme of things, you might recall, the sign is located in a purely synchronic system. The term 'synchronic' (as opposed to 'diachronic') implies the stasis of the sign-system as a whole. In other words, the sign-system is conceived to exist at an artificially isolated moment of the historical

development of a particular language. To put all this another way, the sign is, in Saussure's schema, part of a system conceptualised solely in spatial, rather than temporal, terms. Each sign means what it does by virtue of the fact that it occupies a clearly different 'space' from its companions in that system.

Derrida's term 'différance' is designed to simultaneously denote both the spatial *displacement* and the temporal *deferral* which impedes clarity of signification (hence, the importance of Derrida's change in spelling). Derrida's point is that signifiers/phonemes, signifieds/concepts and, thus, signs always already bear within themselves the *trace* of the other excluded items in a way that undermines the ideal of self-sufficient plenitude which inheres in the very notion of the sign. Consequently, utilising Saussure's purely spatial metaphor for conceptualising the sign-system, Derrida contends that the meaning of each sign is 'displaced' precisely because the sign is not self-contained in its own autonomous space. To signify what it does, the sign is dependent upon the other signs from which it is supposed to be different.

However, Derrida also introduces a temporal element into the process of signification arguing that meaning is also always delayed or *deferred*. Utilising the metaphor of a 'chain' or, more accurately, a 'series' (rather than the 'spatial' one of a 'system') which he borrows from Lacan, he argues that the signification of a particular sign is endlessly deferred along a 'chain' or sequence of signifiers with no obvious endpoint.<sup>64</sup> Cat is differentiated from dog which is differentiated from refrigerator which is differentiated from ox, and so on *ad infinitum*. Each sign is conceived, within Derrida's schema, as taking its 'place' along a chain or, more accurately, as an event in a sequence in which it is linked both to the sign which precedes it (hence, Derrida speaks of "retentions") and that which follows (hence, "protentions").<sup>65</sup> As a result, he argues, "each so-called 'present' element

... is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element.”<sup>66</sup>

As a result of these two factors (displacement [what he calls ‘spacing’] and deferral [‘temporization’]), the *presence* of the referent itself, the thing-in-itself which the sign is supposed to name and for which the sign is supposed to be merely a verbal substitute, is continually displaced within the sign-system and endlessly deferred along the chain of signification. As Derrida points out, the

sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, ‘thing’ here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign.<sup>67</sup>

As a result of *différance*, the sign by its very nature thus implies that circulation which defers the "moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence," as Derrida puts it.<sup>68</sup> The dream of finding the so-called *transcendental signifier* (the last one in the chain which would have, as such, an unmediated relationship to the ‘Real’) and thus reaching the end of the endless chain of signification is just that: a mirage.

There are several important implications to Derrida’s view of language. One, for example, concerns the manner in which the binary oppositions to which our consciousness is predisposed (such as the familiar distinction between History and literature under consideration in the present essay) are themselves inherently prone to collapse or ‘deconstruction.’ However, perhaps the most important implication which concerns us here has to do with the referential function of language. If language operates purely systemically (rather than mimetically) as a result of which, accordingly, signifiers endlessly refer only to other signifiers, then language per se may in fact have very little to do with the

real world out there which it is supposed to merely label. Signification would seem to occur in an autonomous, purely linguistic realm, the nature of whose relationship to the 'Real' is undecidable (which is not necessarily to say, however, that the Real does not exist). As a result, there is no way of ascertaining whether the order of representations within consciousness (necessarily of a semiotic nature) is congruent with the order of material 'things' that would seem to exist external to consciousness (so-called 'reality'). It is precisely this, of course, which renders it so very difficult to decide once and for all upon the exact nature of this 'reality.'

Due to the problematic nature of the semiotic relationship which exists between mind and externality, what emerges as truly important in any form of text that purports to be 'realistic' is what White terms the "linguistic protocols" by means of which we make sense of the Real (or, as put earlier, the particular modes of tropological prefiguration deployed).<sup>69</sup> Given that what really matters is the relationships which signs share among themselves rather than with reality, the role played by the poesis or figuration which occurs along the paradigmatic axis in any text and which involves, in a nutshell, different ways of comparing one sign with another is just as important as the diegesis which occurs along the syntagmatic axis. That is, the process by which the observer constitutes the in and of itself neutral data of the empirical field under investigation into objects of mental comprehension (or 'facts') is a necessarily figurative or poetic (rather than mimetic) process of signification that involves linking signs in several different kinds of relationship to the other signs which comprise a given sign system (rather than to referents). This poesis, White argues, necessarily precedes (White speaks, hence, of '*pre*figuration') the diegetic process by which these facts are subsequently assembled into a particular order in an effort to mimic the temporal nature of human experience. As Derrida points out in "White Mythologies," figures of speech do not function as

merely some “imaginative or rhetorical ornament” which serves to embellish ideas.<sup>70</sup> They constitute the very core, rather, of our comprehension of the world as a result of which all ‘knowledge’ is coterminous with the precise character of the analogies envisaged between the data apprehended, a process that is necessarily semiotic in nature. These analogies, White points out, take the form of one or other of four basic or so-called master tropes, Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche and Irony, each of which have close affinities with one or other of the particular modes of argumentation identified earlier.<sup>71</sup>

What are the implications of all this for the (Caribbean) historian? Firstly, at the most obvious level, it should be clear from the foregoing that the only access which we may have to the past is necessarily textual. As White points out, historical texts may ultimately and *literally* refer only to other historical texts and not to the ‘things-in-themselves’ of the past which they purport merely to *re-present*: the

presumed concreteness and accessibility of historical milieux, these contexts of the texts that literary scholars study, are themselves products of the fictive capability of the historians who have studied those contexts. The historical documents are not less opaque than the texts studied by the literary critic. Nor is the world those documents figure more accessible. The one is no more ‘given’ than the other. In fact, the opaqueness of the world is, if anything, increased by the production of historical narratives. Each new text only adds to the number of possible texts that have to be interpreted if a full and accurate picture of a given historical milieu is to be faithfully drawn.<sup>72</sup>

The result is an agonising *mise-en-abyme* in which the past constantly recedes before us in all its presumed concreteness, for ever tantalisingly out of our reach.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, historical texts emerge as less mimetic or scientific than profoundly poetic. As White points out,

in our account of the historical world we are dependent, in ways perhaps that we are

not in the natural sciences, on the techniques of figurative language both for our *characterisation* of the objects of our narrative representations and for the *strategies* by which to constitute narrative accounts of the transformation of those objects in time.<sup>73</sup>

All historical narratives, he stresses, “*presuppose* figurative characterisations of the events they purport to represent and explain.”<sup>74</sup> The mode of employment deployed by a historian is “dictated” by the “dominant figurative mode of language . . . used to *describe* the elements of his account *prior* to his composition of a narrative.”<sup>75</sup> As White points out, the

*shape* of the *relationships* which will appear to be inherent in the objects inhabiting the field will in reality have been imposed on the field by the investigator in the very *act of identifying and describing* the objects that he finds there.<sup>76</sup>

The implication of this is that historians “*constitute* their subjects as possible objects of narrative representation by the very language they use to *describe* them.”<sup>77</sup> Hence, when analysing “putative ‘realistic’ representations of reality,” the indispensability of determining the “dominant poetic mode in which its discourse is cast”: in so doing, one “penetrates to that level of consciousness on which a world of experience is *constituted* prior to being analyzed.”<sup>78</sup>

## II

If language does not refer to reality in the straightforward and uncomplicated way that we have always assumed, does this mean that language is areferential? Is it possible to conceptualise language in a way which, while not ignoring the validity of Saussure’s and Derrida’s insights, would not completely sever the link between sign and referent, text and context? One way in which this link might be restored without resorting to contested mimetic and/or expressivist models of language may be provided by the Bakhtin Circle’s critique of the ahistorical character of Saussurean linguistics.<sup>79</sup> The Bakhtin Circle sought to combine the best insights of both Saussurean linguistics and Marxism,

arguing that Saussure's model of signification is severely compromised by its tendency to ignore the socio-historical context of the sign at the same time, however, that Marxist thought simply must come to terms with the compelling nature of Saussure's critique of traditional referential and expressive models of the sign. To put this another way, there is, to be sure, an undeniable relationship between the sign and, on the one hand, the real world which it is thought to reflect and, on the other, the mental ideas it is thought to express. However, after Saussure, it would be simply wrong to think of a sign as merely mirroring a referent or expressing an idea.

The Bakhtin Circle criticised Saussure's emphasis both on *langue* as opposed to *parole* and on *synchrony* (the language-system at any given moment of that history) as opposed to *diachrony* (or the history of the development of a language). The ahistoricism to which Saussure's schema is prone derives from the fact that Saussure locates the sign in an autonomous system in which signs derive their meaning almost entirely from their relationship to other signs rather than from their relationship to 'reality,' as in the conventional scheme of things. The Bakhtin Circle sought to restore the connection between the sign and its socio-historical context not by focussing on *what* the sign labels but by acknowledging the fact that it is always *in use* by someone. In other words, any language certainly does operate at any isolated moment of history (synchrony) on the basis of the abstract principles (*langue*) articulated by Saussure, but one must not ignore the history (*diachrony*) of its varying uses (*parole*). That is, it should never be forgotten that any sign has historically been utilised over the years by actual humans within concrete socio-historical contexts and towards necessarily varying ends. By focussing on *langue* to the exclusion of *parole*, Saussure ignored both language use and the actual diversity of speakers, the fact, that is, that everyone is necessarily a member of society at the same time that we are all simultaneously members of several sub-groups on

the basis not only of our class but also our gender and race.

The Bakhtin Circle's basic strategy in so arguing is to equate the signified (an idea about the referent rather than the referent itself) in Saussure's model of the sign with ideology. In short, for the Bakhtin Circle, the linguistic meaning of the sign is inextricably bound up with its ideological signification. At a purely linguistic level, the meaning of a given sign necessarily arises from its differentiation from the other signs which comprise the sign system. However, over and above the denotative meaning produced thereby, one must also take into account the fact that certain ideological connotations have accrued to the sign that are the product of the history of actual people's experiences in and thus interpretations of the real world. To put all this another way, between the signifier and the referent which it purports to denote inevitably intrude the various conceptualisations which humans have over the years imposed upon that referent. Such conceptualisations are not, however, the product of individuals's solipsistic whims and fancies precisely because no human consciousness is autonomous of its socio-historical context. The Bakhtin Circle has in mind in particular the Marxian account of the way in which economic status determines consciousness and as a result of which humans regurgitate, at least to some degree, the dominant ideology imposed by the ruling class of a given society upon the other less powerful classes.

Hence, the model of signification proposed by Barthes in "Myth Today." At the first purely linguistic level (that of denotation), the sign (e.g. 'rose') consists of a signifier (r-o-s-e) attached to the mental concept of a particular kind of flower (the signified). The sign 'rose' produced thereby functions in turn at a second level (that of connotation) as a signifier to which another signified (passion) has come by convention to be attached. The second sign produced thereby is the result of the process which Barthes terms "signification."<sup>80</sup> Roses are often *used* to "signify" someone's

passion. In and of itself, that is, a rose is just a rose but humans have come to attach a particular ideological signification to an inherently insignificant flower (they have become ““passionified roses”).<sup>81</sup>

For the Bakhtin Circle, however, signs do only retransmit the dominant ideology. Given that the same sign is necessarily used by all strata of society, the Bakhtin Circle argues that each class necessarily adds its own inflection to the commonly accepted signification of a particular sign. As a result, the meaning of a given sign is not the property solely of the ruling class. The ruling class is undoubtedly able to a large degree, because of its economic and political clout, to impose its own point of view upon the other classes and in this way legitimate its own socio-economic hegemony and political sway. But that is not the whole picture. Each class constitutes a semi-distinct social subgroup with its own, at least to some degree autonomous, ideological perspective on reality. Each class thus brings to the very same signs used by the ruling class an at least slightly different point of view.

What the Bakhtin Circle has in mind in all this is not some dialectical contest between different classes and their respective socio-linguistic world views which, from a traditional Marxist perspective, necessarily eventuates in their transcendence and the attainment one day of a single, unified national language and concomitant cohesive world view. Their view is, rather, that any given national language/world view is a radically unstable and divided, quasi-linguistic and quasi-ideological phenomenon, that is, one necessarily stratified or, as the Bakhtin Circle would put it, *heteroglot*. In other words, any national language/world view is necessarily pulled between centripetal and centrifugal forces, that is, between the desire for a single language representative of a unified ideological outlook, on the one hand, and the various *sociolects* that correspond to the different

ideological perspectives upon reality that are the property of the diverse classes which comprise that society, on the other. The reason for this is that language is *dialogic*, that is, each sign is *double-voiced* because there is a dialogue or agon of voices implicit in each sign. Each sign is an arena in which the class struggle is fought out but not resolved, a point of intersection, negotiation and conflict between the competing socio-linguistic points of view or fixes on reality that are representative of various social sub-groups. To put this another way, each sign is a *hybrid* construct in that it simultaneously bears the traces within itself of all the various uses to which it has been put by different social classes at various stages of its history.

(Although the major focus of the Bakhtin Circle is on the economic stratification of society, it ought to be easy to see why his model of language has proved so attractive to a wide range of Post-colonial and African American scholars. Thinkers like Homi Bhabha and Henry Louis Gates Jr. have succeeded in stretching the applicability of the Bakhtin Circle's work far beyond its class-centred mode of analysis in order to embrace other categories of social existence such as race, ethnicity and gender and, thus, other modalities of social division.<sup>82</sup>)

What are some of the implications of the dialogical model of the sign outlined above for the practice of (Caribbean) historians? In other words, in the wake of Bakhtin, how might the historian read the textual traces before him/her? Indeed, how should his/her historical narrative in turn be read?<sup>83</sup> Clearly, one crucial function performed by the dialogical model of the sign is to provide a resolution to the problematic nature of the relationship between text and con-text underscored by Saussurean linguistics, a dilemma that has threatened to undermine the entire historical enterprise, *without resorting to discredited mimetic notions*. However, this comes at a high price where historians fond of absolutes are concerned. The Bakhtinian schema in no way entertains the illusion

of absolute truth so dear to empiricists of any variety and which is subtended by mimetic models of language. This is one of the most obvious differences between the Bakhtin Circle's spin on Marxism and traditional accounts thereof. Explicit in the epistemological schema of the latter is the belief that although the ruling class does its best to disseminate distortions of the real conditions of production, it is possible through the dialectic of class conflict to transcend or step outside ideology and attain 'scientific knowledge,' the opposite of 'false consciousness,' as it were. From a linguistic point of view, just as ideology can be bypassed, so too can the signified be eliminated from the process of signification whereby an unmediated relationship between sign and referent is possible. From this point of view, ideally speaking, there would be no question of the Marxist historian imposing his own ideas about reality on the Real. All s/he would be doing is merely transcribing or reproducing the 'true' nature of reality. By contrast, the dialogical model of the sign affords no such comforting thoughts in that it contends, rather, that the signified can never be eliminated from the process of signification. All we have are concepts of reality rather than access to the Real per se. As such, any given language, rather than providing a neutral, transparent window on the 'true' nature of reality, is forever riven by and suspended between the competing socio-linguistic fixes on reality (i.e. the class-specific and other ideologies) which inhere in it.

In other words, a Bakhtinian view of language leads the (Caribbean) historian not back to the certitudes and ultimately dogmas which inform conventional historical materialist approaches to history but towards epistemological relativism (if not radical skepticism). A Bakhtinian perspective does not permit one to side, in Stanley Fish's words, with those who believe "in determinate meaning" and to whom, therefore, "disagreement can only be a theological error."<sup>84</sup> For those who believe in absolute determinacy, Fish points out, the truth is empirically ascertainable, lying "plainly

in view, available to any who has the eyes to see.”<sup>85</sup> In this scheme of things, those who do not see the ‘truth’ are thought to “perversely substitute their own meanings for the meanings that texts obviously bear.”<sup>86</sup> Arguing, by contrast, that it is what he calls ‘interpretive communities’ which “constitute the objects upon which its members . . . can then agree,” Fish contends that it is an illusion to believe that “facts exist in their own evident shape and that disagreements are to be resolved by referring the respective parties to the facts as they really are.”<sup>87</sup> Disagreements cannot be resolved by reference to the facts simply “because the facts emerge only in the context of some point of view” and as a result of which disagreements “must occur between those who hold (or are held by) different points of view.”<sup>88</sup> Consequently, what is at stake in a disagreement is the “right to specify what the facts can hereafter be said to be.”<sup>89</sup>

This is certainly White’s view also where historical explanations are concerned. These, he argues, are “bound to be based on different metahistorical presuppositions about the nature of the historical field, presuppositions that generate different conceptions of the *kind of explanations* that can be used in historiographical analysis.”<sup>90</sup> These differing explanatory frameworks in turn result in “different notions of the nature of historical reality.”<sup>91</sup> Arguing that there are “no extra-ideological grounds on which to arbitrate among the conflicting conceptions of the historical process and of historical knowledge appealed to by the different ideologies,” White contends that no single modality of historical explanation “is more ‘realistic’ than the others” for it is “precisely over the matter of what constitutes an adequate criterion of ‘realism’ that they disagree” in the first place.<sup>92</sup>

Another radical function performed by the dialogical model of the sign concerns the Bakhtin Circle’s spin on Saussure’s critique of expressivism. Saussure, you might recall, demonstrates that our ideas about reality do not originate with the individual but arise at a purely linguistic level from

the way in which the sign system of which they are part functions. The Bakhtin Circle, in turn, shows that this is not a purely linguistic phenomenon and that our ideas about reality are equally determined by the structure of the socio-historical context in which language is deployed. Moreover, the Bakhtin Circle contends that this socio-historical context is marked by a polyphony of voices and, thus, a plethora of points of view, rather than a unified consensus concerning the meaning of human experience. From this point of view, therefore, the Bakhtinian schema of language functions to undermine the view that texts can ever be monological, unified assertions of historical truth giving vent to a single perspective upon reality--their author's. Precisely because there is a dialogue of social voices implicit in each sign, so too is there inevitably a dialogical agon of voices implicit in each text. This is no less true of the historical than of other forms of text. As a result, neither the textual sources which the historian reads nor the historian's own texts can any longer be viewed as monological, centred, cohesive statements of factual certainty expressing a single and unified point of view. Like any other, historical texts ought to be viewed, rather, as texts implicitly populated by a cacophony of divergent voices and thus differing conceptualisations of the Real, none of which can claim ontological priority.

Last but not least, recognition of the dialogical nature of signification offers us a way of rethinking the nature of both the *synchronic* and the *diachronic* relationships thought to link historians, that is, to both their contemporaries and their predecessors. Given that each use of a sign (and thus each text) is a rejoinder to previous or other contemporary uses thereof as much as it also anticipates future responses, each historian may be said to be always already in the process of 'writing back,' sometimes deliberately, sometimes accidentally, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, to other historians with similar and/or different perspectives on the past. In short, no historical text is

an island unto itself precisely because, like any writer, historians inevitably ‘abrogate and appropriate’ the writings of both their predecessors and their contemporaries as a result of which there are threads of both continuity and discontinuity, relationships of both influence and divergence, acceptance and correction, linking historians and their respective endeavours.<sup>93</sup> From this point of view, in short, the relationships which historians share with each other, like those which bind creative writers, inevitably take the form of what Bakhtinians term ‘parody.’

### III

There are several crucial questions which present themselves to historians of the Caribbean in the light of the revisionary perspectives advanced in the preceding pages. Firstly, how many historians of the Caribbean would be bold enough to agree with Fish’s sentiment that disagreements “are not settled by the facts, but are the means by which the facts are settled”?<sup>94</sup> How many would be prepared to surrender the ontological privilege with which their narratives have long been imbued and to grant that what they offer may, like the earlier European record of the region which so much of the contemporary historiography of the region is devoted to setting straight, constitute merely another set of interpretations of the Caribbean past and not ‘hard fact’? Indeed, how many historians would go so far as to concede that the discipline of Caribbean history as a whole may very well constitute an ‘interpretive community’ or discursive practice that functions to dictate what can be taken as true about the region’s past?

How many historians of the Caribbean would be prepared to forfeit all claims of objectivity and honestly come to grips with the theoretical problematic, to be precise, the exact procedures of emplotment, argumentation and tropological prefiguration which inform their particular theses? How many would be prepared to concede what might be shown to be the European provenance of the

particular modes of emplotment, argumentation and prefiguration popular with historians of the region? How many would be willing to confront the possibility that the propensity, for example, to emplot regrettable episodes in our history in tragic terms or, correspondingly, to romanticise desirable ones, or the widespread tendency to deploy particular tropes (such as organicist metaphors) in order to conceptualise Caribbean phenomena (e.g. the Caribbean ‘self’) may not be inevitable or universal ways of thinking about the past or our selves? How many might be prepared to concede that these may in fact be quintessentially Eurocentric gestures, that is, the function not of a universal but of a culturally-specific mode of making sense of ‘things’ which we have come unthinkingly to regurgitate in our own intellectual processes even as we claim to be putting European imperialism behind us?<sup>95</sup> How many would be willing, if necessary, to dispense with the conclusions reached by means of older explanatory paradigms such as these in the wake of new and alternative paradigms? To how many fresh problematics might such a process of reevaluation give rise and what fresh insights into Caribbean society and history would be formulated in this way? What new and perhaps better avenues to the future would accordingly be conceived?

Moreover, what insights into the sense-making strategies of the most important practising historians of the region would an appreciation of their respective modes of emplotment, argumentation and prefiguration betray? Would such an examination reveal in the work of a given historian a relationship of harmony or tension between these different modes? How might their particular combination in turn be shown to entirely shape the historical knowledge produced by the historian in question and thus the nature of his/her contentions? How, accordingly, might historians of the region be synchronically classified relative to each other? Would such a taxonomy reveal academic dialogism rather than monologism, a salutary heteroglossia rather than a stultifying

uniformity of outlook? In other words, would it reveal the existence of a diversity of schools of historical thought or close consensus? What light would such a taxonomy shed on the predominant mode(s) of historical analysis practised in the region? What is more, what results would be yielded by the undertaking, in a manner analogous to literary history, to write a history of the historiography of the region? Could this any longer be predicated, in the wake of Saussure and company, upon the alleged realism of particular endeavours of the sort that concludes in the form ‘Dr. X is more *historically accurate* than Ms Y.’? Or would it necessarily have to be rethought on the essentially Bakhtinian basis that each historian inevitably ‘parodies,’ ‘writes back to,’ ‘creatively misreads’ or ‘Signifies upon’ the work of precursor historians?<sup>96</sup>

In short, to what reinterpretations might any or all of the foregoing lead concerning the ways in which we have traditionally made sense of the past of our region and how it might behoove us to rethink these strategies? How many historians of the Caribbean, for example, would concur with Ian Boxill’s audacious call for an interrogation of the dominant idea of progress which has held sway within Caribbean academe, one derived from the “dominance of the conflict model in our analyses of Caribbean reality,” especially the Marxian, that has entrenched itself as the “paradigmatic basis for social analysis”?<sup>97</sup> Given, as he puts it, that a “way of seeing is also a way of not seeing,” he asserts that it is precisely this paradigm which has prevented us from acknowledging the important “role of compromise and consensus in development” in the region, encouraged us to associate radical and progressive ideas with “people who were physically or verbally aggressive, confrontational and championed revolutionary political change,” and induced us to think of “incremental change” as “reactionary.” How many would agree with his notion of what he calls the “‘Peasants, Warriors and Kings’ or ‘PWK’ complex” as a result of which our “representations of ourselves . . . have tended

to be as romantic peasants, the fighting slave warriors or as in recent times, kings and queens from mother Africa”? How many would grant that we have yearned for “martyrs, heroic endings and mythical political characters” and, where we have not found them, “invented them”? How many would be willing to agree with him that such romantic yearnings are themselves arguably Eurocentric, inspired in us by a hunger for the “recognition which the Europeans have in their Julius Caesars, French revolutions and other mythical European histories”? Indeed, how many would go as far as he does in asserting that “despite the supposedly ‘Afrocentric’ nature of our work, we were not able to escape the European influence of our education and experiences” as a result of which we “were/are Africans without an Africa”?

#### IV

I want to close by leaving you with a thought which might, from the point of view of the conventional historian, appear somewhat heretical, if not downright blasphemous. In light of the foregoing, to wit, the deconstruction of the binary opposition between History and fiction, is it not conceivable that the study of literature/fiction may at the very least be a crucial component of the discipline of History when it comes to the question of re-presenting the past? I am thinking here less of quintessential ‘realist’ literature (notwithstanding Lukács’s claims on behalf of the historical novel or play) than of the challenges posed by Postmodernist fiction. The latter in particular, as Linda Hutcheon points out, by challenging our mimetic notions of representation and originality as well as the seamless joint between history (referent) and fiction (sign), underscores the indispensability of metaphor and narrative to our sense-making strategies and, thus, draws our attention to the process by which histories are *constructed*.<sup>98</sup> That is, postmodernist fiction inspires an ironic self-consciousness about the disjunction between the brute events of the past and the historical ‘facts’ we

make of them. Postmodernist fiction, in short, thematises the very process of turning events into ‘facts’ and “makes overt the processes of narrative representation” which is, according to White, the very essence of history writing.<sup>99</sup>

Consequently, if historians of the Caribbean want to ‘truly’ explore the past of our region, might they not profitably begin with a text such as Caryl Phillips’s *Cambridge* which, as self-conscious historiographical metafiction (to borrow Hutcheon’s tortuous tongue-twister), foregrounds the fictionality of all historical accounts of the West Indies in interrogating and even rewriting the European record of the West Indies?<sup>100</sup> In Evelyn O’Callaghan’s words, *Cambridge* “wears the mask of fiction” even as it “reveals its matrix in historical narratives, which are in turn unmasked by the text’s process and shown to be rather insidiously fictional in their claim to ‘the truth.’”<sup>101</sup> Perhaps, therefore, it is in regionally-produced fiction by recent writers that historians of the Caribbean must recommence their endeavour to ‘dis-cover’ the past by confronting first of all the strategies by which both earlier generations and contemporary historians have sought to make sense of it.

## ENDNOTES

1. For an overview of the so-called 'History and Postmodernism' debate, see Keith Jenkins, ed. *The Postmodern History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997).
2. For a discussion of the rise of historicism in the nineteenth century, see A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: a Study of the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960). See also Karl Popper *The Poverty of Historicism* (London and Kegan Paul, 1961).
3. For a discussion of the rise of historicism in the nineteenth century, see A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: a Study of the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960). See also Karl Popper *The Poverty of Historicism* (London and Kegan Paul, 1961).
4. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (London: Abacus, 1975).
5. Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997) 18.
6. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: OUP, 1956).
7. Munslow 22.
8. G. W. F. Hegel, "Philosophical History," *Theories of History: Readings from Classical and Contemporary Sources*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York: Free Press, 1959) 60-73; Karl Marx, "From the 'Preface' to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*," *Debating Texts: Readings in Twentieth-Century Literary Theory and Method*, ed. Rick Rylance (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987) 202-203 and "The German Ideology: Part I," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978) 146-200.
9. Munslow 23. For the diverse ways in which these deep structures have been variously conceptualised, see Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993).
10. Munslow 23. For overviews of the several perspectives from which historians write today see Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park: Pennsylvania UP, 1992) and J. Gardiner, ed., *What is History Today?* (London: Humanities Press International, 1988).
11. Louis Althusser, Part One, *Reading Capital* by Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar (London: New Left, 1970) 13-69. Althusser stresses here that within the empiricist scheme of things, knowledge is considered a "real part of the real object" (38) from which the perceiving subject, however, is separated by the "veil, the dross of impurities, of the inessential which steal the essential from us" (36). Accordingly, to know is to penetrate in order to abstract from the real object its essence, the possession of which is then called knowledge. Althusser suggests, however, that there are in fact two distinct objects, the real object, which exists independently of the process of knowing, as opposed to the object of knowledge. From this point of view, knowledge is less an act of

penetration than one of "production" (24). To be precise, "thought's labour on its raw material" (42) consists in the "transformation of intuition and representation into concepts" (42).

12. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford (Oxford: OUP, 1971); John Locke, *The Locke Reader: Selections from the Works of John Locke*, ed. John W. Yolton (Cambridge: CUP, 1977).

13. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1957); Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Boston: Beacon, 1962).

14. For examples and overviews of the contemporary critique of conventional modes of historiography, see the following: Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young, eds., *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987); Robert F. Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1995); Robert H. Canary, and Henry Kozicki, eds., *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978); Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991); Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985). See, too, the following essays by Louis O. Mink: "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978) 129-49; "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension," *New Literary History* 1 (1970): 541-58; "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding," *Philosophical Analysis and History*, ed. William C. Dray (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); and "Philosophical Analysis and Historical Understanding," *Review of Metaphysics* 21 (1968): 667-698.

15. Sheila Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: a Rejoinder to Jean-François Lyotard," *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990) 110.

16. Benhabib 110.

17. Ferdinand de Saussure, "From *Course in General Linguistics*," *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: U Of Florida P, 1986) 646-656.

18. Hayden White's principal works are *Metafiction: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973); *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985); and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987). See, too, his important summation of *Metafiction* "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact," *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: U of Florida P, 1986) 395-407.

19. White, "Literary Artefact" 396.

20. Munslow 26.

21. White, "Literary Artefact" 400.
22. White, "Literary Artefact" 396. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957).
23. White, "Literary Artefact" 396.
24. White, "Literary Artefact" 402.
25. White, "Literary Artefact" 397.
26. White, "Literary Artefact" 397.
27. White, "Literary Artefact" 397.
28. White, "Literary Artefact" 397.
29. Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason," *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1991) 3-51.
30. White, "Literary Artefact" 404.
31. Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982) 3-45. See, too, Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Historicity of Understanding," *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 1989) 256-292.
32. White, "Literary Artefact" 399.
33. White, *Metahistory* 7.
34. White, *Metahistory* 10.
35. White, *Metahistory* 11. White offers here useful definitions, derived from Frye for the most part, of the basic genres of narrative. The Romance is a "drama of self-identification symbolised by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it" (8). By contrast, Satire is the precise opposite of the Romance in that it is a "drama dominated by the apprehension that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master" (9).  
 In Comedy, "hope is held out for the temporary triumph of man over his world by the prospect of occasional *reconciliations* of the forces at play in the social and natural worlds" (9). As a result of these reconciliations, "society is represented as being purer, saner, and healthier" (9). By contrast, Tragedy revolves around a "tragic agon" (9) that results in the "fall of the protagonist and

the shaking of the world he inhabits” (9). This leads, however, to a “gain in consciousness for the spectators of the contest” (9): the reconciliations which occur at the end of tragedies are much more sombre than those which occur in Comedy: they are “more in the nature of resignations” (9) on the part of the participants and spectators alike to “the conditions under which they must labour in the world” (9).

Tragedy and Satire have in common a faith that “behind or within the welter of events” (11) can be discerned an “ongoing structure of relationships or an eternal return of the Same in the Different” (11). By contrast, Romance and Comedy stress the “emergence of new forces or conditions out of processes” (11) that only appear to be timeless.

36. White, “Literary Artefact” 402.

37. Roland Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1997) 120. See also his *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

38. Barthes, “Discourse” 120.

39. Barthes, “Discourse” 120.

40. White, *Metahistory* 11.

41. White, *Metahistory* 11.

42. In the Formist mode, White argues, the “task of historical explanation is to dispel the apprehension of those similarities that appear to be shared by all objects in the field” (14). Particularist in thrust, Formist historians such as Herder stress the “uniqueness of the different agents, agencies, and acts which make up the ‘events’ to be explained . . . not the ‘ground’ or ‘scene’ against which these entities arise” (14). (See J. G. Herder, “Ideas Towards a Philosophy of the History of Man,” *Theories of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner [New York: the Free Press, 1959] 35-49.)

By contrast, the Organicist historian such as Hegel is more integrative in thrust, i.e. governed by the desire to systematise, that is, to “see individual entities as components . . . which aggregate into wholes that are greater than, or qualitatively different from, the sum of their parts” (15) and/or the desire to teleologise, that is, to view individual entities as processes necessarily tending toward a particular end or goal.

Mechanistic historians such as Marx tend to be reductive in thrust in that their works are predicated upon the “search for causal laws that determines the outcome of processes discovered in the historical field” (17) and which “govern history in the same way that the laws of physics are presumed to govern nature” (17).

Contextualists such as Burckhardt strive to explain events by setting them “within the ‘context’ of their occurrence” (18), that is, by picking out the “‘threads’ that link the event” (18) to the “circumambient natural and social space within which the event occurred, and both backward in time, in order to determine the ‘origins’ of the event, and forward in time, in order to determine its

‘impact’ and ‘influence’ on subsequent events” (18). (See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore [London: Phaidon, 1960].)

43. White, *Metahistory* 12.

44. White, *Metahistory* 27.

45. White, *Metahistory* 27.

46. White, *Metahistory* 27.

47. White, *Metahistory* 21.

48. White, *Metahistory* 22.

49. These are differentiated on the basis of their respective attitudes towards the desirability and optimum pace of social change as well as the temporal location of the utopian ideal embraced. For further details on these classifications, see *Metahistory* 22-29.

50. Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances: The Metaphoric and the Metonymic Poles of Language," *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1987) 95-114.

51. White, *Metahistory* 33.

52. White, *Metahistory* 33.

53. Saussure 646.

54. Saussure 649.

55. Saussure 649.

56. Saussure 650 (my emphasis).

57. Saussure 652.

58. Saussure 651.

59. Saussure 653.

60. Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language," *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 65.

61. Barthes, "Discourse" 121-122. See in this regard Barthes's "The Reality Effect in Descriptions," *Realism*, ed. Lilian Furst (London: Longman, 1992) 135-141.

62. Barthes, "Discourse" 122.

63. Jacques Derrida, "Différance," *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: U of Florida P, 1986) 120-136.

64. Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: U of Florida P, 1986) 738-756.

65. Derrida 132.

66. Derrida 132.

67. Derrida 128.

68. Derrida 128.

69. White, "Literary Artefact" 404.

70. Jacques Derrida, "White Mythologies," *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 223.

71. White provides useful definitions of these four tropes in *Metahistory*. Metaphor (e.g. equating one's love with a rose) seeks to characterise phenomena in terms of their similarity to and difference from each other. It is an essentially 're-presentational' figure of speech because it attempts to assert similarities in the teeth of manifest differences. The modality of the relationship intimated here is that of object to object. (Simile is an obvious variant of metaphor.)

Metonymy connotes relationships of contiguity between phenomena (e.g. speaking of 'fifty sails' instead of the 'ships' upon which they rest or 'hands' when one intends the entire person to which it is joined at the wrist). This is an essentially reductive figure of speech in that it suggests that a particular object is somehow reducible to a particular part of itself without which it cannot function. For example, sails were once the sine qua non of maritime propulsion just as the hand is the very means of human labour. The modality of the relationship intimated here is that of cause to effect in that one object is in some sense reduced to a manifestation of another. In effect, as White points out, the world of phenomena is separated into two orders of being: agents and causes, on the one hand, and acts and effects, on the other.

Synecdoche, an important form of metonymy, is integrative in that the part of a thing is substituted for the whole of which it is part. By means of synecdoche, a given phenomenon can be characterised by means of a part used to symbolise some *quality* presumed inherent in the whole. The modality of relationship intimated here is that of the part to the whole as a result of which one is a microcosmic replication of the macrocosm. A good example of synecdoche is the phrase 'he is all

heart' which is not intended to reduce the human anatomy to the functions of the heart but to imply that the qualities associated with the heart are characteristic of the whole individual.

Irony is negational in that it attempts to characterise phenomena by negating on the figurative level what is positively affirmed on the literal level. Its basic strategy is catachresis (literally, misuse) in that it presupposes that the reader or auditor is capable recognising the absurdity of the analogy implied by the metaphor, metonymy or synecdoche used. Irony is, from this point of view, metatropological in that it is deployed self-consciously in order to underscore the possible misuse of figuration. It is radically self-critical, as White puts it, "with respect not only to a given characterisation of the world of experience but also to the very effort to capture adequately the truth of things in language" (*Metahistory*, 37). From this perspective, for example, the modality of consciousness evinced by Postmodernist critiques of realism (by, indeed, this very essay) is, evidently, an ironic one.

For further details on these so-called master tropes, see *Metahistory* 31-38.

72. White, "Literary Artefact" 401.

73. White, "Literary Artefact" 406.

74. White, "Literary Artefact" 404 (my emphasis).

75. White, "Literary Artefact" 404.

76. White, "Literary Artefact" 404.

77. White, "Literary Artefact" 404.

78. White, *Metahistory* 33.

79. The Bakhtin Circle, *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Arnold, 1994).

80. Barthes, "Myth Today," *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: HarperCollins-Paladin, 1973) 166.

81. Barthes, "Myth Today" 164.

82. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: a Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1988). For insights into Bhabha's 'abrogation and appropriation' of Bakhtinian thought, see Bart Moore-Gilbert *Postcolonial Theory* (London: Verso, 1997). For insights into Gates's 'abrogation and appropriation' of Bakhtinian thought, see Brad Bucknell "Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and the Theory of Signifyin(g)," *Ariel* 21 (1990): 65-83 and Dorothy J. Hale "Bakhtin in African American Literary Theory," *ELH* 61 (1994): 445-471.

83. My suggestions over the next few pages concerning how we should rethink the historical text are inspired by Bakhtin's *Discourse in the Novel*. See "From *Discourse in the Novel*," *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: U Of Florida P, 1986) 665-678. To glimpse the radical departure to which Bakhtin's model of the novel amounts, compare *Discourse in the Novel* with conventional Marxist views of realism and of the novel such as those expressed by the Hegelian Marxist Georg Lukács in "Art and Objective Truth," *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur D. Khan (New York: Universal Library, 1970) 25-60 and *The Historical Novel*. For an understanding of the theoretical problematic informing Lukács's model of the novel, see his *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin, 1971).

84. Stanley Fish, "What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?" *Is There A Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980) 338.

85. Fish 338.

86. Fish 338.

87. Fish 338.

88. Fish 338.

89. Fish 338.

90. White, *Metahistory* 13.

91. White, *Metahistory* 13.

92. White, *Metahistory* 26.

93. 'Writing back' and 'abrogation and appropriation' are terms popularised by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989) in order to connote the relationships which literary writers share with each other.

94. Fish 338.

95. For an exploration of the Eurocentrism inherent in the tropological modes which predominate in Caribbean culture, see my "Roots: a Genealogy of the 'Barbadian Personality,'" *The Empowering Impulse: the Nationalist Tradition of Barbados*, ed. Glenford D. Howe and Don Marshall (Kingston: the Press UWI, forthcoming) which is in many ways a companion piece to or practical illustration of many of the theoretical considerations outlined in the present essay.

96. These three terms might be considered, roughly speaking, synonyms for the process denoted by the Bakhtinian notion of 'parody.' 'Misreading' is a term that derives from Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) and *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford UP, 1975). 'Signifyin(g)' is a term utilised to similar effect by Gates in his *The Signifying Monkey*.

97. Ian Boxill "Crisis of an Intellectual Tradition," *Vistas* 6.2 (1999) (no pagination provided).

98. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989) and *The Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988).

99. Hutcheon, *Politics* 36.

100. Caryl Phillips, *Cambridge* (London: Picador, 1991).

101. Evelyn O'Callaghan, "Historical Fiction and Fictional History: Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 29.2 (1993): 34.