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Monsters in Motion: Tracing the Silences in John Gabriel Stedman and William Blake

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It is crucial, at this moment of global violence and danger, to think, read and write dangerously, across boundaries, disciplines and borders. Stories erased must be re-imagined, events mistranscribed must be remembered in all of their complexity, unspeakable pasts must be told and remembered as we, in our present, imagine and enact new connections in our teaching, our methods and our thinking. Postcolonial and subaltern theories have taught us to read the record against the grain for the traces, ghosts and memories of the stories silenced by the colonial and neocolonial ideologies that inform the way we tell our multiple pasts and presents. In the past ten or fifteen years, new models of scholarship have reimagined and challenged the geopolitical boundaries and historical narratives of the colonial relations between Africa, Europe, and the Americas.¹ Literary miscegenations, or deliberate acts of “disciplinary promiscuity” between Literature, History and Culture are powerful tools to re-imagine and re-member the ghosts that continue to haunt our recorded histories, our knowledge and our disciplinary boundaries. This new scholarship engages with questions of history, literary narrative and the processes of collective memory and forgetting which the inheritors of empire and colonialism in the Caribbean are especially aware.

Engaging with this line of thought, this article puts into dialogue theoretical and historical questions of literary and visual narrative and their function in the processes and events of history. Here I will conduct a close cultural and literary study of the ways in which cultural and literary images produced within and in relation to the late Eighteenth Century Caribbean reflect and re-tell the transatlantic crossings that would transform the world. The Caribbean is understood here as the dynamic site out of which the transatlantic processes of colonialism, empire, nation and subject-formation exploded. As such, in this piece, the Caribbean emerges as a pivotal site for literary and cultural studies that should engage in productive dialogue with the transatlantic literary and cultural studies of the Americas and Europe. In turning to the transatlantic Caribbean, I am concerned to consider and show some of the intricate and expansive cultural mechanisms by which certain stories are remembered and told; the process of historical, political and cultural selection that subjects certain bodies to erasure, dismemberment and re-membering. I use an interdisciplinary, intralingual, literary and historical method to address the cultural, literary and artistic products of the late Eighteenth Century as actors in the ideological and material processes of empire, colonization, and expansion that gave shape to the European Subject. As I understand them, colonial relations in the Caribbean were central to this formation.

In theories and the practice of remembering, current scholars and writers use the figure of the ghost, the trace, to speak of the processes of remembering or understanding what has been silenced. The literary figure through which I do this is the *monstrous*, which I identify as a tool of representation as well as a tool of analysis. A monstrous analysis seeks out traces, memories and hauntings pointing to the erasures, excisions and repressions through which these bodies and the stories attached to them continue to exist. The monstrous enables a multilingual, transatlantic, transcultural and transhistorical narrative that attempts to make stories of violence and suffering into stories in movement through languages, nations, histories and disciplines. As I trace the

trope of the monstrous, it crosses disciplinary, historical and national boundaries embracing multiple stories whose narratives echo and speak to one another. These stories show that the narratives of erasure in the gaps of colonial historiography are always also stories of resistance for Caribbean peoples and the inheritors of colonial violence.

The violence to the bodies at the expense of which empires and nationalisms are built takes shape within the rhetoric of the construction of nation and empire that we read in the literary canon. These literary canons, like the official histories and colonial documents that give shape to early nationalisms, are haunted by the stories they do not tell. The monstrous resides in but also exceeds the monsters that appear in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Coleridge's Christabel or Blake's omnipresent monster-like serpents: it stretches these symbols, looking through them to the surrounding political and ideological conflict. The moment of rhetorical monstrosity emerges through a set of *intangible exchanges* that inform the dynamic between viewer and text, text and context and viewer and context.

The monstrous reading illuminates the ways we read, write and use the knowledge we receive; the ways historical and literary narrative tell a story or document a series of events in a certain way. The paradigm of the monstrous urges us to revisit the following questions: Does the text—historical, literary or visual—tell the story to reaffirm or subvert it? Do we, when we use our knowledge to speak or write of the horrors of the legacies of slavery and colonization tell them in such a way that glorifies or demonizes the system we point at? And how is it that so often the distinction is so tenuous? These questions point to the fluidity and transmutability of the questions we deal with as we re-imagine, re-read, re-tell and re-write the human record. The contradictions of telling alternative histories are tied up with the violence of recording and remembering, where the telling and recording involves excisions, erasures and misconceptions of which we accuse the very records in and against which we read or write.

The monstrous moments this piece will outline can be described by the following elements: 1) the monster emerges, *shows itself*, within the normative structure that identifies, *sees*, it as monstrous. The *monstrous figure or event*, that which is identified to be (*like*) a *monster*, emerges against a specific background; what acquires monstrous contours in one cultural, political or historical moment will not necessarily do so in another 2) The normative structure against which the monstrous figure has emerged identifies, studies and explains the monster, thereby normalizing and compromising its disordering or dangerous potential 3) The delineation of the contours of a monster open up the possibility of imitation, mimicry, repetition and performance.

The figure that performs monstrosity may signify as dominant or subversive, depending on the background against which it emerges. The subversive, disordering element may be camouflaged, unseen, mistaken for something else. However, the distinction between what is actual and what is mistaken for something else does not necessarily matter in the context of discourse or politics, as we have recently seen. What does matter is the way the representation is

understood and the material consequences of that understanding. As I see it, the monstrous figure that holds the greatest *subversive or dangerous* potential over time combines performance, subservience and resistance and is not easily recognized as a monster by the dominant reading culture. This is because it appears to be subject to the laws of the surrounding cultural and political institutions. This figure passes unnoticed or in the guise of something else, something more familiar, of that which looks just long enough like the successfully subjected or normative body not to draw the attention of the oppressive eye, or the censor.

The monsters and violences narrated in recorded History and in the smaller stories of remembered pasts can serve different purposes. An event emerges as something horrific, monstrous and needing to be erased, as something sublime, powerful and needing to be reproduced and brought back, or as something entirely demystified. The monstrous reading is particularly useful in the analysis of stories of violence, movement and inscription: it captures the intimate relation between inscription, erasure and transatlantic and historical movement between the Americas and Europe in a particularly compelling way. It brings together the threat, violence and horror on one hand, and nostalgia and sublimity on the other as well as all the possible gradations. But the most dangerous—and promising—element of the monstrous is that at any moment it can assume the shape not of that which is most despised, but of that which is most desired.

I will now turn to the texts and images with which I will showcase my method. Here I will focus on a “historical” slave-figure called Neptune who, as John Gabriel Stedman has it, was tortured and broken on the rack for taking a sheep to feed himself and other slaves. Stedman witnesses and observes the torture closely and records it meticulously both in narrative and painting, alleging that Neptune’s bravery on the rack attests to “Negro Fortitude” and to the horrifying and *distasteful* violence that occurs in the colonial plantation system. This event travels in Stedman’s journal on the English military offensive against the maroon uprising in Surinam between 1774-79 back to London where it is published under the title of *Narrative of a 5-Years’ Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, 1774-1779*. It is first published in 1790, just after the successful slave uprising in Saint Domingue had drawn attention in the metropole. William Blake is hired by the publisher Joseph Johnson as one of the engravers for the publication. Blake completes at least thirteen engravings after Stedman’s painting, one of which is the representation of Neptune, a distinct figure appearing in the books that Blake would write and self-publish shortly after—*America, a Prophecy* (London: 1793), *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (London: 1793) and *Europe, a Prophecy* (London: 1794). This figure, “adopted” and transfigured by William Blake, *passes* from the context of the slave uprisings in Surinam into Blake’s representation of the American revolutions and the European revolutionary bourgeoisie. As he travels between revolutions, continents, texts, genres and authors, Neptune loses his blackness, becoming white, and also his gender, becoming female (See Figures N1, N2, A1, A2, V1a, V1b & V2 [in Appendix]). Through the transatlantic transformation and whitening that Neptune undergoes in the transference from Surinam to London, from a historical account

written by Stedman to the very politicized symbolic network of Blake, “Neptune” remains a haunting reminder of the violent excesses of colonial repression and of the revolutionary success of the uprisings in Saint Domingue.

The characters and images represented in these figures are as follows: from Stedman’s *Narrative* we see the Frontispiece (N1) and Neptune broken on the rack (N2); from Blake’s *America*, revolutionary Orc broken/bound (A1), and Orc rising (A2), from *Visions*, we have Oothoon rent (V1a & V1b) and Oothoon soaring (V2); from *Europe*, Orc fleeing in horror at the excesses of Revolution (E1). If one imagines the sequence of these images as film frames progressing from one gesture to the next, we would see a body (or a series of different bodies) moving from the position or condition of being broken to a position of rising power and soaring possibility, arms stretched out and face to the wind, then bending into a position or condition of blindness, or unwillingness to see the horrors of historical violence and revolution.

Witnessing/Inscribing Violence

The monstrous appears through an emergence that involves explicitly the act of “showing,” as in *monstrare*. Implicit in this act is a three way dynamic, where there is the subject who shows, the subject/object shown and the witness. The monstrous reading, then, takes into account these elements as well as the related element that describes to some extent the purpose of the act of showing, as in *de-monstrare*, where something is shown as an example, a demonstration. Implicit is the idea that what is being shown is somehow new, but also that it involves a process, a development out of something else. There is, therefore, the element of time-lapse, representation, reception and by extension, comprehension. Within the concept of demonstration there doesn’t seem to be room for disagreement, dissent or resistance from any of the three subjects involved, although if we look to the element of the monster we can see the potential for dissent, resistance or the exertion of power in the figure that draws fear or awe from the witness.

One of the ties between the images in the *Narrative* and those in Blake’s prophecies lies in the idea of the demonstration of something monstrous. Stedman’s Prologue promises to show and pass on to his readers his immediate experience of the expedition of Surinam and promises to bring them to life to such an extent that the descriptions will elicit exclamations of pity and sorrow from his female readers at the extent of “Poor Stedman’s” suffering in Surinam. Stedman’s narrative persona is represented in Blake’s engraving of a soldier on the Frontispiece of the *Narrative* (N1). According to this image and the accompanying text, Stedman presents himself as an unwilling witness and executioner of a *monstrous act* of violence: the brave but saddened soldier appears on the frontispiece—after successfully but unwillingly executing a maroon fighter—and looks out at the reader with an air of pain and contrition at the crime just committed. If the reader’s gaze is looking for the monstrosity that Stedman’s prologue promises

to *show*, it is not in the killer that the monstrosity rests as our gaze reaches the end of this particular interaction. Despite his monstrous act of violence, the soldier emerges as the heroic survivor of dangerous conditions and as a victim and survivor himself of unspeakable suffering and violence. In this particular moment of showing, (from the Latin, *monstrare*), witnessing and demonstrating, the monster, or that which is being perceived or represented as monstrous is treacherously fluid: somehow the monstrosity of the crime represented slips from the soldier's finger and drops onto the unresponding, gazeless body of the dead maroon, whose dangerous agency or monstrosity caused the soldier to become an unwilling and himself wounded killer. This drama of monstrous violence yields an hermeneutic interaction in which the victim we see, the soldier/Stedman and the readers are caught in a circle of experience, representation and witnessing in which violence, terror and power shift. The violence Stedman portrays is presented as central and necessary to the process of showing, witnessing, performing and writing that underlie his text, for it is the event that shocks or inspires fear and awe in the onlooker eliciting, as Stedman anticipates, sighs from his female audience. These sighs will become one of the expressions of transference, echo and transformation from Stedman's text to Blake's *Visions*, where Oothoona's suffering is echoed back across space and time by the Daughters of Albion.

The dynamic of showing, witnessing and demonstrating in which the monstrosity shifts, occurs at another level: we have the revolutionary activity and pacification of the maroons in Suriname between 1774 and 1779 observed and noted by Stedman (a soldier for the colonial system), whose journal is later refined and published in London (for the first time in 1790, later translated into many European languages) to "show" within the political context of the very large threat of another anti-colonial revolt led by slaves and maroons in Saint Domingue that maroons and slaves, if treated correctly (as per the abolitionists) could be pacified and subdued. At this stage of its transformations, the monstrous element already seems to reside, at least in the "purpose" of the demonstration, in the revolutionary bodies of the maroons: the publication of Stedman's story of the successful pacification of the maroons in Surinam is timed perfectly to remind the European plantation-holders that the revolution in Saint Domingue may not succeed. Again, the subject that is causing fear and awe is not the colonial plantation owner or soldier, but the resisting slave in Saint Domingue. The monstrosity of the European plantation owner (the *Narrative*'s readers in Europe, momentarily acknowledged in Stedman), who pays the soldiers to kill the slaves and maroons, is dropped from the symbolic pointing finger onto the revolutionary maroon and slaves. (N1)

The circle of showing works yet at another level: the "material" rises out of the political strife in the Caribbean, is represented by Stedman, a first-hand witness and mediator of the revolutionary events, and then by Blake, who further represents and mediates the material, and whose particular "showing" introduces a very different perspective. The whole line of production embraces the revolutionary material that is produced by and recorded in the Caribbean colonies but assembled, refined and sold for profit in Europe. This cycle of production, also a cycle of "showing," reenacts at a literary and theoretical level the economic and physical patterns of

extraction, production and profit that unfailingly favored the metropole while it did violence to the colony and its slaves. The repetition of the colonial violence at the level of literary representation becomes striking when we read Stedman's meticulous recording of this violence not only as a re-presentation but as a displaced re-enactment, where his text and images provide a scene of vicarious violence, "imported," framed and reproduced for the consumption of the London and larger European public to which he and Johnson directed the *Narrative*. The violence inherent in the textual representation occurs not only at the textual and graphic level (the violence is described and illustrated) but is also intimately tied into the process of production itself, so that violent repression of maroons—in which Stedman is not merely a witness—and the torture of slaves are elements necessary to the production of Stedman's piece.

Blake's contribution to the re-enactment of this violence is considerable, since of all the accompanying engravings, Blake illustrated at least thirteen, two of which represent the most violent acts against slaves to be recorded in the whole *Narrative*. It is important to explore Blake's investment in the cycle of violence, witnessing and representation, both within his role as engraver for Stedman's publication as well as in his role as poet and engraver of his own work, which is deeply informed by the social critique that permeates his works. It has been argued that Blake's engravings for the *Narrative* were already considerably different from the original sketches and paintings from which he worked. In his own work, Blake not only represents and comments on the primary violence in the colonies but also interprets Stedman's representations. Blake incorporated the material and images with which he worked for Stedman's publication into his own works *America*, *Europe* and *Visions*.

I propose that Blake's interpretive adaptations of Stedman's scenes of colonial violence offer images of what that violence of subjection could look like if it could be turned to the favor of the subjected and become a successful force of revolution. I pay close attention to the transformations and the contortions the subjected victim undergoes as it strives to access this revolutionary force. The prescription for successful revolution—and the accompanying implicit critique of colonial oppression—is deeply complicated by the element of the Sublime in these representations: because it enhances the aesthetic value in these expressions of colonial violence, and because as a concept it is firmly located within the ideological project of the Enlightenment, the Sublime seems to work against the social critique for which Blake and Stedman's texts were used.

Stedman's Vision

In the Prologue, Stedman encourages his female readers to "at intervals throw down the Book—& with a Sigh exclaim in the Language of Eugenious—Alas poor Stedman—" (Price & Price 11). Stedman's representation of violence, although compelling, is severely skewed, for although he attentively portrays the violence done by the "black Europeans" to the exploited

Negro and Indian slaves—in a framework that could be calling the readers either to witness the horror or, alternatively, to reinforce and partake of the acts of torture—the burden of this violence is transferred from the rebelling slaves onto the purportedly unwilling oppressor that represents himself as being prey to the colonial machinery of violence. Stedman thus presents himself as a metaphorical victim of violence and transfers the weight of the suffering from the maroon to himself, from the victim to the oppressor in a gesture that complicates the dynamics between oppressor and oppressed so that the oppressor becomes a victim himself, deprived of his own will and forced by the higher invisible powers and mechanisms of colonial oppression to impose terror.

Although Stedman professes to loathe the violence he depicts, this loathing is disavowed by the fascination with detail and the way that his narrative is punctuated and framed by acts of violence. Within Stedman's text, the engraving/image of the contorted Neptune speaks one dynamic of author, text/image and reader/witness while in Blake's own texts (published three and four years after) the tortured figures of Orc and Oothoon invoke quite different dynamics of text/image and reader/witness. Stedman's twenty-seventh chapter opens with the brief summary of the events to follow, among which are listed "Shoaking Execution and African Fortitude" (Price & Price 543). Throughout his narrative, Stedman has expressed a double-edged sympathy for the African slave in such a way that his detailed descriptions of torture conflict with the repeated protestations against terror, often having the effect of glorifying the power of the torturer over the tortured.

Stedman had rewritten his journals and given shape to his *Narrative* a full thirteen years after his voyage, during the debate in Europe on slavery. This debate was conducted in an atmosphere saturated with white masters' fear of black rebelling slaves, who, through Toussaint L'Ouverture, had succeeded in rebelling against and overthrowing white rule in Saint Domingue. With this context in mind, it is not difficult to hear an element of the colonizer's fear in Stedman's praise of the natives against whom he had striven in Surinam. But the context in which his narrative was published also points to the possibility that, following the political sympathies of Stedman, he proposed more humane treatment of slaves and wage-labor as a solution to slave uprisings for the good not of the slaves but very clearly for the good of the European economy which the Caribbean plantations supported. Stedman's successful travels to Surinam stand, through his published narrative, as documented evidence that the colonial machinery had been victorious over slave rebels and that there was no cause for alarm at the upheavals in the colonies: *perhaps the uprisings in the Caribbean would turn out to be nothing after all*.

It is through the image of this broken slave that Blake's text and image intersect with and diverge from Stedman's and where we see Stedman's image being transformed and reinterpreted by Blake. As I turn toward Blake's images and texts, I will discuss the ways in which Stedman's textual and graphic representations of the subversive figure were altered when filtered into Blake's own works. As it moves from Neptune to Orc and through to Oothoon, the abject takes

on differing degrees of voice, whose mode and expression is dependent upon the figure in which it is embodied. Blake's renderings tune in to the messages of resistance already inherent in Stedman's scaffold-like images. They enhance these inaudible strains (or sighs), thus making recognizable the subversive possibilities latent in the representation of Neptune.

Blake's texts represent the revolutionary upheavals from his own position within Europe, while the historical and factual material from which he draws is filtered through Stedman's vision of these upheavals from within Surinam. If we may consider these tortured figures as graphic descriptions of revolutions at the time, perhaps they can also be read as graphic prescriptions or models of what revolutionary force at the time could look like. If it is fair to say that the European metropole was imagining itself through violence on the body of the colonial other creating a blueprint model of the identity of metropole and Empire, then perhaps the representations of the colonial revolutions can be read as a set of blueprint models for subversions of the state of Empire. If we take the figure of Neptune—whose symbolic function defers the possibility of writing or speaking of his figure as anything but a metonymy—to be the figure on which the following representations build their force, it is necessary to examine how and with what consequences Orc and Oothoon might draw and differ from Neptune.

In what follows, I will highlight the element of the repetitive, transformative subversion that is possible to see in the movement of the unrecognized monstrous figure. Even though the monstrous figure of Neptune, the revolutionary slave may have been contained or exhausted in Stedman's text by the lesson of "pacification," the monstrous element returns to haunt the European imaginary through Blake's images. If the threat of upheaval in Surinam was successfully contained by Stedman's expedition, the subversive figure nevertheless is re-created and re-emerges in the shapes of Neptune, Orc and Oothoon. Embodied in these figures of literary and cultural production and reception, this figure travels between the Caribbean and Europe and enacts at the textual level the political and historical movement of revolutionary influence outlined in C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins*. Not only does the monster of revolution travel, but also it morphs, adapting its shape and method of resistance to the changing conditions of oppression.

Although the visual representation of Neptune in the *Narrative* freezes him in spatial and temporal immobility on the rack, the open eyes fixed in the direction of the spectator inscribe eloquent albeit silent resistance. The persistent gaze back in the direction of the horrified witness steps beyond submission. The spectator is not granted the spectacle of violence entirely free of discomfort, as in the frontispiece, for this time the victim gazes back. What is being "shown" here is very different. The two images (N1 & N2) diverge most sharply around the presence or absence of a gaze in the two black bodies: contrast this victim of colonial violence (N2, Neptune) with the victim on the Frontispiece of Stedman's *Narrative* (N1), where the wounded slave lies face up, with his back to the spectator, his eyes nowhere to be seen, his gaze not perceived.

Visually, what I believe to be the initial blueprint image of subversion, namely the prostrate, tortured figure is present in the images of the contorted yet [soon to be] successfully revolutionary Orc (A1) and the violated Oothoon (V1a, V1b, & V2) [link]. The element of repetition or echo that can be observed as the eye moves from one to another enhances and serves to strengthen the symbolic connection between these three figures. Orc and Oothoon adopt a recognizably similar crucified position within the contexts of their own particular moments of subversion. But here the echo involves a stark change: the image of the subjected, tortured black slave is whitened and incorporated into the explicitly revolutionary Orc, the figure of constant threat to the established law and institution of Blake's pantheon. The figure of the abject, originally conceived as Neptune for Stedman's *Narrative*, is first whitened as he becomes Orc and then gendered and marked as a violated female as it is incorporated into the ravished figure of Oothoon. The force and face of resistance mutates, acquires different political meaning, social resonance and even functions differently according to the different bodies of literature and culture it inhabits. Inscribed in the body of a black slave broken on the rack whose representation is framed in an engraving for an illustration, the force of revolution is removed from the lived experience of the reading subject and inhabits the comfortably distant realm of the imaginary. Closer to the imaginary of the reading imperial subject is Orc, whose embodiment of the force of revolution is allowed a fuller expression than when it is found in Neptune. In Oothoon, resistance is confined to the limits of gender and sexuality, her body castigated for sexual deviance from the norm. Despite Oothoon's forceful eloquence, she perhaps forever remains the body lost to Theotormon and stamped, raped and impregnated by Bromion. Only the distant and disembodied Daughters of Albion hear her and they can echo back her sighs and the sighs Stedman anticipates from his female readers.

Blake's Shifting Scaffold

The first plate of the Preludium to *America* presents an engraving showing four naked human bodies, one of which is stretched out in the same contorted position (A1)—only very slightly altered—as the black Neptune depicted in Stedman's *Narrative* (N2). Blake's transference of the figure is transparent, since the alteration is blatant: the color is changed, the position slightly altered and the shackles are almost erased. However, in Blake's own poem, the one who is on the rack or in the position of physical subjection is not black, but white. In the body of Blake's text, Orc is presented as the white male revolutionary force that must be kept chained if the colonial system of exploitation and production is to keep its balance. Orc speaks to the daughter of Urthona, the god who has him chained:

Dark Virgin; said the hairy youth. Thy father stern abhorrd;
 Rivets my tenfold chains while still on high my spirit soars
 Sometimes an eagle screaming in the sky, sometimes a lion
 Stalking upon the mountains. & sometimes a whale I lash

The raging fathomless abyss, anon a serpent folding
Around the pillars of Urthona (*America* plate 1; Dover 7)

Blake's second rendering (this time within the frame of his own poem) of the image originally described by Stedman (Neptune, N2) poses several problems, one of which I would like to comment upon as it appears in *America* in response to the current debates on slavery and gender in London at the time: When we see Blake take the figure who is initially a symbol of "Negro fortitude" against the cruelty of white masters and whiten the body that becomes a revolutionary symbol against his oppressive god-figure Urthona, we see the appropriation of the image of successfully broken revolution embodied in the steadfast slave represented by Stedman and its transformation: with the effacement of blackness comes the power to successfully revolt. Although Blake has been read as articulating the cause of abolitionists and anti-slavery views, his rendering of Orc deprives the related slave-figure his blackness and of any articulation of revolutionary potential as a black slave, while in Stedman's illustration the blackness was present.

Blake's images draw attention to the exchange of blackness for unbound revolutionary force (A2) is evident in Blake's images of black bodies, generally seen in poses of subjugation and disempowerment. However, in the second plate of *Europe*, (E1) the two black figures in the foreground are being strangled by the white figure while another white figure (perhaps Orc?) in the upper right background flees, its hands to its head in a gesture that echoes the theme of the hands raised in horror at the sight of the bound but soon-to-rise Orc in the prelude (A1). This is an image where the monstrous is again in motion, as the viewer wonders what it is that the figure fleeing is horrified at: is the horror caused by the sight of the violent struggle between the white and black bodies, where all three are violently contorted by the force and effort, or is it the horror at the conflict of interests that has driven these bodies to express violence against each other? Or is the horror expressed anticipating what will result from the struggle? But as the element of the force of revolution (which arises out of a predominantly black Caribbean colony from within the context of a slave-master confrontation) is folded into the historical material of the north American revolution, the blackness of this element is necessarily reinscribed and reconstructed through violence.

It is widely accepted in Blakean scholarship that Blake was writing as a radical in favor of abolitionism who, even in his engravings for Stedman's original drawings, attempted to endow the figures of tortured men and women slaves with some sort of agency, which he presumably perceived filtering through Stedman. However, in his own interpretation of the situation, it becomes clear that Blake's support for the cause of slaves is mediated and qualified, first by the effacement of the slave-figure's blackness in *America* and then in *Visions* by the collapse of the figures of oppressed slave and broken woman into the figure of Oothoon, the victim of Bromion's chastising act of rape. It is essential to note that Orc's revolutionary mobility results in his breaking the chains that bind him in order to physically assault the nameless Shadowy Female, an act echoing the rape of Oothoon. That these two acts of

aggression should be read in tandem is made evident in the text's insistence on the speech and voice that erupts from both Oothoon and the nameless Shadowy Female after their assaults. Whereas Orc is able to break out of his shackles, Oothoon and the nameless Shadowy female, like Neptune, both remain bound: Oothoon is represented in the cover plate as weighed down by chains of [social] enslavement in contrast to the image of her soaring above the female figure huddled on the shore by the sea. Although in the visual representation Oothoon soars, she is undeniably caught by the text and narrative in a repetitive cycle of signification from which she does not escape. Oothoon has only seemingly broken out of the shackles imposed on her by Bromion's patriarchal and imperialist rape (V2).

If Oothoon can be understood to symbolize the force of revolution whitened and gendered as female, her ability to articulate subversive desire and movement is conditioned by the explicitly sexual violence that appears to be prompted by her identity as a woman. It is almost as if the price of articulating and voicing resistance is a violent inscription of that revolt on the female body, as in Bromion's "writing" of Urizenic (patriarchal) law through the chastising rape and "stamping" of the female transgressive body. In the narrative text of *Europe*, the Shadowy Female perceives Orc's revolutionary agency as far-reaching, uncontested and not tied to his gender in any way that humiliates or causes hubris to him—as it does to Oothoon—but only in a way that reaffirms the revolutionary force. Oothoon's revolutionary act is tied explicitly and violently to her gender so that the moment she steps out of her socially demarcated heterosexual and monogamous bounds she is chastised by Bromion in a way that specifically reasserts her gender and her role, forcing her—by branding her with the role of "harlot" and a presumed pregnancy—into the normative heterosexual female role. But if Oothoon's revolutionary voice is frozen and silenced within the text of Blake, the *transhistorical echoes* of her *sighs* and critical readings of the workings of power, and resistance and oppression within culture and institution can in turn echo, "show" and remember other words of resistance throughout history and literature.

Here, I come back to thinking dangerously, movement across boundaries and the monstrous. I consider cultural and literary sites where one can see the violent processes—both physical and discursive—that are invested in the articulation and establishment of the dominant structures supporting the European project of imperial expansion and colonial exploitation. The political, mercantile and cultural transformations of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries eventually led to the establishment of Britain as the hegemonic metropole of imperial exploitation and expansion. The historical advantage of hind-sight allows us now to locate the period leading up to the establishment of uncontested British hegemony as a space rife with possibilities and instances that may show us and give us the tools to imagine other ways to resist state and global violence. We now understand hegemony as the process of domination and incorporation, where the dominant structure constantly grapples with the constantly burgeoning pressures and ruptures coming from contending ideologies and structures. I hope that the exploration of these processes in the Eighteenth Century cultural and literary images, where we

have seen Orc, Neptune and Oothoon grappling with the structures of society and ideology that build and enforce the violence of empire, normativity and hegemony has suggested new angles from which to consider the ways that subjectivities continue to be articulated through processes of physical and discursive violence, erasure and forgetting.

I will close with a look at our global present through a look back at *Europe* Plate 2 (E1): We see one white figure grappling with two black figures, all three of them equally contorted, expressive of pain and suffering. The white figure in the upper right hand corner, seeing/being shown this monstrous violence reacts with horror at the violent encounter, hiding and fleeing from it rather than engaging in it to understand it. As readers and writers of histories of violence we must grapple, ourselves, with the difficulties of looking at and showing the histories and stories that elicit reactions of horror and blindness. Rather, we must attempt to turn that final gesture of fleeing to one of looking, of showing and writing the stories we have been taught not to show, look at or read. Our present global moment attests to the need for new modes of understanding and reading the structures, stories and paradigms that are presented to us. Perhaps, if we integrate another kind of showing, reading and writing into our classrooms we may begin to build new modes of understanding and engaging with the silences and violences we live. Finally, as we look back at this image of Blake's *Europe*, we should be aware that we are in fact looking back to the Caribbean as the historical, cultural and literary site of production from which the post-feudal Europe effectively arose. To read these images housed in institutions ruled by Western capital is to attempt to understand more fully the pivotal role of the peripheral stories of the Caribbean and to place the Caribbean at a central point in the study of the literatures and cultures of Europe and the Americas.

Notes

¹Notably, Joseph Roach and Paul Gilroy, with their conceptions of the “Circum-Atlantic” and the “Black Atlantic,” Michel Rolph-Trouillot in Caribbean historiography, Avery Gordon in sociology and Jennifer DeVere Brody in African American Studies have opened up powerful tools with which to mine the intersections of the [his]tories against which we read and write.

Appendix

A1

Plate 3 from William Blake's "America: A Prophecy" copy M. Used with permission of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection B1992.8.2(3)

A2

Plate 12 from William Blake's "America: A Prophecy" copy M. Used with permission of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection B1992.8.2(12)

E1

Plate 4 copy B from Blake's "Europe: A Prophecy" (Sp Coll RX 132). Used with permission of Special Collections Department, Glasgow University Library.

N1

The Frontispiece from Stedman's *Narrative* (N1). Courtesy of Richard and Sally Price.

N2

The image of Neptune being broken on the rack from Stedman's *Narrative* (N2). Courtesy of Richard and Sally Price.

V1a

Plate 4 of "Visions" copy J, William Blake Archive, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2005 the William Blake Archive (65C5CD). Used with permission.

V1b

Plate 6 of "Visions" copy J, William Blake Archive, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2005 the William Blake Archive (65C5CE). Used with permission.

V2

Plate 11 of "Visions" copy J, William Blake Archive, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2005 the William Blake Archive (65C5C). Used with permission.

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