

**“GREAT HOUSE RULES, CHATTEL HOUSE BLUES’:
NARRATIVE, SPACE AND THE ‘INTERPRETATION’ OF BARBADIAN ‘HISTORY’
IN JUNE HENFREY’S COMING HOME, AND OTHER STORIES”**

Andrew Armstrong

If History expresses a people’s growth toward liberty . . . then art and literature . . . are its flowering.
(Laura Doyle, Freedom’s Empire)

Women writers are acutely aware of the negative, and even neurotic, consequences of powerlessness. It should then come as no surprise that the strength of their contribution to Caribbean literature lies in their capacity to interrogate and demystify systems of total explanation. (J. Michael Dash, The Other America)

In his book Great House Rules: Landless Emancipation and Workers’ Protest in Barbados, Hilary Beckles states that the text was written as part of a trilogy to chronicle the journey of the sub-tribe of Africans in Barbados (xi): a “trilogy that speaks to the journey of these tortured souls in the struggle for liberty, justice and redemption” (xii). He continues: “it sets out the paradigm of the landless emancipation experienced by Blacks and their renewed struggles for rights, respect, and recognition” (xiii). Beckles’s mandate, as historian in this context is clear – namely, an urgent discourse “that begins with the search of the self for clarity on issues of identity and ends with the politics of everyday life” (xi). In the companion text, Chattel House Blues: Making a Democracy in Barbados from Clement Payne to Owen Arthur, he concludes by making a call to the “post nationalist public intellectual” in the search for relevance to “break free of the 1960s discourse and imagine 2050 as if it were now” (199) – perhaps echoing and reformulating Toni Morrison’s now famous dictum in Beloved that “history is now” (247). Between the beginning of Great House Rules and the ending of Chattel House Blues then, Beckles chronicles and discusses the history of the people of Barbados from their early post-slavery struggles for land, rights and justice to their late twentieth century movements for nation rights, democracy and global enfranchisement in what he calls a postmodern, post-nationalist world. His final call to “break free of the 1960s discourse” not only embraces the idea of new critical thinking on issues related to freedom, justice and citizenship in envisioning a course for Barbados and the Caribbean within a hostile global arena, but also works in the process of helping to repossess the good past, articulating the present and fashioning futures. His is also a call for a new creative and imaginative space in which to do this.

Both books, then, work as what E. A. Markham in another context describes as “indictments of the Great House” (xxxvii), especially when we recall Beckles’s own views that “it was the rule of the Great House that subverted the promise of. . . . Emancipation [and] determined the terms under which the majority of Blacks would seek to reconstruct their lives under the banner of freedom foisted without liberties” (xiii). Thus, Beckles construes Great House Rules as “a narration of Blacks’ preparation for persistent resistance and civil war as the only means to effectively break the rule of the Great House and establish preconditions for genuine Emancipation” (xiii). Beckles’s narrative trajectory moves sequentially from 1838 to 2000 in his critical and, at times, self-critical reading and re-writing of this important period in Barbadian history. The ‘story’ told here is not a singularly emplotted one, but one that shows various plots, sub-plots and linked stories that often project beyond the stated period. In addition, Beckles’ texts show that “no given set of casually recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story” (White 84). While he writes of the injustices of the Great House, he also chronicles and discusses the great struggles of the ‘sub-tribe’ for freedom. In fact, it may be argued that if there is an overriding narrative in these histories, it is the narrative of freedom through resistance and struggle. In this narrative, the Great House rules are resisted by the ‘blues’ or the mode of resistance of the chattel house. This

is the 'story' of how the 'nigger yard' resisted the Great House to secure the rights, respect and recognition mentioned earlier.

Finally, in this conceptual framework, it is useful to note the context in which Great House Rules (and perhaps Chattel House Blues) was conceived; as Beckles notes, "within the context of . . . participation in the public discourse on political democracy and economic injustice in Barbados during the late 1980s and 1990s. The cause of popular economic enfranchisement in the country invoked the need for historical readings of the economic environment" (ix). As Beckles notes, it was both a "political circumstance" (ix) and an "academic challenge" (ix) which proved to be potent "motivational sources" (ix) for the work that went into his research and writing. There was at that time a need for an engagement not only with the history (the past events) of slavery, emancipation and the struggle for rights, but also with historiography, the writing and philosophy of history – an engagement with sources and interpretations, with narrative and time consciousness. Caribbean literature shares similar concerns with freedom, history, time and narrative. Hence, the purpose here was rehabilitative and transcendent. This follows what David Scott, commenting on C. L. R. James's The Black Jacobins, calls a "romantic" (63) mode and trajectory – the redemption narrative, from fallenness to redemption. Central to this plot are the stories of the two houses, the 'Great House' and the 'chattel house.' Beckles' model here is both narrativist (plot centred) and discursive (analytical and revisionist); the historian is both interpreter and analyst. In the latter role, we see the historian as both explaining and understanding the 'facts' through connecting the past to a specific teleology: here, the movement from landless emancipation to economic enfranchisement where key characters such as London Bourne, General Green, Colonel Baird, Samuel Jackman Prescod, Charles Duncan O'Neale, Chrissy Brathwaite, Clement Payne, Grantley Adams, Errol Barrow and Owen Arthur, to name some, play significant roles in the interweaving plots (thus demonstrating a wide transhistorical vision). Quite rightly, Beckles' histories may be read as an ideological indictment not only of the Great House but also of the colonial politics of the ruling classes. This indictment is further strengthened when we recall Michael Craton's view that Barbados remained even down to the late twentieth century, the "salient relic of the planters' world of the old British Empire . . . the longest lived of the English sugar colonies, the one with the earliest and most complete sugar monoculture and the most homogeneous class of planters" (Craton 360).

Beckles's writing used here, thus provides a useful theoretical prism through which to 'read' and 'decode' June Henfrey's transhistorical vision in the collection Coming Home and other stories. It provides ways to read her routing of the past through a specific teleology connected to women's struggles for rights and recognition; to critically assess her 'romantic' mode in recounting the past; and to critically evaluate her revisionist strategies in the development of her plots. As a literary critic, I wish to consider Beckles's call for new creative and imaginative space especially as it calls on younger intellectuals to rise above the residual ideas of their elders and ask the questions: What role can creative literature play in this? What is the role of literary critics and writers (as public intellectuals) in all this? I begin by affirming that my engagement with these historical stories, while acknowledging what Hayden White calls the narrativisation of history, acknowledges the difference between the historical text and fictional narratives based on a particular history or histories of ideas. History and historical fiction are not the same thing, although they both use the processes of narrativisation. The contrast between history and fiction has long rested on their specific marks, namely "the claim to truth on the side of history and the 'voluntary suspension of

disbelief' on that of fiction" (Ricoeur 242). And, following Paul Ricoeur here, I must state that the question of narrativity in both history and fiction tracks a movement "along the way from representation to re-presentation" with all the necessary problems "having to do . . . with the structure of the act of configuration" (247). To conclude a contentious and difficult issue here in a few lines, one may say that the historian 're-presents' through narrative and analysis from a 'mine' of facts and documents, thus 'making history,' while the fiction writer of a particular historical event or personality 'represents' historical knowledge subjected "to an unending process of revisions" (Ricoeur 234), of which one may argue that the fictional 'interpretation' is one of them. Thus, we may read Henfrey's short stories as fictional interpretations of aspects of Barbadian history. But we may also read them, according to the second epigraph above, as interrogating and demystifying systems of total explanation found in historical representation. Furthermore, we may read Henfrey's stories in the context of larger national (even transnational) structures of events, ideas and ideologies. Thus a story like "Love Trouble" cannot be read simply as a love story between a young black woman and her white lover, but rather as part of women's struggle for rights, recognition and freedom within the oppressive world of the "Hundred Year war against Great House Rules" (Great House xvi).

To leave off this matter and return to Beckles' philosophy of history, he articulates a trajectory of freedom, associated with the legacy of slavery, around issues of land / landlessness, rights, property, citizenship and nation building in his "indictment of the Great House" (Markham xxxvii). In these texts, as elsewhere in his other histories, Beckles views the past "as both a space of experience and a conceptual framework or period concept" (Baucom 114). From the great house rules through the chattel house blues, the histories chronicle and interrogate the difficult work of freedom and historiography through the building of a narrative "architexture (structure and texture) of the text" (Gretlund 151) that reveals the many layers of historical re-presentation. And it is by means of this term, 'architexture,' that I identify in June Henfrey's Coming Home, and Other Stories sociopolitical subtexts that speak to various layers of the representation of women's involvement in Barbadian history and with the Barbadian landscape. In fact, I argue that there is an important subtext in these short stories that is pre-occupied with 're-telling' Barbadian history (Gretlund 151). I argue that Henfrey constructs architectural / architextual spaces within and through which her female protagonists articulate their concerns with freedom, place, belonging and authority. Henfrey's stories are deeply concerned with slavery and its many legacies in Barbados, especially the impact on women. In fact, in this collection, the ideological indictment mentioned above intersects with issues of gender and class. These are not simply stories of struggle but, more particularly, (with the exception of "The Cane Cutter") of women's struggle for recognition and rights, a concern that has consistently gained Beckles's attention in his writing.¹ I am therefore concerned with the ways in which Henfrey's stories may be seen as a fictionalisation or a fictional interpretation of some aspects of Barbadian history. Additionally, I am of the view, as is Simon Gikandi, that women writers have put some distance between their own concerns and the male focus on the modern state and search for patrimony; they have eschewed patriarchal origins and male national identities, in other words, a revision of male

¹ See Beckles' Natural Rebels: a Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados, Afro-Caribbean Women and Resistance to Slavery in Barbados and Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society as evidence of this.

projects of decolonization and contestations over power. Henfrey is thus engaged not only in a retelling or recovery of women's history, but also in telling history's other side, as Jean Rhys's protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea* pointed out in words that reverberate throughout Caribbean women's writing: "there is always the other side" (106) of the story. And Stewart Brown, in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories*, searching for a link between Caribbean women writers identifies an "interest in exploring the spaces in the prevailing versions of history, domestic as well as 'national,' by giving female characters opportunity to speak and so drawing attention to the partial character of all storytelling – oral or written, academic history, or science fiction" (xxix). This statement is demonstrated in Henfrey's stories in this collection, particularly in the plantation stories "Love Trouble," "The Gully" and "Freedom Come." In the latter, the spaces left vacant in Busa's narrative are explored and filled in by Nanny's voice and perspective. In this study, therefore, I am, firstly, invoking the title of Beckles's histories as both a framing device and a spectral textuality for my discussion and, secondly, aspiring to show how a work of fiction may not only narrate the 'now' of that which is stated in the historical text or, as Toni Morrison puts it, to show that "all of it is now, it is always now" (210), but also, perhaps self-reflexively, serve as "a way of coming to terms with problems in modern history itself" (LaCapra 116). Beckles's texts then, provide a useful point of entry for my discussion here, especially as I attempt to discuss the many ways that the great house rules, the logarchy of the great house, enter the chattel house in the authority and behaviour of men, and the ways that the female protagonists and characters contest this.

Caribbean short story writers write stories that encode a powerful literary, historical, aesthetic and cultural reality. In Barbadian Henfrey's case, the stories encode a trajectory or itinerary from slavery to late twentieth century Barbados in the thematisation of the struggles of women against the norms of patriarchy. Here, the themes and the transhistorical vision 'come home' in the final story "Coming Home" in independent Barbados. Hilda, in a sense, symbolizes, even figures, all the female protagonists that have preceded her – Sarah, Nanny, Quashebah and Eva Simmons. In all six of Henfrey's stories, we see the negotiation of time through memory and dream. Here, I especially want to focus on "Love Trouble," "The Gully" and "Freedom Come." In Henfrey's collection, threads from the narrative of slavery work as a haunting (inter)text throughout the many voices in the stories; especially in "Love Trouble," "The Cane Cutter," "Freedom Come" and "The Gully", forming a sort of spectre of the black Atlantic. As E. A. Markham points out in his introduction to *The Penguin Anthology of Caribbean Short Stories*, "[t]hree of the six stories are set in the time of slavery, in and around the Great House, and there is something inspirational about her women characters striving for freedom. The work straddles sociological research and fiction" (xxviii). These palimpsestual narratives then work not only as representations of trans-Atlantic, middle passage plots, but also as narratives deeply concerned with freedom, the re-possession of the self and time consciousness. In Henfrey's collection, the stories are framed within the idea of home, symbolized by the Barbadian landscape, which acts as both land of exile / estrangement and place of refuge, or welcoming space. The paradox of home, seen in the landscape, or what I shall refer to as shifting topographies, is both harsh and forgiving. The topography provides a thread that runs through the collection, as it unravels the author's transhistorical consciousness. Hence, history and time-consciousness are important themes and devices in this collection. In addition, one may say that the politico-historical events in the stories are not only temporal markers of the internal historical memory which is deeply linked to spatial presentation, but also illustrative of the need, stated in the collection's preface, to "seek to recover the roles

and experiences of women in [Barbadian] history – and particularly, their struggle to change it – from slavery down to the present” (viii). Thus, stories such as “Love Trouble,” “The Gully” and “Freedom Come” (the plantation narratives) may be read not only as writing women into the struggle “to change it”, but also as “indictments of the Great House” (Markham xxxvii) as the chief marker/symbol of plantation rule. In these plantation stories, to borrow from Antonio Benítez-Rofo comment on Nicolas Guillen’s *Sol de Domingo*: “the Plantation [maintains] an authoritarian style if not a despotic one” (146) at the centre of the slave society manifested not only in the “repressive and racial character of the colonial government, but . . . also [as] a necessarily antidemocratic model of governance which, beneath different ideological masks, would tend to repeat itself for as long as the plantation economy held sway” (146). Thus, images of the plantation and the black Atlantic which fed it, tend to be repeated in Henfrey’s collection as a sort of framing device, the past constantly ghosting the present. For example, we move from Sarah looking out over the cliff to the ocean beyond in the first story, to Vincent in the final story, “scan[ning] the horizon . . . from the shallower water . . . as if hoping to catch a glimpse of ancestral ships” (97). In these plantation stories, Henfrey’s narrative voices coalesce and interlocute with the historical voices of Nanny Grigg and Bussa in the 1816 Rebellion on Bayley’s Plantation, and with the other histories of resistance within a discourse of resistance throughout the historiography of Barbados. The voices, thus, also interlocute with a historiography surrounding the Barbadian plantation and social systems, symbolised in the many variants of the great house.

The collection maintains, moreover, an internal historical memory that shows the impact of change on the lives of Barbadian women over 150 years from the story of Nanny (“Freedom Come”) and Quashebah (“The Gully”) to that of Eva Simmons in “Goodnight, Miss Simmons” and, later, Hilda in “Coming Home.” The stories chronicle a certain aspect of historical change in Barbados through the stories of these women, refracted through the landscape as witness to this cruel history. Thus, the sea, the canefields, the gully and the rough rab land, or to quote from the description on the back cover of the text, the “fields of whispering sugar cane, the rugged Atlantic coast of crashing breakers and the womb-like gullies” together form a topography of witness.² Many of the protagonists in these stories are linked to aspects of the landscape: Sarah, Nanny and Hilda to the sea in their various ways, Quashebah to the gully, and Silas and Reuben to the canefields.

Henfrey’s fictionalisation of women’s lives in these stories tells us not only about the purposes that such representations were invented to serve but also much about her women as living beings (Beckles, *Centering Women* xv). The stories thus invite us to examine the ways that female subjectivity is constructed by giving us a range of representations of women across various classes, in different historical periods, and within different lived experiences – from the slaves Nanny and Quashebah, to the free born Sarah to the “almost white” (46) Eva Simmons fallen from social grace, and the ‘been-to’ Hilda in post independence Barbados.³ In the story of Eva Simmons in “Goodnight, Miss Simmons,” Henfrey allows a ‘look-in’ on the lives of the near white class in Barbadian society, a class /

² The quote here is from the back cover of the book.

³ Hilda is a returning national who has recently come home from England. The term ‘been-to’ is used by many African writers to describe those who have recently returned home from away.

group seriously underrepresented in Barbadian literature. Similarly, in "Love Trouble" in the encased story of Johnny Bishop's wife, Beth, Henfrey gives us a brief 'look' into the experience of the white creole woman within a post-slavery society. By narrating her story, sandwiched between those of the black woman Sarah and the white male, Johnny, Henfrey allows for an examination of her experience in relation to them both, and at the macro level of the white creole experience in relation to white patriarchy and black female struggle. In this way, we may say that Henfrey's representations here 'coincide' with those three categories of analysis mentioned by Beckles (drawing on Lucille Mair): experience; identity and relations. Henfrey's narrators not only relate the experiences of women in their fictive worlds, but also underscore issues relating to identity and subjectivity, and more importantly show women in their relations to wider systems of power and exchange within their societies – as in the experience of Sarah in her relations with Johnny Bishop, attempting to live out her freedom amidst the harsh socioeconomic conditions of the 'nigger yard.' These three categories of analysis are important to a reading of Henfrey's collection here as all her women are framed within larger systems of power – the plantation economy, the middle class society of mid-century Barbados; late twentieth century, post independence migrant consumer society, the global world of production, exchange and consumption seen in the final story "Coming Home." All this impinges on these women's 'real' life experiences "across the social boundaries of race, class and colour" (Beckles, *Centering Woman* xv). In "The Gully," for example, Henfrey writes Quashebah's daily experience of enslavement within a politics of resistance and refusal "through which she claims a 'self' and an 'identity'" (*Centering Woman* xxii). And in the story of Nanny in "Freedom Come," in foregrounding her story over that of Bussa and Franklin, Henfrey demonstrates Kamau Brathwaite's view that "the slavery system impacted upon the black woman in deeper and more profound ways than was the case with black men" (qtd. in *Centering Woman*, xxii). Additionally, Nanny's narrative demonstrates that the "slave mode of production by virtue of placing the black woman's 'inner world' – her fertility, sexuality and maternity – on the market as capital assets, produced in them a 'natural' propensity to resist and to refuse as part of a basic self protective and survival response" (*Centering Woman* xxii).

Henfrey's voices provide a countervailing narrative to the ways in which women have been historically written about and historicised within male dominated narratives. Examples are Sarah in "Love Trouble," Quashebah in "The Gully" and Nanny in "Freedom Come." In "Love Trouble," the story of a young woman, Sarah, who chooses to become the kept woman of the white 'backra' overseer of the Great Hope plantation, Johnny Bishop, the continuous shifting between points of view, centered in the first person, acknowledges subjectivity but denies the absolute authoritativeness of any one perspective. In this story, the narrator skillfully shifts from Sarah's point-of-view to Johnny's to 'tell' their stories and to demonstrate the paths to their union – Johnny's desire and Sarah's acceptance. In fact, the story, which is set in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, begins with Sarah under the male gaze: "Sarah was not aware that she was being watched. She would almost certainly have minded if she had known. Not out of fear, more out of a sense of privacy invaded" (9). After devoting the first five pages to Sarah's point of view, the narrative shifts almost imperceptibly to Johnny's perspective and then continues in this manner until the story ends with Sarah's point of view. This type of narrative structure, with its fragmented, non-linear movement, resists the essentialising and totalising influence / affect of history's master narratives with their insistence on order and sequence and brings into focus other ways of 'telling' history, or narrating the past. The shifting points of view also highlight the shifting nature of subjectivity. But the sharing of the narrative by Sarah and Johnny

reinforces the contingent and interdependent nature of storytelling – Sarah’s story is dependent on Johnny’s and vice versa.

Through Sarah’s narrative we get the experience of life under slavery (told to her by her grandmother Rose), the immediate post-slavery years and generally the perspective of the emancipated slaves and their descendants. Likewise, Johnny’s point of view gives us the perspective of the Barbadian poor whites and the rise of the ‘new’ local planter class in post slavery Barbados. Through the spatial metaphors of the chattel village and the great house, the story dramatises the class differences that exist between the ex-slave classes and the planter classes in the society. Both points of view underline how individual perception is shaped and conditioned by cultural and historical experiences, and that there is a very distinct human tendency to rely upon that individual perspective to interpret events and make value judgements. Both Sarah and Johnny view the same society through different lenses, shaped by different social experiences (although they live within ‘close’ physical proximity) because completely different events and experiences have shaped their perceptions. However, and this point cannot be stressed too much, it is Sarah who sets the pace by controlling the early narrative space here, but the fact that she is being watched (looked at) by Johnny and later finds him occupying her point of vision in the churchyard, would seem to indicate that subject positions cannot be fixed or rendered unmoveable. Sarah is being watched even as she is looking out on the landscape and ‘telling’ her story through witness and memory. The subject is also the object.

However, Sarah occupies the first subject position and takes the narrative lead, painting a picture of the landscape and giving a ‘history’ of the place and its people. It begins with Sarah’s view of the landscape from her position in the churchyard:

Every time she came, she did the same: walking round the church building, and through the graveyard to its retaining wall which hugged the edge of the ridge. Here the land dropped down in regular terraces to the sea some miles distant. And what a sea it was! No placid millpond, but a heaving ocean, whose steepling breakers thrust up plumes of white foam as they dashed against the reef and then continued, still full and high, to bounce finally against the sand of the little coves that dotted the coast. (9-10)

The significance of this passage and the landscape associated with it becomes clear immediately, as we learn in the next paragraph that “Sarah knew that beyond the ocean was Africa, the Guinea shore. Her grandmother, Rose, who had raised her, had always told her so” (10). And it is this link to Rose and her story-telling that gives Sarah the narrative authority to relay her family’s history and even aspects of local history through the medium of the ‘story’:

Standing on the same spot where Sarah now stood, holding the child’s hand, the old woman would say: ‘Yuh see that ocean there? That does go all the way to Africa where all o’ we come from. My pappy remember coming over on a boat . . . he aint born here in no island. He aint born no slave. Now me, I born here, right here on Great Hope plantation and my mammy too and I never live nowhere else.’ (10)

Rose’s stories provide Sarah with the knowledge to relay the outline of the Bussa rebellion of 1816: “[O]ne of Rose’s earliest memories, as she told Sarah, had been of the excitement of the rising, when a slave called Bussa, and another called Jackey and the coloured house-servant called Nanny had organized the field gangs to rise up and set themselves free” (11). The fact that Rose’s father, Sarah’s great grandfather, was involved in this rebellion, links

Sarah to this important and epochal event in local history and also makes this opening story (the order of which may have been an editorial decision) a framing narrative for the other stories in the collection; or to employ Doris Lessing's term (speaking on the short story), "something small crystallizing out"⁴ For it is here that "Love Trouble" acts as a framing device for "Freedom Come," the story of Nanny and the 1816 rebellion, in providing an early narrative framework for it in the collection; for "The Gully" and "The Cane Cutter" in framing the plantation life narrated in these stories in Rose's tales told to the young Sarah; for "Goodnight, Miss Simmons" in the relationship of Sarah and the white plantation owner, Johnny Bishop, whose offspring prefigures the "almost white" Eva Simmons (46), as her biological ancestors; and again for "The Cane Cutter," "Goodnight, Miss Simmons" and "Coming Home" in fictionalising the 'origins' of the tenantry 'system' in Barbados, which shadows the early move by landless Barbadians towards land ownership, democracy and the reclamation of the self. In "Love Trouble," the narrator observes that:

Some of the younger men and even some women moved away, but most stayed on the plantation. For a while they had continued living in the old slave quarters, but found that their closeness to the Big House reminded them too much of slave days. So the families put up some shacks on an empty piece of land, on the edge of a gully where there was a spring. The Master let them stay, but he and his attorney came round to see who had put up a dwelling. After that, each family with a house spot had money taken from the wages of the oldest male every week. When they protested they were told that they now lived in a plantation tenantry. (11-12)

Thus, there are a number of narrative threads that interlink and connect the six stories in the collection to form a short story cycle. The cycle is 'completed' in the final story, "Coming Home," where Hilda's narrative, a story of transatlantic migration meets the oceanic vision evoked in Sarah's narrative in "Love Trouble".

"Love Trouble" however, poses some questions in its foregrounding of the Sarah / Johnny Bishop relationship: Does Sarah simply capitulate to the 'great house rules' in the face of what may be seen as her 'chattel house blues'? Has she found a way to manipulate the power of the former in finding a means of survival? For the relationship between herself and Johnny is not built simply within the dynamics of power / powerlessness or dominant / dominated, but is spread out to accommodate other ways in which power can be realized or manipulated. It is constructed within the transaction where positions are negotiated, the powerful and the powerless positioning themselves for what is on offer. Johnny's desire for Sarah (great house rules) is met by Sarah's desire to escape the harsh conditions of the Negro Yard (chattel house blues). But this is not a simple, clean transaction, for it leaves untouched a number of issues having to do with similar transactions between the powerful and the powerless, especially in terms of sexual relations and cohabitation. Henfrey's narrative does not suggest, neither from Sarah's perspective nor Johnny's, an easy path to salvation, but rather deliberately avoids judgements, leaving these open to the reader who may read Sarah's choice as a matter of the urgency of the pragmatic – the need to survive. In fact, one of the dominant themes in the stories of Caribbean women writers is that of survival, especially where women's lives are represented as mired in the problems of survival under the weight of unfavourable living conditions. Sarah's choices must therefore

⁴ Quoted in Ellen Cronan Rose, "Crystals, Fragments and Golden Wholes: Short Stories in The Golden Notebook," in Clare Hanson ed., Re-Reading the Short Story (London: Macmillan, 1989) 126.

be 'read' within what Ato Quayson in another context terms the "malaise and emotional aridity brought on by the oppressive and mechanical forms of economic labour that [the members of the Negro yard] have to struggle under" (731). And this is certainly seen in the stories discussed here, but also in the collection as a whole.

In "The Gully," Henfrey's transhistorical vision widens through the imposition of dual narratives and dual timelines on her storytelling. In "The Gully," Quashebah's slave narrative runs up alongside the late twentieth century narrative of I-Malachi in the gully where the rasta brethren of the twentieth century live in the haunting 'presence' of the run-away slave woman. As Toni Morrison demonstrates in *Beloved*, the story of slavery haunts the black literary imagination. Henfrey's short story accommodates the twin narratives of Quashebah and I-Malachi. Quashebah, the slave woman, the female version of the highly ideologised grateful slave Quashee, constantly escapes the hardship and brutality of the slave yard and finds refuge and respite in a cave in a gully miles off the plantation, away from the great house rules.⁵ After the first few 'escapes' to the gully, when she is beaten on her return to the slave yard, Quashebah is left alone to move to and from her place of refuge and 'hope.' For it is in the gully that she finds a type of 'healing' for the wounds of the plantation. Once again, as in "Love Trouble," Henfrey constructs a character fleeing from the great house rules and trying to find not only means of survival amidst the harsh conditions of slavery but more importantly the re-possession of the self. There are many indications in the story of Quashebah's desire for such repossession of self. When we first meet Quashebah, we are told that the

first time she ran away was when she was pregnant by Blackett, the overseer. When Blackett had first forced her, she had lain under him mute and hurting, separating herself from her body and from the business that Blackett was doing. Every time after that she had done the same, and had managed to will her spirit away, leaving the shell of her body behind. (Henfrey 26)

From this beginning the first part of the story narrates the journey of this "Africa nigger" (27) – or the slave born in Africa with ties still to her homeland – and her many escapes to the gully miles off the plantation, away from the Great House rules, in her quest for recovery and repossession of self. The seemingly paradoxical act of separating herself from her body is Quashebah's attempt at the repossession of a self raped and abused under the harsh rules of slavery. It is important too, that this story begins with an account of rape – "when Blackett had first forced her" – for it is the sexual self that is imperiled in these harsh conditions. This attack on the sexual self (of both female and male slaves) was a deliberate act by the Great House rulers not only to maintain control of slaves but to reinforce this control through their attacks on gender roles, gender reconstruction, so vital to the slave system in the West Indies (see Beckles, "Freeing Slavery" 211-213). And as Beckles states, this gender reconstruction entailed both the "ideological defeminization of the black woman" (212) and the feminisation or demasculinisation of black men (205). This had the effect of "fundamentally transform[ing] the sex structure and modif[y]ing gender discourses" (201). What is important in all of this for my study here is that the rape of Quashebah and the other young women like Becky in "The Gully" serves as a fictionalised reinforcement (interpretation?) of what the historian has stated. It is clear that Blackett's rape of the

⁵ According to Beckles, "Quashee was ideologically constructed and fixed within texts as the typical black male in a state of enslavement. He was docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing; his behavior was full of infantile silliness and his talk inflated by childish exaggeration" ("Freeing Slavery: Gender Paradigms in the Social History of Caribbean Slavery" 208).

women was part of a deliberate strategy aimed at the twin tasks of subjugation and the replenishing of a labour supply. Thus, Quashebah's resistance to this forced sex, coupled with her abortion of the pregnancies, must be interpreted within the context of slave resistance on the Barbadian slave plantation. It also underscores the many ways in which the Great House rules or plantation power was undermined and thwarted by these rebellious women. This resistance may also be seen as encapsulating a greater resistance by Barbadian slaves, and slave women in particular, framed in Henfrey's collection in the story of Nanny and the 1816 rebellion in "Freedom Come."

Henfrey's narrative demonstrates the ways in which power on the slave plantation was distributed and controlled to touch the very bodies of the slaves. The use of power included beatings, executions, rape and other forms of torture. It was sometimes 'delegated' to overseers and those of the plantation owners' choosing in its execution and demonstration on the bodies of the slaves. It was the tactile nature of this power that stood at the heart of slave resistance. In Quashebah's case, she was not only fleeing the general harshness of the slave yard, but also the psychological imprisonment this harshness imposed on her. For example, on finding out that she is pregnant with Blackett, the overseer's child, Quashebah decides to end the pregnancy:

She did not want this child. She would not be able to love it, to feel it as hers. It was Blackett's and his alone. The business which had given rise to it was Blackett's. Her true self played no part in the rough couplings which left her feeling soiled and abused. Despite being new to plantation life, she was beginning to find her way around. Though she still thought in her own language, she could now understand much of what was said to her in the language of the plantation, whose cadences were not unlike those of her own and contained a number of words which she recognized from her former life.
(28)

In addition to narrating the unwanted pregnancy, there is much in the above passage that foregrounds the need for resistance on Quashebah's part. There is the fact that she is new to the Caribbean plantation complex, and still retains fresh memories of her life in Africa; and correspondingly, there is the disjunction between the 'language of the plantation' - which goes beyond words to include all the brutal 'gestures' and actions of plantation life - and her own language and way of life. There is the sense of alienation and exile that the slaves would have felt. And it is to escape this psychic damage, this traumatic experience, that Quashebah often escapes to the cave as a space of healing - her 'small' rebellion. Henfrey's description of the gully is poignantly narrated and is quoted at length here:

Before it was fully light, she had reached a landscape of small gullies and caves, sufficiently broken and undulating to confuse pursuers but with enough vegetation to afford both shade and concealment. The main gully when she found it was a stroke of luck. Its entrance was a large pothole partly concealed by the branches of trees whose roots were below, in the gully. The sides though steep were manageable, with hand and footholds provided by the branches and protruding bits of rock. When she had lowered herself down to what she thought was the bottom she discovered that this was only a ledge partially overhanging the pothole shaft which dropped half as deep again, to the true bottom. Here, about a hundred feet from where she had started on the surface she found herself in a wide, natural chamber which sloped gradually back into the bedrock at its far end, with galleries leading off from either side. She looked for and found a dry cave along the gallery on the

chamber's darker side, and noticed as she did so that among the abundant trees and bushes there were some whose fruit she knew to be edible. They strengthened her sense of being welcomed and protected by the gully, despite the pains she was now feeling. (31)

Quashebah's presence transforms this hitherto unknown place into intimate space where the self undergoes a process of healing after the abortion of the child as a result of Mercy's herbal medicine (32). We have moved here beyond simple "geometrical space" according to Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (the sheer size of the gully) and into what he terms "inhabited space" (47), and even into what may be understood as existential space. And all this is facilitated by the compressed space of the short story form which allows Henfrey to manipulate both the spatial and temporal poetics of the story – that movement from space to space (and from place to place) within a few paragraphs. Quashebah moves from the new and constructed space of the plantation with its great house and lined or structured canefields, within closely supervised time - this man-made, ordered world of violence and death - to an old, immeasurable world with its timeless vegetation and structures. This is a world outside of the plantation rules and codes of behavior; an open, yet intimate space beyond the sociolegal ambit of the great house rules. The fact that Quashebah returns to this space on several subsequent occasions, despite the beatings on her return, bears this out and further emphasises the search for self-repossession which I mentioned earlier. As the narrator states:

It happened so regularly that the plantation more or less got used to her running. It was regarded as a quirk of Quashebah's. As the years went by they even ceased to punish her for it, reasoning that the beatings only made her even less fit for work, and hastened the day when she would be of no use to the plantation at all. . . . She continued to visit the gully in her mind long after she had ceased to do so physically [and] would have liked to have gone there to die when her time came, but feared that in death she might then yield up the secret of its whereabouts, which she had guarded through her lifetime. (36–38)

The gully thus becomes another house, away from the harshness of the great house rules, where Quashebah can act out her blues; her gestures of resistance before returning to the plantation. The blues in this case may be seen not as a form of suffering, but, as in the later African American tradition, as a way of constructing a narrative of resistance against the harshness of slave life.

A comparison can be made here with other representations of the gully in Barbadian literature. In Paule Marshall's "To Da-Duh, in Memoriam" (1985), the gully is figured as a place of re-generation after struggle and pain. In this passage the child narrator observes this following her grandmother Da-Duh into a small forest:

Following her apprehensively down the incline amid a stand of banana plants whose leaves flapped like elephant's ears in the wind, I found myself in the middle of a small tropical wood. A place dense and damp and gloomy and tremulous with the fitful play of light and shadow as the leaves high above moved against the sun that was almost hidden from view. It was a violent place, the tangled foliage fighting each other for a chance at the sunlight, the branches of the trees locked in what seemed an immemorial struggle, one both necessary and inevitable. But despite the violence, it was pleasant, almost peaceful in the gully, and beneath the thick undergrowth the earth smelled like spring. (163)

In his essay on this short story, Martin Japtok advances the view that the "spring-like smell of the earth" in the gully "suggests a new beginning, one apparently resulting from struggle." And, Japtok continues, "this struggle takes place in an area not cultivated by plantation owners . . . but dominated by what might be indigenous woods and by plants pointing to either India or Africa." Thus, like Marshall, Henfrey constructs her gully as a safe place, a healing space from the harrowing realities of the plantation life experienced by women. Similarly, in his novella, *The Gaulin and the Dove* (2008), Lewis Henry portrays the gully as a place of mystery, play and discovery. In this picaresque tale, or what may be termed an episodic bildungsroman, Henry's narrator tells a series of tales of the lives of seven young boys (the Mau-Mau Raiders), growing up in the fictive Broken Hill village of an unnamed country resembling Barbados. For these young men, the gully is a hiding place from which they "initiate [members] into the mysteries of their inner circle" (18). The gully is thus linked to ritual and myth and a sense of the sacred. The boys experience the gully as the nesting place of the gaulins, the sacred rainbirds: "As they approached the gully from the back, they looked towards their den and suddenly spotted four big gaulins. . . . Near a watering hole in the gully, right on the doorsteps of their den, were the sacred birds. . . . That meant that the rains would be there again" (40-41). Again, the gully is linked to renewal or re-generation after difficult or hard times. In this instance, the gully is associated with the gaulins and the coming of rain after the long dry season. Similarly, in Glenville Lovell's *Fire in the Canes* (1995), the gully is linked to myth, ritual and magic. The duppies or spirits of the dead slaves live in the gully's ancient spaces. Angry African spirits, the spirits of the murdered slaves (burned alive) roamed the gully at night (26).

In Henfrey's "The Gully," in the twentieth century narrative, I-Malachi and his brethren 'escape' from Babylon and the downtroddenness of everyday life: "When he came across the gully, I-Malachi was walking away from the new highway which had been recently opened. He felt at once that he had been drawn to it by a force stronger than himself. . . . Despite its closeness to the new highway and government housing, he could see that it was little frequented" (38-39). In this fecund and felicitous gully, the intercourse between the brethren occurs in the presence of Quashebah; the activities of the present are shadowed by the haunting past. But there is ambiguity in the representation of the brethren's occupation of the gully; they are both dwellers and interlopers. They are dwellers in the sense that they occupy this gully as a space of escape from the world of Babylon outside; interlopers in that they bring an unwanted presence into this hitherto 'sacred' space. The woman, Doris, whom I-Malachi sees as "Jezebel, a whore of Babylon" (41) upsets and alters the image of Quashebah from the "calm and wise" (41) figure of comfort and assurance to that of "meld[ing] into the sensuous shape of Doris" (41). I-Malachi's perceptions change as Doris begins to evoke visions of slavery's violence: "Scenes of violence began to feature in his visions and in one of them the woman figure was tied to a post and beaten with a cow-hide whip" (41). Doris's negative presence evokes another 'reading' of the past, this time as a haunting, disturbing and unproductive presence. In this twentieth century narrative, the gully as house is haunted by the strange behavior of its inhabitants. By reading both accounts as narratives of resistance and as slave memory, we may see the gully as an "embedded space . . . for creating knowledge that emerges in the relationship between [past and present within the confined space of the gully]" (Castor 146). Within both narratives in "The Gully," the process of representing the gully as lived space "is about mediating exterior and interior landscapes and making various past and present moments in time [challenging] dualistic oppositions between man, history, and agency on the one hand, and woman, nature, and passivity on the other" (Castor 148). In this story (and others in the collection),

then, “Women and various elements in the living world have [been given] historical agency” (Castor 148). Here, the interrelationship between narrative elements – the gully as device and central symbol; the technique of framing; the shifting perspectives and dual timelines; and the blending of ordinary and extraordinary content – all work together to illustrate a connectedness between humans and their world, past and present, and ultimately, history and fiction.

This narrative trajectory is maintained in the other plantation story “The Cane Cutter” (the only story with male protagonists) in which dual timelines and a shifting perspective is employed. Here too, as in “The Gully” the landscape is used, and in this case it is the canefields (the sugarcanes) which are personified, to demonstrate the historical link between the slave and ex-slave populations and the landscape, and more importantly, between sugar, slavery and the struggle for freedom in Barbados. Let me insert a caveat here, which I believe will work effectively in articulating my concerns. It is centred on Michael Craton’s assessment of the early sugar industry in Barbados. Craton observes that of all the territories of the British sugar producing colonies:

Barbados was the first to move from the production of tobacco and cotton on smallholdings with the labor of indentured whites to establish a sugar monoculture based on large estates and the labor of imported African slaves and, as an essential part of this process, to develop a settled ruling class of substantial planters. Never conquered by a foreign power, always retaining a sizable white population . . . and having more than two hundred years to develop before slavery ended, the island exhibited the most complete and sophisticated plantocratic system, including the highest proportion of resident planters. . . . Barbados had a slave population that was creolized, culturally as well as demographically, earlier than anywhere else in the British Caribbean. (316)

And this would almost certainly account for someone like James Drax becoming what Craton terms “one of the first and most notable of upwardly mobile West Indian planter dynasts [who] lived in almost baronial style” (332). One could argue from this also that this may account for the baronial manner in which the Great House lorded it over the black populations in the island even after emancipation. This, of course, leads us to consider the unsettled, or uneasy relationship between sugar (represented by the Great House and the plantation) and the labouring population of the island, which extends to my earlier observation, namely, the troubled relationship between Barbadians and the sugar canefields. All this comes to a bloody head in the story’s conclusion, where Silas having witnessed in his dream/vision the slaughter of the mistress of the Great House by the slave Reuben (employing the “slash, flick, slash and drop [63] rhythm of cane cutting) dies of an apparent heart attack in the middle of the canefield.

The canefields are hereby linked to slavery, violence, revenge and trauma within the West Indian imagination. Thus, Kamau Brathwaite sees the canefields as “canefields of pain [which] must be cut-/lashed away” (*Caribbean Verse* 262). For both sugar and blood run through the sugar canefields. Henfrey skillfully captures this latter image of sugar and blood:

As the day wears on, a canecutter’s cutlass becomes sticky with sap, so that Silas had at first ignored the uncomfortable cloying feeling that was loosening his grip on the handle. Then, on flexing the fingers of his cutting hand, he noticed that the palm was stained red. In fact, there was blood everywhere.

A slash at the next clump of cane revealed that it was the plants themselves which were bleeding profusely as they were cut. Silas thought of the story in which water was changed into wine. Now cane juice was changing into blood.
(69)

The canefields retain an emblematic, even iconic presence, in Caribbean literature. Here Henfrey invokes what may be termed 'sugar cane poetics' in graphically recounting the bitterness of the slave system and plantation life. In addition, in "The Cane Cutter," Henfrey evokes Marshall's use of the Barbadian landscape seen in "To Da-Duh in Memoriam" and The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), while recalling George Lamming's, Cecil Foster's, Geoffrey Drayton's, Kamau Brathwaite's and more recently, Lewis Henry's that speak to the relationship between sugar and slavery, the plantation and sugar cane fields, and their connection to the consciousness of the people. There is a link here, too, to Sydney Mintz's observation that "sugar and slavery [and all that this entailed] traveled together for nearly four centuries in the New World" (122).

In Marshall's "To Da-Duh, in Memoriam," for example, the child protagonist's vision of the sugar cane testifies to a feeling of being threatened by the canes' "stiletto blades" (162). This image of the canes as dangerous and somehow colluding in the people's misery and downtroddenness is further dramatised in Marshall's The Chosen Place, The Timeless People in the scene where Saul visits Stinger in the canefields and watches as Stinger cuts the canes. Saul describes the whole process of cutting and loading the canes as an "ordeal . . . the only word for him that came close to describing what he witnessed in those fields" (160). The narrator then paints a picture of Stinger cutting the canes, described in the militaristic language of a titanic, ancient battle: he "saw, was only conscious of, the canes ranked like an opposing army before him up the slope, their long pointed leaves bristling like spears in the wind . . . each time he brought one of them crashing down, he would give a little triumphant grunt . . . and toss it contemptuously aside" (161). Saul, too, shares this militaristic vision of the canes, observing that the "canes, while giving the impression of retreating, had all the time been swiftly regrouping, replenishing their ranks, so that there were now as many of them as when the cutting began" (161-162). There then follows a lengthy passage describing the actions of Stinger and Gwen cutting and loading the canes, as a monumental battle between warriors and a formidable foe.

Marshall, thus, in these few paragraphs, as elsewhere in the novel, fictionalises this important aspect of Barbadian history, that link between sugar, labour, survival and democracy within the context of an ancient, even 'classical' battle between the black labouring classes and modes of production (systems of power), summed up in the scene's closing image of Saul fleeing the canefield, "grop[ing] his way down the shorn hillside, which, with the dust and smoldering heat and the cane trash lying heaped up like so many abandoned swords, resembled a battlefield on which two armies had just clashed" (163). In Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin, this sense of the ominous is associated with the canefields where very early in the novel, the narrative voice speaks of "fields of sugar cane [that] crept like an open secret across the land" (17). Here, the image of the canes creeping "like an open secret" conveys that feeling of ambiguity or ambivalence associated with the history of sugar cane on the island; the beauty of the canefields across the landscape, even their horticultural value in helping to maintain the soil, and the brutality of the intensive labour involved in reaping the canes. All this is linked to the association with plantation slavery and the horrors of the Atlantic middle passage. For their part, both Foster (No Man in the House) and Henry (The Gaulin and the Dove) dramatise the threatening

nature of the sugar canefields by pointing to something foreboding within them. In Foster's novel, the protagonist's grandmother uses the threat of the 'heart-man' to keep the children at home at nighttime: "That is why I keep telling you young children to stay close to the house at night. You can never tell when some man looking for a young person's heart might pass through this village and grab one of you off the streets. An' the next thing we know, one of you will turn up dead in some cane field" (61). Likewise, Henry's narrator speaks of this dangerous, mythical figure as the "cane man" and warns of a "wild man who lived in the canes" and carried the unwary away (Gaulin 85).

This image of the canefields as foreboding, containing something that not only oppresses the people but also threatens their very lives, is constantly internalised by the various characters within these fictions. In Foster's novel, the young man sees the "endless fields of sugar cane" as past "the point of no return . . . a desolate, frightening part of the island" (237); and in Clarke's Proud Empires, Boy, on his way from the airport on his return to Barbados from the cold, alienating presence of Canada, in the passenger seat of the large black car, passes through "the valleys of green sugar cane fields" and feels "swallowed and partly hidden from sight" (221). The narrator continues: "Boy could see nothing but moving canes, like crowded teeth bunched together, all symmetrical, rushing at him, while he was not moving; or moving very slowly, like a beetle that had eaten too much" (221). It is within this 'tradition,' then, that Henfrey's "The Cane Cutter" writes the 'other' story of sugar. In Henfrey's story, told in the narrative tradition of the Caribbean gothic, the narrative embraces a number of modes of telling within the space of thirteen pages: it moves from the pastoral to the lyrical to the naturalist to the chillingly gothic. The narrative voice begins the story with a deceptively tranquil pastoral scene which belies the horrific murder that will later unfold: the "morning was fresh as Silas made his way to work. The grass, still damp with dew, was cool beneath his bare feet. So pleasant was the sensation that he deliberately chose to walk in the middle of the path where the grass was most abundant" (58). But the plantation slave society is far from saccharine and this idyllic world is soon disrupted by the narrative of the dream Silas had the night before, a dream of the murder of the mistress of the Great House, in which he sees "three pieces of her lying on the floor, strands of hair like streaks of light against the blood" (60). This illustrates the haunting nature of slavery on the present world of Silas and, more so, that of the slave narrative on contemporary writing for so much of West Indian writing is haunted by the spectre of slavery. Moreover, Silas's dreams, which serve as a prefiguring of the events leading to his own death in the canefield, also re-enacts the prior story of Reuben the slave. That Silas's story is narrated before Reuben's in the short story would serve to indicate the ways in which the horrible, traumatic past may write or underwrite events in the present. This is not to say that the present is overdetermined by the past, but simply that the work of memory is necessary in structuring our stories today. In this story, the sugar cane stands as a metonym for slavery and its abuses. The 'talking' canes, like the slave ships, the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean sea, witness to the injustices of slavery and the many ways that black people were uprooted, denied a sense of selfhood during plantation slavery. Reuben's response to the 'talking canes' is a response to the cries of slavery's injustices and to its trauma.

In both stories, the trauma of slavery seeps into the present lives of the protagonists, deeply affecting and influencing subjectivities. Henfrey's particular take on history here demonstrates the point made by Paolo Bartoloni that "what history measures is the cosmology of human life as it unfolds" (42) and that it measures "not time but the intricate

relationship between time and humans" (42). In other words, from Quashebah to I-Malachi, and from Reuben to Silas, to borrow from Bartoloni again: "History is . . . more than a chronicle of human achievements, misdemeanors, and horrific crimes [but] also an emblematic narrative that staves off death and celebrates humanity's collective immortality. Time is an essential part of this narrative" (42).

Henfrey's characters become figures of resistance to systems of power and structures of domination (under the new great house rules that include global consumer politics, migration, trade and commerce) that confront the black populations of the country in their quest for freedom, democracy and voice. The ways that this comes home in the final story mark not only the cyclical and sequential nature of this collection, but also highlights themes that underline Beckles's concern, stated at the start of this paper, "for rights, respect and recognition" (xiii). Henfrey's collection in its own interpretive manner, and within a reconfigured poetics of space, attests to such recognition by giving powerful 'voice' to the various protagonists / characters in their own struggles for liberty, justice and redemption.

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