"DEATH IS THE ONLY REALITY": A FOLKLORIC ANALYSIS OF NOTIONS OF DEATH AND FUNERARY RITUAL IN CONTEMPORARY CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

by

CHRISTINA E. VRTIS

A THESIS

Presented to the Interdisciplinary Studies Program:
Individualized Program
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 2010

"'Death is the Only Reality': a Folkloric Analysis of Notions of Death and Funerary Ritual in Contemporary Caribbean Women's Literature," a thesis prepared by Christina E. Vrtis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Individualized Program. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

Dr. Dianne Dugaw, Chair of the Examining Committee

Dr. Lisa Gilman, Committee Member

Dr. Phil Scher, Committee Member

June 1, 2010
Date

Committee in Charge: Dr. Dianne Dugaw, Folklore
Dr. Lisa Gilman, English
Dr. Phil Scher, Anthropology

Accepted by:

Dean of the Graduate School

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Christina E. Vrtis for the degree of Master of Arts in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Individualized Program

to be taken June 2010

Title: "DEATH IS THE ONLY REALITY": A FOLKLORIC ANALYSIS OF NOTIONS OF DEATH AND FUNERARY RITUAL IN CONTEMPORARY CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

Approved: _____
Dr. Dianne Dugaw, Chair

Approved: _____
Dr. Lisa Gilman

Approved: _____
Dr. Phil Scher

Caribbean cultural ideas and values placed on death and mourning, especially in relation to cultural roles women are expected to perform, are primary motivating factors in the development of female self and identity in Caribbean women's literature. Based on analysis of three

texts, *QPH, Annie John,* and *Beyond the Limbo Silence*, I argue that notions of death and funerary rituals are employed within Caribbean women's literature to (re)connect protagonist females to their homeland and secure a sense of identity. In addition, while some texts highlight the necessity of prescribing to the socially constructed roles of women within the ritual context and rely on the "proper" adherence to the traditional process to maintain the status quo, other texts show that the inversion or subversion of these traditions is also an important aspect of funerary rituals and notions of death that permeate contemporary Caribbean culture.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Christina E. Vrtis

PLACE OF BIRTH: Faribault, Minnesota

DATE OF BIRTH: October 14, 1979

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Concordia College, Moorhead Minnesota

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Interdisciplinary Studies:
Folklore, 2010, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2008, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Theatre Arts and Psychology, 2002,
Concordia College

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Women's Folklore and Literature
African and African Diasporan Studies
Ritual and Performance Theory

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Composition Department,
University of Oregon, Eugene, 2009-2010
Graduate Teaching Fellow, Folklore Department,
University of Oregon, Eugene, 2008

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Folklore department at the University of Oregon, especially Dr. Dianne Dugaw, Dr. Lisa Gilman, Dr. Phil Scher and Dr. Daniel Wojcik for their support and encouragement throughout the development of this project.

To my Bobby, without whom I wouldn't smile or laugh nearly as much as I do, and I would not have started, let alone completed, a Master's degree in Folklore.
I am forever grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Caribbean women's literature emerged as a recognized field of literature study in the late twentieth century. More recently, the works produced by these women have been made increasingly available through publication in the United States and Europe, and are increasingly included in courses taught in universities and higher education institutions in these locations as well as the Caribbean (Anim-Addo x). According to Caribbean writer and scholar Joan Anim-Addo,

> the writing [...] includes groups which, prior to the late twentieth century were largely excluded from publication. Amongst these are to be found African and Indo-Caribbean women. It is gradually being appreciated, too, that poetry, novels, short stories and drama, as well as other works 'between genres,' feature in the growing literature of the region. (x)

One element that is common to much of the recent literature is a reliance on local culture, traditions, and folklore to inform and influence the stories, characters, and situations that make their way onto the pages of plays, novels, books of poetry, and a few films. In studying and interpreting these texts it is important to be clear in the way concepts such as folklore, culture and tradition are being used in order to facilitate reader understanding. Folklore, as it is used in this project, will be understood based on folklorist Barre Toelken's definition, presenting folklore as "[a] spectrum of human knowledge and expression that can be studied in a number of ways and for a number of reasons. Its primary characteristic is that its ingredients seem to come directly from dynamic interactions among human beings in vernacular performance contexts" (32). It is also important to note that the texts that I've included can be read as folklore or folklore-like elements and as sites for the transmission of tradition even though they may not be considered actual permutations of "folklore" because they are written down and printed, therefore they remain static. The distinction between folklore and folklore-like elements

is necessary to clarify in this study because the elements of folklore that will be examined do not fit one of the main tenets ascribed to folklore as defined by Michael Owen Jones and Robert A. Jones in *Folkloristics: An Introduction* as "expressive forms, processes, and behaviors (1) that we customarily learn, teach, and utilize or display during face-to-face interactions" (1) simply because they appear in literature and are thus transmitted from person to person through the text as opposed to personal encounters.

However, as Barre Toelken describes in *The Dynamics of Folklore,* folkloric elements can be used within literature in multiple modes (folkloric, traditional, mythic) for many purposes. One such function of elements used within the traditional mode, which Toelken defines as "a conventionalized ordering of literary design according not to the demands of verisimilitude but to the expectations of tradition" (395), or more simply put, one can assume that the literary conventions used will be familiar to anyone who shares the tradition (395), is the inclusion of readers as cultural participants and to respond to the included folklore-like elements because they feel a shared

connection with members of the culture that "refuses to let them [the readers] only be spectators" (398). This function of folklore within literature describes the use of folklore within the texts that will be examined in this study.

In addition to delineating the use of the terms folklore and folklore-like elements in this study, it is also important to clarify the definitions of tradition and culture. Tradition is defined by Toelken as "a compendium of those pre-existing culture-specific materials, assumptions, and options that bear upon the performer more heavily than do his or her own tastes and talents" (37), and that those things that are considered to be traditional are passed on by members of the culture. Culture, then, can be understood generally as "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a group, or humanity in general" (Williams 90) and specifically, as the "process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development." Culture, tradition, folklore and folklore-like elements will be discussed here, then, within the context of these definitions.

The elements of folklore that will be analyzed in this study will be the performances of funerary ritual and the expression of beliefs about death and dying within three Caribbean literary texts written by female writers: *QPH, Annie John,* and *Beyond the Limbo Silence*. It is also important in this context to differentiate between folklore that occurs in real life, and the folklore-like elements that are contained within the texts themselves. The term folklore-like elements will be used to describe rituals and beliefs that are written in fictional texts that are representative of folklore, but that don't serve the same function as vernacular expression as it occurs in daily life outside the literary frame.

One theme that maintains a major presence throughout Caribbean literature, particularly in the texts I examine here, is the theme of death, dying and burial. Caribbean cultural ideas and values placed on death and mourning, especially in relation to cultural roles individuals are expected to perform, appear to be primary motivating factors in the development of female self and identity in the texts because each episode within the texts that

includes the theme of death and funerary ritual is linked to the growth and development of the female protagonist. Therefore, I argue that notions of death and funerary rituals are employed within Caribbean women's literature to (re)connect protagonist females to their homeland and secure a sense of identity.

In addition, while some texts highlight the necessity of prescribing to the socially constructed roles of women within the ritual context and rely on the "proper" adherence to the traditional process to maintain the status quo, other texts show that the inversion, or subversion of the status quo is also an important aspect of funerary rituals and notions of death that permeate the Caribbean culture. Therefore, the inclusion of funerary rituals and notions of death within the literature serve three main purposes: cultural transmission, written documentation, and examples of possibilities for transgression. These three purposes will be used in the analysis of the literature examples in Chapters 3 and 4.

Finally, I contend that by incorporating Caribbean cosmological beliefs and rituals concerning death, dying,

and mourning within literary frameworks, the authors illuminate pressing concerns of contemporary women in the Caribbean and the broader African Diaspora, framing them within the context of folklore and shared tradition in order to facilitate an increased cultural understanding, not only within the Caribbean, but throughout the world.

Methodology

The methodological foundation for this literature-based thesis is reading primary texts, which include literature from different genres of Caribbean women's literature, and interrogating the texts in relation to theoretical frameworks, including: folklore and literature theory, ritual theory, and Caribbean ethnographic research. The questions that I will ask in light of these frameworks are as follows: What notions of death or types of funerary rituals are found within the literary text? What is the purpose of including funerary rituals and notions of death in each text? How does death affect the female protagonist? Does it help to connect the protagonist to her homeland?

Does it push her away? What does it suggest about cultural connectedness? How do the specific folklore and folklore-like elements (related to death) aid in the development of identity? How do these elements function in the text to convey meaning, content or themes? Does the protagonist adhere to ritual expectations in order to reinforce the status quo, or does the ritual function as an inversion in order to challenge the status quo? To answer these questions, I will isolate occurrences of death, notions of death and dying, and funerary rituals within three literary texts: *QPH* by the Sistren Theatre Collective, *Annie John* by Jamaica Kincaid, and *Beyond the Limbo Silence* by Elizabeth Nunez. From there, I will analyze each occurrence, using the aforementioned theoretical frameworks to answer the above questions. Finally, I will use this analysis to come to a conclusion about the function of episodes of death, dying and funerary ritual within each text and within the larger category of contemporary Caribbean women's literature.

CHAPTER II

RITUAL THEORY

Ritual theory provides a framework within which to study human behavior, especially as it occurs in specific cultural, historical and individual contexts. This chapter will delineate a few of the primary texts that have formed the foundation of ritual theory as it is used and understood by contemporary folklorists in the United States, including works by Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Catherine Bell. In addition, after providing a basic foundation for the study and analysis of ritual in general, I also include a brief section that covers ritual theory as it is used by Margaret Drewal to study ritual in the Yoruba tradition in Africa. I have included this section because it is useful in analyzing the occurrence of ritual in literature from the African diaspora.

Through analysis and comparisons of the following ritual theories, I suggest that the performance of ritual,

specifically rite of passage rituals, within communities creates a socially sanctioned space in which community members improvise and enact social dramas that can both enable individual and communal bonding and transformation as well as support individual transgression and the subversion of social norms.

Arnold van Gennep, in *Rites of Passage*, describes the life of a person as a series of transitions from one stage to another, and proposes that these transitions are marked by "similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, [parenthood] advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death" (3). In addition, the transitions are celebrated and marked through the enactment of ceremonies "whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally defined." van Gennep calls these transitions from one life stage and individual and communal status "rites of passage," which can thus be further divided into rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation (11). Rites of separation, according to van Gennep, separate the participant(s) from "a previous

world" (21). Rites of transition, then, move the participant(s) from one position within their current world to a new position, usually within that same world. Within rites of transition, the participant is in a "liminal" (21) stage wherein they are neither what they were before the ritual began and are not yet changed; therefore, the participant is betwixt and between. And finally, rites of incorporation bring the participant(s) fully into the new role/status/world and are welcomed back into the community usually through some kind of sharing (of a meal) or the presentation of an item that signifies the reintegration into the community, like salt (20). Each rite of passage ritual, whether it is a rite of separation, transition, or incorporation in function and purpose, also includes (albeit to a lesser extent) all three rites as stages within the ritual itself.

For example, van Gennep devotes one chapter in the text to describing and studying funerals. He finds that, although at first glance it may seem that funerals and funerary rituals would primarily focus on rites of separation, after further study found that in fact funeral

rites include all three stages of a rite of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation (146). It is essential for every participant in the funerary ritual to engage in each step of the process in order for the ritual to achieve its cultural and contextual function. van Gennep concentrates a section of this chapter on mourning specifically, and theorizes that the work of mourning occurs within the liminal (the period of time betwixt and between, neither here nor there)/transitional period of the funerary ritual. He argues that:

> Mourning, which I formerly saw simply as an aggregate of taboos and negative practices marking an isolation from society of those whom death, in its physical reality, had placed in a sacred, impure state, now appears to me to be a more complex phenomenon. It is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning). (146-7)

It is important to notice here that although in other

sources the function of the funerary ritual itself is to honor the dead and perform the ritual for their enjoyment, van Gennep focuses his attention on the function of the ritual for the survivors. Specifically, the survivors must engage in the act of mourning in order to move through the entire sequence of rite of passage stages (separation-transition-reintegration). Mourning, according to van Gennep, is the transitional or liminal stage in which the survivors are caught betwixt and between two worlds, in which they, along with the deceased "constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead" (147).

Van Gennep goes on to delineate specifics related to the transitional period for funerary rituals, explaining that it is:

> first marked physically by the more or less extended stay of the corpse or the coffin in the deceased's room (as during a wake), in the vestibule of his house, or elsewhere. But this stay is only an attenuated form of a whole series of rites. (148)

In addition to the physical location of the coffin, the coffin or corpse itself becomes the physical marker of the transitional period, and the length of time the physical presence remains serves as a marker for the survivors to gauge the appropriate length of mourning. In addition:

> The transitional stage is sometimes subdivided into several parts, and, in the postliminal period, its extension is systematized in the form of commemorations (a week, two weeks, a month, forty days, a year, etc.) similar in nature to rites of the anniversary of a wedding, of birth, and sometimes of initiation. (149) [1]

Victor Turner, building on van Gennep's theory of ritual and rites of passage, defines rituals as opposing forces coming together and he expands upon this idea to include the necessity of communal unity and the creation of communitas[2] within the community. Turner defines ritual in two parts. The first deals primarily with what Turner calls

---

[1] In the case of Caribbean funeral rites, the transitional period is generally nine nights during the wake, however, the funeral rites might be suspended for a full year or more if the "dubby" or spirit of the deceased is thought to be still roaming and has not reconnected to its body for burial. See Hurston's account of nine night in *Tell My Horse*.

[2] *Communitas* is understood as the feelings of community connection and bonding that occur during ritual; camaraderie.

structural rituals. He writes that structural rituals are "the affirmation of communal unity in contrast to the frictions, constraints, and competitiveness of social life and organization." When considering both structural rituals, rituals that support the structure and hierarchy of the social system within which they are performed, and rites of passage, which he terms "antistructure," Turner's definition of ritual becomes "those special, paradigmatic activities that mediate or orchestrate the necessary and opposing demands of both communitas and the formalized social order" (qtd. in Bell 20-21). Turner's definition also brings in the ideas of social order being negotiated through ritual events, which will be dealt with further in the sections on ritual functions. A major component of Turner's definition that must be addressed, however, is the idea of ritual being separate from normal, everyday life.

In his definition of structural ritual, Turner introduces separation by calling attention to ritual as being a time and space of "communal unity" that is distinct and separate from "the frictions, constraints, and competitiveness of social life and organization." Ritual,

then, becomes an event that removes participants from normal, everyday life, and opens up a space where communal unity and bonding can occur without restraint and without regulations imposed on common social actions and behavior.

In addition to providing definitions of ritual, Turner delineates the purpose and function of ritual within social structures. Turner focuses his attention on the function of ritual for the group itself, finding that he

> came to see performances of ritual as distinct phases in the social processes whereby groups became adjusted to internal changes (whether brought about by personal or factional dissensions and conflicts or norms or by technical or organizational innovations) and adapted to their external environment (social and cultural, as well as physical and biotic). (21)

The main functions of ritual for Turner are group adjustment to internal changes, and adaptation to external environment. Adjustment and adaptation, for Turner, occur through social processes, like the performance of ritual,

and are reliant on the group working together, through the ritual enactment, to achieve the expected changes.

Catherine Bell, working with Turner's definitions, expands on them in order to define ritual as "a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing social or cultural forces comes together"(20). Although this definition is brief, it includes two major ideas for considering ritual: critical juncture, and the meeting of two opposing social/cultural forces. Bell's definition suggests that a ritual must be performed at a moment of heightened importance to the community and that there is a necessary opposition between two groups or factions within the social and cultural structure. The assumption here is that the ritual then provides the opportunity for the moment of crises to be resolved by the two opposing forces coming together and engaging in a performance that alleviates the tension, resulting in a return to equilibrium within the community.

In contrast to both van Gennep and Turner, Bell's discussion brings in an important function of ritual that is not frequently addressed: the effect and function of

ritual for the individual participant. She writes: "ritual is the means by which individual perception and behavior are socially appropriated and conditioned" (16). Individual perception and behavior is monitored and adjusted according to social and cultural codes and expectations. However, neither of these possibilities for the function of ritual addresses the idea of transgression or the consequences of individual behavior that is not socially appropriated or that is contrary to social conditioning. Possible explanations to this absence may be found by looking at theories as to how ritual actually works.

Emile Durkheim produced one of the central theses regarding the question of how ritual works within social groups, called the social solidarity thesis. According to Bell,

> [Durkheim's] model, the social solidarity thesis, suggests that ritual exercises control through its promotion of consensus and the psychological and cognitive ramifications of such consensus…they are representative of the tendency…to see social solidarity as 'a requirement of society' and ritual as

> 'an indispensable element in the creation of that solidarity. (171)

Durkheim's model brings in several important concepts to consider regarding the workings of ritual. First, he suggests that ritual itself has the ability to exercise control over participants. The idea that an event can exert control over a group sounds problematic and not necessarily believable until he brings consensus into the equation. Consensus, according to Durkheim, has psychological and cognitive ramifications that result in social solidarity, group think, and thus, control over the social group enacting the ritual.

Durkheim's model of social solidarity and consensus is further explored by contemporary ritual theorist Douglas A. Marshall. Marshall argues that Durkheim's notion of consensus is reached through deindividuation. He contends that deindividuation

> has to do with the loss of a sense of self, resulting in three important effects: (1) a strong sense of unity with and liking for the group and its members,

> thus contributing directly to belonging; (2) behavior that is disinhibited and free from the normative and moral constraints that usually constrain it; and (3) a direct and positive impact on the participant's subjective state via its ability to reduce self-awareness. (362)

The main components of Marshall's theory of deindividuation are a strong sense of unity with the group leading to feelings of belonging, uninhibited behavior, and positive feelings and a reduction in self-awareness. Each of these results contributes to the social effect and celebration of the ritual for the group. A primary example of participants in a ritual feeling a loss of a sense of self that occurs in the literary texts that will be examined is when, as Virginia Kerns suggests in her work *Women and the Ancestors,* women, as one of their primary functions during funerary rituals, wail or keen together as an act of mourning. The act of wailing as a group expresses social unity and cohesion by allowing the women to freely express their emotions without inhibitions or constraint.

Marshall's idea of deindividuation supports Turner's theory of social control, emphasizing the loss of a sense of self, the major factor in achieving social cohesion, and thus creating the space where Turner's ideas about the function and effect of ritual come to fruition.

Ritual Theory and the African Diaspora

The preceding theories form a foundation for regarding ritual, what ritual does, how it functions, and how it works as it is applied to many areas of folklore and performance studies. One area in particular that these theories have been applied is to African Disaporan ritual and drama theory. In African ritual studies, there are three main theoretical areas that I am interested in: community connection, improvisation, and play.

One of the major tenets of African and African Diasporan ritual and drama theory is the connection to community created through the sharing of ritual traditions. According to Jean Young:

> Literary theorist Cheryl Wall called the African-derived folklore and rituals the 'Africa Reconnection,' or the shared foundation of African heritage among the scattered peoples of the Diaspora, which binds black women through a similar folklore and cultural history. In other words, women reclaim their stories by connecting them to their past. (298)

Ritual and theatre derived from African folklore, according to Wall, creates a connection to the community and to cultural history and heritage through which African women, and probably men as well, bond and share through their similar backgrounds and history. In addition to creating a connection to past history and to others within the community, ritual also creates solidarity, similar to Durkheim's model. The separation between self and other, as Kimberley W. Benston says in the article "Art for Life's Sake," results in shared passions and a sense of communitas as "'the Black beholder is theoretically transformed from a detached individual whose private consciousness the playwright seeks to reform, into a participatory member of [a] ceremony that affirms a shared vision'" (qtd. in Walker

183). Not only does the detachment from individual status occur in theatre, as Benston suggests, but it also occurs in ritual, where the ritual enactors lose their sense of self and become part of the socially cohesive group. An example of the detachment from a sense of self and inclusion into the social group through ritual occurs in *Annie John* when Annie goes to a young girl's funeral. Annie, an outsider to the group, is absorbed into the community of mourners and participates fully in the ritual, including sitting and singing hymns with the girl's family before going home for dinner.

Essential to the performance of African ritual, specifically Yoruban ritual, is the use of improvisation and the incorporation of play. According to Margaret Drewal, "Repetition within ritual serves to represent (re-present) time concretely, providing a continuous temporal reference. It has a unifying potential, or rather it provides a common denominator for actions and events. Its binding potential is what makes it particularly crucial to any collective action" (2). The use of repetition encourages the audience to submit to the greater purpose of

the ritual, and increases understanding of the sequence of events and occurrences within the ritual because they have prior experience participating in the ritual, and therefore know what to expect. However, adding improvisation to the performance, in the form of inversions, as discussed earlier, or simple costume changes, can disrupt that prior knowledge just enough to change the meaning of the ritual.

Drewal writes about an example where one performer in a Yoruba ritual wears a Western tuxedo instead of the expected symbolic garb. According to Drewal "the revision of the signifier [costume] disrupts the signified/signifier equation and opens up meaning" (5). In this instance, the performer chooses to change his prescribed, repetitive role within the ritual, and instead improvises a new costume that results in an alteration to the original meaning of the ritual. Instead, the audience is now faced with a signifier, the Western tuxedo, that creates many new levels of meaning for the audience, possibly related to the influence of the West over traditional African and Yoruban social and cultural history and values, to give just one example.

The performer's improvisational actions can be viewed as a performative strategy in ritual because he made a conscious decision to deviate from his expected role and function within the ritual. According to Drewal,

> Whenever improvisation is a performative strategy in ritual, it places ritual squarely within the domain of play. It is indeed the playing, the improvising, that engages people, drawing them into the action, constructing their relationships, thereby generating multiple and simultaneous discourses always surging between harmony/disharmony, order/disorder, integration/opposition, and so on. (7)

The performer's decision to engage in play creates a new space for understanding within the ritual context.

Drewal suggests that "what is significant is that to play a situation is to intervene in it—to transform it" (17). Drewal's suggestion that the significant factor in improvisation and play within ritual, then, is the individual's decision to intervene in the ritual causing it to transform into something else, or at least transform the

meaning of the ritual. The idea that the individual has the agency and ability in rituals that are intended to promote, according to Durkheim and Marshall, social solidarity and the loss of a sense of self, complicates the issue of the function and effect of ritual on the social structure and community that performs the ritual. The example of the performer wearing the tuxedo provides one form of play, improvisation, and subversion that can create a space for individuals to break away from social solidarity and instead enact their own personal meanings and expressions within the context of the socially sanctioned and supported ritual framework. The role and actions of the individual is pursued more extensively in the following chapters, as I look at exactly this type of individual transgression and subversion of prescribed ritual role performances in Caribbean women's literature.

CHAPTER III

FUNERARY RITUAL THEORY AND PRACTICE AND THE CARIBBEAN CONTEXT

Many of the rites of passage and ritual characteristics and theories described in the previous chapter can be directly applied to the performance of funerary rituals in a Caribbean context. It is clear that ritual theory can be applied to the interpretation of specific activities contained within Caribbean funerals and wakes, but it is also important to look closely at the specific features of Caribbean funerary rituals to glean meanings associated with family and gender roles, actions, and the process of separation, transitions and re-integration described by Van Gennep unique and specific to the Caribbean in order to more accurately analyze Caribbean texts within a more focused and specific cultural context.

One way to begin examining funerals and wakes to find meaning and functions in relation to a specific context and

culture, in the case of this study, in the Caribbean context, is to look at the work of ethnographers in the region, and to consider the interpretations and analyses of actions about which they have written. I was able to find two relatively old ethnographies from folklorists that studied groups in the Caribbean who also included information about funerary rituals, Zora Neale Hurston and Roger D. Abrahms. In addition, I also studied ethnographies by two more contemporary anthropologists studying in the Caribbean, Virginia Kerns and Huon Wardle, who paid special attention in their works to gender roles, mourning and funerary rituals within a Caribbean context. Kerns researched women and the work of mourning in Belize, and Wardle studied community and the performance of ritual in the nine night wake ceremony in Jamaica. From these four perspectives, we can begin to make meanings and interpretations that could prove useful in analyzing the occurrence of wakes and funerals in Caribbean women's literature.

Kerns's feminist ethnography *Women and the Ancestors: Black Carib Kinship and Ritual* records and analyzes "black

carib" or Garifuna culture in Belize, paying particular attention to women's roles and women's work, as it pertains to religious beliefs and ritual, and how those roles are affected or affect kinship. Of particular interest to my research are her chapters on funerary ritual. According to Kerns, the funerary ceremonies

> have a solemn purpose but typically festive ambience…Song and dance are integral to most of their celebrations, including these. All of the rituals require cooperative work and the distribution of food and strong drink both with the living and (through offerings) with the dead is a central ritual act. *It provides the quintessential expression of trust and kinship, and it tangibly demonstrates generosity to the living and gratitude of the dead.* (emphasis mine) (149)

As Kerns goes on to describe the work of women to bring to fruition the extensive rituals that accompany a death in the community, she focuses a particularly interesting section on the work of mourning, in particular

calling attention to and describing wailing. According to Kerns, "As the women arrive (to the wake), each begins to wail. Wailing is song-like and starkly beautiful, a highly stylized but very moving expression of sorrow. When a woman wails, she eulogizes the deceased and expresses her gratitude for the support and care that person gave her" (152). A woman who does not wail, or who does so "quietly or spiritlessly" (153) is thought to be ungrateful, and may be associated with being manly, as men rarely wail. The association between a woman not wailing and being manly is explored in *Beyond the Limbo Silence,* when Sara's grandmother does not cry or wail at her grandson Alan's funeral. Kerns continues through this chapter and the next to describe in detail each element of the funerary ritual ceremony, as well as the organization, participation and obligatory roles of the women of the community who are responsible for all of the community funerals.

Huon Wardle's ethnography *An Ethnography of Cosmopolitanism in Kingston, Jamaica*, on the other hand, focuses on the wake as a ritual-aesthetic form that includes many inversions and changes as to suggest there is

no necessary "right" form or traditional structure, although the wake includes many elements that make it recognizable as a "wake" to participants and observers. Wardle argues that the lack of an "absolutely shared cultural tradition" does not effect the feeling of community created by the wake celebration; instead, the sense of community is dependent on "the quality of people's aesthetic engagement in the here-and-now" (159). The recognizable elements included in a Caribbean and Jamaican wake that have spanned time and distance include: the saying of prayers and psalms, singing of hymns and other songs, drumming, dancing, and drinking (161). In addition, a common and popular occurrence at the wake is storytelling, most notably of Anansi stories.

The primary function of funerary rituals, which are often performed within the context of a wake, is to bring the community together. According to Wardle: "Though nine nights are organized with regard to the religious affiliation of the dead person, participation at a wake is available for all regardless of specific church attachment. This means that the wake is inherently open to symbolic

negotiation by its participants. Many […] will travel long distances to reach a wake. Wakes similarly draw family members back from 'foreign'-typically America, Canada, and Britain. There is also an internal dynamic in the nine night between those who come to sing, drink and eat, and the family which opens up its yard and provides for these—not always entirely welcome—guests" (173).

Kerns describes a similar phenomenon in her work, and goes into detailed analysis of the cost of hosting a wake and the necessity of a community of women to support the host family in supplying the necessary food, drink, and space to support the sometimes extreme number of guests that will arrive from near and far.

According to Wardle, the propensity for the nine night to attract guests from all over the island, and from other "foreign" locations creates a feeling of celebration, rather than mourning, which attributes to conflicts within the structure and organization of the ritual across the culture. However, it is also a "redistributive, reciprocal and open-ended network." Wardle explains that "bereaved relatives bring their friends to their family's nine night

and in turn are welcomed when the situation is reversed. But the lines of reciprocity are likely to be considerably more blurred: in practice, the mix of visitors is an eclectic one" (173). The eclectic and large mix of participants contributes to the cost that Kerns discussed, and Wardle picks up on it as well, citing that

> Preparations for the wake involve considerable expense and yet anyone is free in principle to visit and sing at the wake and, in return, receive food—usually curried goat and soup—and drink—white rum, but also occasionally bottled beer. The nine night's quality as a network becomes apparent when I say that some of my friends in Kingston were able to visit wakes as often as once a week or one a fortnight simply on the basis of invitations from friends, friends of friends or by word-of-mouth." (173)

The network established also contributes to "the relative stability of the wake as a celebration despite its structural and meaningful changes over the years" (174). According to some of Wardle's informants "the spirit should

be enjoying the wake performed in its honour, and the participants should be enjoying themselves" (175).

Within Wardle's accounts of several wakes that he observed while researching in Jamaica, it becomes clear that one major commonality between the performance events is the ability, and I would contend, necessity, of inversion/subversion within the rites. As Wardle argues, he does not see a clear set of "standard" elements that each and every wake contained. Instead, each wake performance is dependent on the observers and participants, the family of the deceased, and the religious and aesthetic sensibilities of the mourning community. Wardle includes one transcript in full from the last night of a nine night celebration, that demonstrates the inversions and improvisations that occur within the ritual context,[3] commenting that, indeed, within the "brief space of time there takes place a marked overall shift from the relatively serious to the highly ludic" (178) when participants contribute whatever they think is necessary to the last night of the wake.

---

[3] Refer to Drewal's analysis of improvisation and inversion/subversion as vital to ritual performance in Chapter One of this thesis.

The notion of improvisation, inversion and subversion taking place within the nine night performance, and within wakes and funerals in general, is discussed at length in Abrahms's account of wakes and "nonsense" performances at wakes on the island of St. Vincent. He explains that wakes are:

> best understood in the terms employed by Vincentians themselves in talking about them: 'A whole lot people be coming on with nonsense there.' Nonsense, which is Vincentian for loud, boisterous, rude, argumentative behavior, may seem inappropriate as a way of marking death, but not so in the West Indies. Commonly used to describe the way men behave whenever they get together, but especially at the crossroad rumshop, nonsense takes on another set of meanings in the wake, in which it draws upon the semantic field of Nansi, the spider trickster, as well[…]nine-night has come to include not only a way of acting but also a perspective by which the respectable ideals of behavior and decorum have been inverted and commented upon jokingly. (389)

These wakes are traditional events that establish themselves outside the flow of the every- day because they are named, anticipated, and involve intensive preparations and conventions of play and performance (392). Zora Neale Hurston's account of wakes in Jamaica corroborates Abrahms's analyses, and adds to it the element of belief about death, most notably that the nine night wake ritual is necessary because "It all stems from the firm belief in survival after death. Or rather that there *is no death*" (43). The connection that Hurston acknowledges between life and death is fundamental in understanding the beliefs, and behaviors, of the protagonists in the novels and the characters in the play that will be examined here.

CHAPTER IV

FUNERARY RITUAL IN *QPH*

As we can gather from the previous section on funerary rituals and notions of death in specific Caribbean contexts, the concerns of Caribbean peoples are communicated through contact with real people through ethnographies conducted by scholars such as Abrahms, Hurston, Wardle and Kerns. However, the concerns of Caribbean people within the region and throughout the diaspora can also be communicated through literature, and specifically through folklore and folklore-like elements within the literature. Some of the concerns addressed include: socio-economic concerns, gender, identity, community, increasing violence and death and the afterlife. In particular, it is telling to read fiction and drama from the region, and specifically fiction and drama written by women, to gain an even greater understanding of the

cultural and individual notions of death and dying, and the importance of funerary rituals and other folkloric meanings and influences that permeate the literary works. The incorporation of full-fledged funerary ritual within dramatic literature in particular creates a space for actors and audience to connect as participants in remembering the elders of the community, while basing the ritual in conjunction with a fictional play. This chapter will focus on the incorporation of funerary ritual into one type of literature, drama, through an analysis of the play *QPH*.

QPH is a play written through a collaborative-based workshop process set-up by the Sistren Theatre Collective based in Kingston, Jamaica. The Sistren Theatre Collective began as a governmentally funded organization intended to produce community-based theatre for social change in the 1970s, (Smith 243). The Sistren was created to "encourage the development of Jamaica's oral tradition," (234). According to Helen Gilbert, "their primary mission became to examine the ways in which women in their society are oppressed, particularly by men, but also by the broader

structures that shape Jamaican culture," (2001; 153). The Sistren employed multiple strategies to begin this process, focusing primarily on workshops that involved the telling of personal experience narratives by working class Jamaican women. Personal experience narratives, which are defined by Sandra K.D. Stahl in "Personal Experience Stories" as first-person narratives, usually composed orally and based on incidents that have actually occurred in the life of the teller, are "a narrative creation of the teller, and it uses not only the experience itself as a base but also many traditional aspects of storytelling—predictable form, evidence of cultural and personal stylization, conventional functions," (268). The women involved in the Sistren workshops shared their personal experience narratives that provided the framework and narrative foundation for the development of one of Sistren's major dramatic works, *QPH*. Sistren relies heavily on folk and traditional performance forms in the majority of their works; including the use of children's rhymes, the Caribbean trickster character Anansi, rituals, traditions and the "witnessing" of

personal narratives. Many of these folklore forms are used to inform *QPH*, (Gilbert 2001; 154).

QPH uses the stories of three women, Queenie, Pearlie, and Hopie, to set up the narrative structure of the play. Each woman takes turns telling stories about significant moments of her life living and working in the Caribbean, culminating in her eventual settlement at an "alms house" for poor older women in Kingston. The climax of the play occurs when the alms house burns down—killing Pearlie and Hopie—and leaving only Queenie to finish the play.

QPH is framed by the performance of an Etu ritual. In African and Yoruban cosmology, the Etu ritual is a celebration of the dead through singing, dancing and feasting. The ritual is used as "the appropriate vehicle through which to celebrate the dead and dramatise their unacknowledged contributions to society" (Gilbert 154). "The dead women are 'raised' to relive fragments of their lives for the audience. Staged as part of the play, this ritual functions as a mnemonic device that shows evidence of a cultural history at the same time as it moves the action beyond the sphere of received Western theatrical

genres such as realism" (154). It is significant to point out that, according to Gilbert and Tompkins, "Etu tends to be more women-centered than many other equivalent rituals such as the Nine Night ceremony. Not only are women the main participants, but the ritual is usually guided by the Queen, the lead dancer, who 'shawls' other dancers to invoke in them the spirit of the deceased" (72).

In addition to focusing the action and story of the play on women and women's stories, the play also verges on *becoming* a ritual because:

> its distinctions between 'reality' and fiction are deliberately blurred; in the theatre, the play *is* a remembrance ceremony for the many fire victims buried without any memorial, and in this respect each performance requires appropriate preparations, including the sprinkling of the four corners of the stage with rum. When *QPH* was performed, members of the audience also protected themselves thus against the spirits evoked (72).

The blurring of the line between fiction and reality in the space of the performance helps to create a sense of communitas between the performers and the audience. Through the enactment of familiar ritual elements, such as cleansing the stage area with rum, the audience is transported into the realm of the memorial ritual—even though they don't know the women being honored, and in this case the women are only representatives, playing the roles of the actual women who It is interesting to note that the play becomes a ritual, at least to the audience members, as Gilbert and Thompkins note, because the audience members enact additional ritual elements (crossing themselves) to prevent being harmed by any spirits that might linger after the event has ended. Gilbert goes on to suggest that:

> The creative reshaping of such traditional ceremonial enactments is not uncommon in Caribbean theatre, which frequently draws from the rich performative archive of various syncretic religions, as well as from rituals associated with carnival, to root its stories in the community. (154)

The rootedness of the rituals within the community is key. Through the Etu ritual performance, the audience is signaled that this event is special—it is not just a play, it is a play with purpose and function within the community. By choosing to participate in the ritual and performance of the play, the audience members and the actors form a connection, a bond like that described by Turner that occurs during the ritual event. In addition to the feeling of communitas and relationship to the group, the ritual as part of the play performance also highlights critical social issues that some feel are not being addressed in the community—in the case of *QPH*, the treatment of women and elders. The combination of the heightened reality of the ritual context and the performance atmosphere of the play create an environment rich for addressing these issues to an audience that is familiar and open to the ritual event. This is key to my argument that the rituals used within both the play and the novels function as connections to the community; not only for the audience and potential reader, but, especially in the case of the novels, for the female protagonists.

Each woman onstage is part of the ritual, and the ritual provides the ability for the victims of the fire to tell their stories, to "witness" through the actors. The process of "witnessing" (Gilbert 154), which involves listening to personal and often intimate testimonies, is used in the play to tell the characters' stories directly to the audience. By drawing these stories out of the Etu ritual, the stories move beyond merely personal experience and toward addressing the socio-political causes that Sistren works to highlight, namely issues dealing with working class women, oppression, abuse and neglect, (154).

Witnessing involves the audience in the process of recognizing and remembering the women who lost their lives in the fire, but it also works to create a sense of community and communion that is an essential function of Caribbean funerary rituals and wakes. According to Gilbert, each character's witnessing is recognized by the audience and is associated with similar testimonials that might be given at other funerary and memorial events. She suggests that:

> Moments of direct audience address suggest that the respective stories of Queenie, Pearlie, and Hopie are to be witnessed as testimonials, which are imbued with a certain truth value and spiritual resonance by their containment within the Etu ritual. Thus the stories move outwards from personal experiences to their socio-political causes. (154)

The audience has come to watch and participate in the play in the same manner that they would come to participate and share in the mourning and celebration of each of the women separately, if they had known them in life and had witnessed their testimonials during their lifetime.

The design, or narrative framework of the play itself can be analyzed in relation to the enactment of wakes and other funerary rituals in the Caribbean. The play begins with the stage set for the Etu ritual. As the production notes explain: "A table is set with ritual food and rum for the ancestors, and players are anointed with a goat-blood cross to the forehead and bisi (kola nut) to the tip of the tongue. The drummers on the ire drum and the achata (kerosene tin) control the proceedings while the Queen, as

lead dancer, controls the dancers. Each soloist represents a family with its own song and dance patterns. Dance movements are centred on the pelvic area, symbol of fertility, birth and rebirth" (Gilbert *QPH 157*). In addition to the stage setup and opening of the play, the stage area is purified by sprinkling the four corners of the stage with rum (Gilbert and Tompkins 72).

In the play, each of the main characters takes her turn "witnessing" through the telling of fictionalized personal experience narratives addressed directly to the audience that enables the character to tell her unique story. The act of witnessing is reminiscent of the telling of tales and stories at a wake, where the audience participates by listening to the stories of the elders and family members of the deceased.

The actors playing the roles of Queenie, Hopie and Pearlie act as conduits for the "ancestors" to share their stories with the audience and community, lending a voice to the women that were silenced by the fire. The characters take the opportunity to address socio-political issues that affect Jamaican women through witnessing, and the audience,

as guests at the funeral ritual, are captive and must listen and respect the women as they tell their tales. The character of Hopie tells the first story of the play, explaining to the audience why she has to beg for money and about a time when she was almost raped:

> Work, maam? Hopie cyaan work again. Yuh know if ah did only get lickle good education mi woulda able fi work an help miself today…Di bwoy dem come fi trouble di rice and peas and mi tell dem seh mi gwine tell police. Mi a go a station go tell police seh dem waan fi rape Hopie. Hi sah! (160-1)

In this personal narrative, Hopie addresses not only her own situation, telling us about why she doesn't have a job and how people (men especially) have tried to take advantage of her, but she also brings to the play insight into the very real concerns of Jamaican women. She is unable to work because a proper education was not available to her, she is in danger because she has to beg for money, and if anything does happen to her, like being raped, the police will not believe her because she is poor and

uneducated. The use of Hopie's personal experience, and the telling of that experience with traditional oral narration, informs the audience and aids in their connection to the material and socio-political need for change.

The other major characters in *QPH* use similar "witnessing" narratives to address other socio-political issues, including issues of youth ignoring their elders and being ungrateful, living on the streets without concern for education or their elders, and in particular the treatment of the elders in society. Queenie addresses this final concern in the closing monologue of the play. In it, she is speaking to the audience and telling her story about what happened in the fire: "Was a terrible sight, suh. Di fire, di smoke, di flame, di bawling. I did almost tun fool, suh, but mi never panic too much. Only when mi couldn't reach mi two friend," (175). Queenie's testimonial continues, concluding with an appeal to the audience to remember the past, and to acknowledge and value their elders. She says:

> We old but we active and waan occupation. Give we materials and we wi mek tings and sell fi help tek care a we, instead a just having we siddung so…No

> carry we go a no bush or hill where yuh cyaan see we, so oonoo can have a free conscience. We waan live! Everybody haffi get old but member, di old have the key to di future cause we have di secrets of di past. (176)

Queenie's message here is clear: don't forget about the older members of the Jamaican community. Don't shut them away in an almshouse and forget about them. They are equal and important members of society, and not only that, they want to be included. They want to work, and they want to help the community to thrive and succeed into the future.

Not only does Queenie's final testimony address the need to remember the community elders, but it also addresses the need to remember the past and know the past, which is the motivating function behind the Etu ritual within which the play is framed. As she says "di old have the key to di future cause we have di secrets of di past." To survive and thrive in the future, the past must be remembered and used to inform the present and future. Queenie's appeal to the audience creates a feeling of deindividuation, like that which contemporary ritual

theorist Douglas A. Marshall suggests is foundational to the success of ritual performance. In this case, the audience members are drawn into the stories of the women, and are subject to acting and feeling as part of a community rather than as individuals because they have shared this common experience. A sense of communitas, as Van Gennep suggests, has been created, and the ritual participants, which includes the audience as soon as they enter the ritual theatre space, feel and act as one. The audience has been invited to and has partaken in a remembrance ceremony that holds deep meaning for the community at large.

CHAPTER V

NOTIONS OF DEATH, DYING AND FUNERARY RITUAL IN *ANNIE JOHN* AND *BEYOND THE LIMBO SILENCE*

The novels that I will analyze in relation to notions of death, dying and funerary rituals are *Annie John* by Jamaica Kincaid and *Beyond the Limbo Silence* by Elizabeth Nunez. Each novel is a coming-of-age tale in which the protagonist goes through many ordeals on her way to becoming an adult. In each, the girl does so without very much help from mother figures, either because the mother is physically separate from the girl (as in *Limbo*) or emotionally separate, as in *Annie John.* This separation seems to be the prominent motivating factor of change and self-discovery for many of the girls, and the separation also then becomes related to, or begins as a relation to, death and dying.

As each of these girls attempts to move beyond what she views as the limitations of her life in the islands, she is always connected back to her home through death, notions of death, and funerary rituals. Because of this, every time each girl experiences a death or participates in a funerary ritual, she is reminded of her home, of her past, of her family, and of her ancestors. Therefore, death serves as a grounding force for each girl. The recognition and acknowledgement of death through personal ritual or public wake/funerary ritual is the means of expressing the need and desire of each girl for that connection to home.

Annie John

Annie John by Jamaica Kincaid is a coming-of-age novel in which the protagonist, Annie, grows from a ten year old girl trying to figure out life and death in Antigua, to a young woman boarding a ferry that will take her to Barbados, and then a plane to England where she will study to become a nurse. As Annie reflects in the final chapter, "I did not want to go to England, I did not want to become

a nurse, but I would have chosen going off to live in a cavern and keeping house for seven unruly men rather than go on with my life as it stood" (130).

The novel opens with a chapter dedicated to death and Annie's fascination with death and funerals when she is a little girl. This chapter provides many folkloric details and elements specific to funerary rituals and notions of death in the novel's setting: Antigua. In addition, the chapter lays the foundation for cultural transmission and written documentation of funerary ritual performances, as well as delving into possibilities of transgression, particularly for Annie, as she begins to participate in funerary rituals for the first time.

The chapter begins with Annie explaining that she "thought that only people I did not know died" (3), but then finds that, through the deaths of many of her neighbors and even a girl her own age, that everyone, even children, die. The focus on death in the first chapter signals the beginning of Annie's separation from her mother, her childhood, and ultimately her life on the island. This separation is highlighted when her mother is

charged with washing and preparing a young neighborhood girl to be buried. The girl died in Annie's mothers arms, and with that knowledge combined with seeing her mother's hands washing the little dead girl's body, Annie "could not bear to have my mother caress me or touch my food or help me with my bath" (6). The connection between death, children dying, and her mother's role in the ritual washing of the girl's body to prepare it for burial is too much for Annie: she cannot break the association she has made of her mother's hands with death. This moment in the text is the first step of separation Annie feels from her mother, beginning her trek into young adulthood, and ending with the complete physical separation of Annie from her mother, father and home when she leaves Antigua for the opportunity to study nursing in England.

Annie's notions and understanding of death are the first exposure we as readers have to cultural ideas about death, dying, and funerary ritual specific to this novel set in Antigua. Early in the text, Annie, acting as culture bearer, explains to the reader that "I was afraid of the dead, as was everyone I knew. We were afraid of the dead

because we never could tell when they might show up again" (4). Annie goes on to explain the belief that when people die, their spirits will show up again. They can show up in dreams, which seems to be preferable because then they "usually only brought a warning, and in any case you wake up from a dream." But they can also appear to a lone person walking by a tree and if that happens, they might "follow you home" and they will not leave you until you have joined them through death. According to Annie, it is common knowledge that the dead can have such an influence on the living, and asserts that even her own mother knew many people "including her own brother" (4) who had died after the spirit of someone deceased had followed them home and refused to leave.

Annie's beliefs about death and the spirits of the dead hanging around with the potential to do harm coincides with Zora Neale Hurston's accounts of the belief in spirits of the dead, or "duppys" in her ethnographic work in Jamaica. According to Hurston, "It all stems from the firm belief in survival after death. Or rather that *there is no death*. Activities are merely changed from one condition to

the other" (43). The duppy is the ghost or spirit of a person. It is considered to be the thing that is the most powerful part of any person; the duppy gives power to the parts of a person that make them "living" (Hurston 43). In addition, it is believed that the there is evil in everyone but that the heart and mind restrain and control the evil. When a body dies, the duppy leaves the body and goes out into the living world unrestrained and capable of doing evil to the living because "the duppy is much too powerful and is apt to hurt people all the time" (44). The nine night wake in Jamaica, then, is created to force the duppy to stay in it's grave and not do harm in the living world.

In addition to cultural/communal ideas about the connection between the living, spirits and death, Annie also conveys funeral protocol in the chapter, including: appropriate apparel, mourning, coffin making, and the appropriate time and place for funerals to occur depending on who had died. For example, a funeral in the morning means that a child has died because children are always buried in the morning. Her musings over ritual performance serve as moments of both cultural transmission and written

documentation of how and when to perform the appropriate funerary rituals as well as the beliefs and stories the reader should know about death and dying in Antigua. In addition, Annie's descriptions of funerary rituals and beliefs about spirits and death function as folklore within the novel because they include the reader in the culture and traditions that Annie participates in with her family and community in Antigua. The reader, then, participates in the performance of the funerals and Annie's conveyance of beliefs about death and spirits as listener. According to Toelken's argument of the function of folklore within literature, by participating as listener and receiver the reader connects to Annie, her family, her community and her culture and traditions.

As the chapter progresses, Annie becomes increasingly obsessed with death and funerals. She begins to seek out the funerals of people she doesn't know and observes the rituals from outside the funeral home, church, or home where the funeral is taking place, listening to hear "the close relatives and friends let out incredible loud wails and moans" (9). After observing several funerals from the

outside, Annie becomes brave enough to enter the place of mourning, but only when a little girl whom she knew from a different school died. Annie went to the funeral on her own, and went inside. She observed the little girl lying in the "regular, pitch-pine, varnished coffin, on a bed of mauve-and-white lilacs" (10). Annie focused on the girl's face, to see what she looked like dead. Although she had been told that dead people looked like they were sleeping, Annie decided that "this girl did not look asleep" (11). She was too still. The death and funeral of a girl that Annie knows serves as a point of entry for Annie to begin participating in funerary rituals as a member of the community. Until this point, Annie had observed funerary rituals only from the outside. Now, she takes on the role of mourner which, according to Van Gennep, is essential to the function of funerary rituals for the community.

Annie, however, must learn the proper behaviors of mourners. She does so through a series of activities, including: paying her respects to the girl as she lies in her open casket, and singing hymns with the other mourners. After observing the girl in the coffin, Annie joins the

other mourners, sitting with them they sing a hymn, "All Things Bright and Beautiful" that was the first hymn the little dead girl learned to sing by heart, according to her mother. After singing the hymn with the family, Annie left and went home. This scene shows one of the final stages in the funerary ritual process, the funeral itself. At this point, the mourners who have gathered sing Christian hymns together to facilitate group adjustment to the change in their community that has occurred with the young girl's death.

In addition, the singing of hymns familiar to the group, and that in this case is specified as the girl's favorite, acts to increase communal unity and bonding. Annie, as a participant in the ritual, sings the hymns along with the family, even though she is technically not a member of the "group." In light of Turner's theory, Annie's involvement does not hinder the development of communal unity for the group because the bonding that occurs does so without restraint and without the rules of social actions and behaviors placed on the participants. In this case, Annie is a member of the community of mourners because she

is there participating, and so it does not matter that she is unknown to the family and that they assumed she was "a school friend, even though [she] wore the uniform of another school" (11). In addition, by engaging in the same behaviors as the other mourners and conveying grief, Annie is treated as a member of the group which relates back to Marshall's ideas of social solidarity and the strengthening of social ties through ritual performance.

In the opening chapter, and throughout the novel, Annie recalls stories of death; deaths that she has heard about or experienced herself as well as stories of deaths told to her from her mother and father about relatives that died before Annie was born. These stories provide Annie with a connection to her family, her past, and her community and give her the strength to overcome life's struggles.

In one such scene, her father tells her a story of the night his grandmother died. Her father lived with his grandmother after his parents left him to move to South America; one day his grandmother did not wake him up so he slept in. When he awoke, he saw that she had died in her

sleep. "Even though he was overcome with grief, he built her coffin and made sure she had a nice funeral" (23). One element of significance is that the sharing of the story helps Annie to feel more deeply connected to her father, and brings the family closer together as they share the story and cry together. In addition, it instills in Annie that her father has lived a life that is more than anyone should bear, but that he has pushed through, and shown great strength, including the ability to continue his duties as son/grandson/man of the house and build the coffin for his grandmother and provide her with an appropriate and "nice" sendoff into the next life.

Although it is not elaborated on, the cultural significance of the funeral seems highly relevant when looking at the father's actions. The importance of the funerary event for the soul/spirit of his grandmother to enter the next life amid love, friends, and family is clear. This scene works in the novel to strengthen Annie's bond to her father through his sharing of stories related to death and funerary rituals. In addition, it, like the other examples in the novel, present cultural beliefs and

traditions associated with funerals. Most significant here is the necessity, conveyed through Annie's father, of making sure the casket and funeral were well-prepared in order to facilitate a smooth transition for both the deceased and the survivors.

The scenes that were explored in *Annie John* serve as examples of cultural transmission and sites of learning folklore, culture, and traditions for both the reader and Annie as she begins her journey into adulthood. She, along with the reader, learns familial and communal beliefs and behaviors associated with death and funerary rituals from observing and participating in rituals, and from listening to stories told by Annie's parents as they are performed on the island of Antigua before Annie leaves for school in England.

Beyond the Limbo Silence

Beyond the Limbo Silence, on the other hand, begins in Trinidad but most of the action (and cultural transmission) occurs in the United States. The novel takes the reader

through the protagonist Sara's progression from ten-year-old girl living in Trinidad, through her education at a small Catholic women's college in Wisconsin as a scholarship student from, in the words of a classmate, "the bush" during the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Each fundamental moment in Sara's growth is marked by a death and/or the performance of a funerary ritual, which we as readers are complicit in from the opening pages. Through these moments of participation, storytelling, memory, and observation, folklore and folklore-like elements associated with death and funerary rituals are conveyed to both Sara and the reader in order to facilitate (1) a connection to family, home, and culture for Sara, and (2) a sense of connection and shared Trinidadian cultural knowledge and traditions as they are performed and transmitted for the reader both on the island and off.

The novel begins with the celebrated return and sudden death of Alan, Sara's eldest cousin, as he returns to Trinidad from spending ten years in England, supposedly studying. This episode includes one of the most in-depth and detailed descriptions of a wake and funeral service

that I've found in the novels I have read thus far. Sara introduces the wake with the following passage:

> I learned about grief that night, the kind of bottomless, yawning grief that can find nothing upon which to anchor itself, that stretches itself out into a long howl ending in a hollow silence. I heard men cry that night: my father, his five brothers, my grandfather, my cousin's friend, his two brothers. The sounds they made were different from the muffled sounds of the women. The men bellowed loudly with impotent rage…(Nunez 7).

The description includes the familiar and gendered roles associated with organizing and performing the funerary ritual in the Caribbean, as relayed in detail by Kerns in her analysis of women's roles and the "work of mourning" in "Women and the Ancestors" by separating the type of mourning performed during the wake by me and women. It is interesting to note, however, that in this instance Sara recognizes and makes note of the difference between the way the men and women behave at the wake. In this way, the

mourning behavior becomes a transmission site for cultural expression performed by her folk community. Sara, as a young female member of the group is learning how to mourn at a wake in relation to her status as a female in the group, while at the same time the reader is being shown mourning behaviors by this particular group during the specific wake and funeral for one member of the community, Alan.

In addition to describing mourning practices during the funerary ritual of both male and female groups, the wake itself features storytelling by many of the male members of the community. Some of the stories and proclamations made by the men at the wake represent moments of grief and anger over the unnecessary loss of such a promising member of the family. For example, during one such storytelling episode, Alan's father oscillates between rage and grief:

> "He must have thought he was a fish. The damn fool!" His father shouted through his tears. "Who the hell would dive down in the middle of the sea with no oxygen? Who the hell did he think he was? A damn fish?

> […] The fool!" My uncle railed against my cousin's folly, his pride, his ignorance, his bullheadedness. He hurled blame at his dead son until he exhausted himself and only grief remained, releasing tears that poured without restraint down his cheeks. (7-8)

In this passage, Alan's father appears to transgress his culturally specified role of a male participant in the wake. Instead of mourning quietly and remaining stoic, he uses the funerary ritual context to express his rage and grief over the sudden and tragic loss of his son. However, it is clear in this example that his behavior (raging, blaming, crying) is accepted by his community, and perhaps behavior like his is expected when a young male member of the family dies unexpectedly and in such a violent way. It deviates from generalized statements about male/female roles within funerary rituals described by Kerns and Huon, however, in the specific context within this text it appears to be socially and communally sanctioned behavior for the men to cry, wail and rage after the tragic death of a young man.

The community embraces Alan's father despite his individual transgression, and the ritual continues without conflict. This example of individual transgression within the ritual framework in the novel serves as a folklore-like element in which it shows both to Sara and to the reader that rituals and expressive behavior are constantly in flux, and that behaviors like mourning, especially in this context, can change and yet still have the desired ritual result: community bonding, individual transformation, and reintegration of the survivors back into the community after the funeral ends.

Storytelling at the wake, however, also includes the transmission of cultural beliefs, most notably related to Oheru, or mermaids. The transmission of cultural beliefs through storytelling is an important function of folklore in non-fictional contexts, and so it follows that storytelling also serves as a useful tool to transmit cultural beliefs to both the protagonist and the reader in fictional literature. Specific to *Beyond the Limbo Silence*, storytelling at Alan's funeral and later in the novel enables Sara to foster her sense of connection to her

family and home community, but it also gives her a connection to her ancestral history, culture and traditions. In this scene, which immediately follows Alan's father's outburst, the man that was with Alan when he died, Melvyn, summons the courage to speak:

> "We had a warning," he began cautiously. "I told him so. I told him—"
>
> "What warning?" My grandmother's voice, soft but firm, stopped Melvyn in midsentence. "Go on, tell me. Talk."
>
> "A big black fish like a giant dolphin. I saw it in the distance when our boat was out to sea. I saw it break through the water. It looked…" My Uncle Melvyn paused.
>
> "Go on," my grandmother urged him gently.
>
> "Like a woman." […]
>
> "The Orehu," said my grandmother.[…] "The mermaid. The Orehu. She called your son home." (8-9)

Melvyn's personal experience narrative of seeing the "mermaid" before Alan's death provides an opportunity within the novel for the author to include cultural beliefs relayed by an elder. Personal experience narratives are a common folkloric genre that engage both the teller and the receiver in transmitting through narrative of events meaningful to the teller but that may also have significance to the larger audience and community.

Melvyn's account of what happened before Alan's death, in this case, is vital to the progression of the funerary ritual within the novel, and also important to further Sara's interest in and understanding of her own cultural history and folkloric beliefs. In addition, the episode also shows how information is relayed in a seemingly natural way. First, Melvyn shares his version of what happened right before Alan dies, and adds that he thought her saw a mermaid. Sara's grandmother adds a bit of cultural knowledge related to the community's shared beliefs about mermaids. Then, that belief in mermaids is later explained in more detail by Sara's father, who tells Sara that Orehu is one of gods of the Waraos, a cultural

group from South America that used to canoe to Trinidad to sell goods (10).

While the funerary ritual—wake—episode facilitates community bonding, communitas and reintegration for many members of the community, it does not have the same effect for all participants. At the conclusion of the wake we, the readers, are told that Sara's grandmother has broken one of the major tenets of the funerary process: she does not cry. This break from established social codes and gender roles sets up an intriguing look into expected modes of behavior, especially when looked at as an "introduction" to the rest of the narrative because of its positioning in the first chapter. Although Alan's father transgresses within the ritual frame by crying profusely, yelling, and blaming his son as part of his own individual mourning experience, he is still accepted by the community. However, when Sara's grandmother also transgresses her ascribed "social role" of female mourner and does not perform that role properly, i.e., by not crying, she is ostracized. Not only does the author mention several times throughout the novel that Sara's grandmother does not cry at the funeral, but Sara

herself muses over this fact at several points. As in *Annie John*, the positioning of death and a funeral at the beginning of the novel works with the theme of separation and the beginning of Sara's advance into adulthood, as she embarks from her home to pursue an education in Wisconsin.

These selections from the beginning of the novel show a reversal of roles generally associated with funerary rituals as described by several ethnographers in the Caribbean. Instead of the women performing the "wailing" that is a common element of the wake, the men in this text do so as a testament to their rage. In addition, although the other women present cry softly, Sara's grandmother does not cry at all. This detail seems to haunt Sara for most of her childhood and into her adult life. Her grandmother, already viewed as "mannish" by the other women in the community, takes on the expected male role of not crying at Alan's funeral. As Sara explains, "My grandmother remained in stony silence. Not a word of consolation. Not a tear in sympathy" (8). The inversion of gender roles as part of the wake ritual described in the novel introduces an uneasy feeling for Sara that continues throughout the novel. Sara

is not sure of her place in her community, and the fact that her grandmother did not cry at Alan's funeral only increases her feeling of insecurity. Sara's expectations of how her grandmother should perform in the funeral ritual were not satisfied because her grandmother acted independently and subverted her traditionally sanctioned mourning role as female/woman/grandmother. By not crying at her grandson's funeral, Sara's sense of self, place and role in the family and community becomes unstable, and she carries this feeling with her to the United States.

Beginning the novel with the grandmother's transgression sets up a feeling of uncertainty for the audience and for Sara as we follow her through her transformation from girl/child living on the island of Trinidad to adult/young woman being educated in the United States. When viewed in relation to Brian Sutton Smith and Victor Turner's analyses of the Steam Valve Theory, the grandmother's lack of crying at Alan's funeral acts as a learning moment for Sara. Her grandmother behaves in a disorderly way, and because Sara is familiar with the local funerary ritual customs and appropriate individual and

community action, she is surprised at her grandmother's behavior. Although she may not know exactly what the lesson is, Sara is aware of her grandmother's inappropriate performance of her socially sanctioned mourning role, and she dwells on this experience, referring and reflecting on her grandmother's lack of crying at the funeral throughout the novel.

The grandmother's inverted role as mourning female can also be analyzed using Drewal's theory of play within ritual. As mentioned earlier, Drewal suggests that the importance of play within the ritual context is that play intervenes in the ritual situation resulting in a transformation of the meaning and function of the ritual (17). In this instance, the grandmother "plays" with her own role within the ritual and transforms the ritual, at least as far as Sara is concerned, from an opportunity to mourn the loss of her cousin and eventually feel relief and a stronger sense of communal bonding, to a ritual that encourages and reinforces Sara's own insecurities.

This feeling of insecurity is further increased when Sara tells her grandmother that she has been accepted to an

American college, and she will be leaving the island. Sara is sure, because of the example introduced at Alan's wake and funeral, that her grandmother will not cry when Sara tells her the news; however, her confidence is shattered when she tells her grandmother and for the first time in her life, Sara witnesses her grandmother cry.

Sara leaves the island uncertain of her place in the family, of her role as granddaughter and young woman, and her responsibilities as a female member of her family. However, when she finally gets to the school in Wisconsin, she befriends Courtney, a fellow Caribbean scholarship student, who is very much connected to her roots and her homeland. Through various Obeah rituals performed with Courtney, including rituals relating to death, and beliefs associated with death, dying, and spirits, Sara begins to grow her own roots and becomes firmly planted in her identity as a Caribbean woman. The (re)connection to her Caribbean and ancestral roots is the main function of the folklore-like funerary rituals and beliefs included in the novel, and as Sara learns and recalls more about her culture, traditions, and beliefs, she establishes a clear

sense of self and identity that embraces rather than shuns her Caribbean roots.

The first major scene where Sara's growing connections to her cultural past and traditions are highlighted occurs when Sara finds out that she is pregnant, and Courtney offers to help her out of the situation by performing an Obeah ritual abortion. As part of the set-up for the ritual, Courtney has lit six thick candles on top of the bookcase in her room. The preparations for the abortion ritual, and the use of candles in particular, set the stage for Sara to remember her own participation in a funerary/remembrance ceremony as a young girl. Her memory is relayed in the novel and acts to not only further our understanding of Sara as protagonist, but the memory also serves as a moment of cultural transmission and written documentation of the way one potential performance (albeit fictional) of an All Souls Day ritual was enacted. Sara remembers that:

> When I was a girl, we put candles on the graves of our dead relatives on All Souls Day. Dressed like a bride in my First Communion clothes, I clutched my bouquet

> of white candles and trailed behind my mother and aunts along the tiny, paved paths that divided the cemetery into street blocks. Once, kneeling beside Bertha's grave [one of her dead relatives], a sudden breeze stirred the flames on the candles I had planted in a cross in the earth that covered Bertha. I felt the heat first, rising from Bertha. Then I saw yellow flames licking the frills on my white organza dress. (231)

This memory includes not only Sara's memory and connection she made between the candles, death, and her own mortality caused a fear of fire that momentarily delay the beginning of the abortion ritual, but it is also a significant episode that relays much about Sara's past and folklore specific to her heritage and home community. The scene includes descriptions of multigeneric folkloric elements involved in the ritual. One of the genres that is included is material culture, which is comprised in this scene of Sara's white First Communion clothes and the white candles she carries. In addition, the episode also describes the context of the remembrance ceremony through physical

movements/spatial placement of people and graves: Sara followed the other female elders of her community, including her mother and aunts, in a single file line into the cemetery. Once inside, they follow a tiny path that "divide[s] the cemetery into street blocks" which alludes to the way the cemetery was divided into neighborhoods where the people lived during their lives on earth. This reinforces the belief held throughout the Caribbean that life and death are not mutually exclusive, and that a connection between the two remains. Finally, we are introduced to the enactment of ritual elements: Sara places the lit candles in the shape of a cross on top of Bertha's, her ancestor, grave.

The inclusion of this memory in the text is significant because it provides another instance in the novel where the reader is exposed to a funerary tradition—the remembrance of the dead on All Souls Day—that is carried out by the women in Sara's family. It is a ritual which carries with it significance associated with African and Caribbean cosmological beliefs concerned with honoring and remembering the ancestors. In this way, the passage

becomes a teaching moment through a written document: it shows the reader when to perform a remembrance ceremony, on All Souls Day. In addition, it tells the reader how to do it and who should do it: the women in the family dress in white and in a single line, walk through the cemetery placing lit, white candles in the form of crosses on the graves of the ancestors. Most importantly, the episode relays the cultural belief that it is vital to remember the ancestors that came before and have moved on through death. Reading the episode in this way provides one example of a possible way to perform a remembrance ritual; however, the most significant things to take from it are the necessity of performing rituals and remembering the ancestors, and that it is the *women* in the community that are responsible for performing this duty.

In addition to serving as a moment of cultural transmission and a written teaching document, the episode also provides an example of transgression and the effects of transgressing on the individual. Sara participates in the ritual with the older female members of the family and experiences separation from them and, by association,

separation from her cultural connectedness and identity when her dress catches on fire while she is enacting the ritual. For Sara, the ritual then becomes associated with fear: of death, of fire, of candles, and of death and funerary rituals that include candles. Sara's experience during this remembered ritual can be seen as a moment of transgression in another ritual ceremony in which things did not go as planned. As in Alan's funeral, a woman in the group, Sara this time, did not perform her role accordingly. Although Sara did not have control over the candle flames catching her dress on fire, the result of the accident is her dis-connection with the community of women within which she participated in the ritual. Social solidarity and re-integration, in this case, were not achieved because Sara left the ritual scared and negatively affected to the point of wanting to avoid important ritual tools—candles—in the future.

In addition to the memory of the All Souls Day ritual, Sara also has a vision of mermaids during the abortion ritual that reconnects her with Alan's death and funeral. In Sara's vision, the mermaids circle around her and seduce

her to follow them down into the water and to her death. However, Sara is rescued by the sea cow—the goddess Orehu—who "wrapped her dwarfed arms around me and held me close, and then, in one swift movement, she lifted me upward to the surface of the sea" (235). As Sara awakens, she is confused and talks to Courtney about the mermaids and the sea cow. Courtney, however, knows that Sara is trying to say that she feels bad about going through with the ritual. Courtney reassures her, however, by relaying Caribbean beliefs regarding the spirits of unborn children, saying that: "Spirits don't die, not even the spirits of unborn children. She'll be with you again" (236). In this scene, Sara is bombarded with dreams and memories that combine funerary rituals that she has participated in from her past with cultural beliefs and traditions that she tries to hang on to. This scene is significant because it demonstrates Sara's struggle to find a sense of self and identity within her new surroundings while also maintaining a strong connection to her cultural and folkloric past. In this scene, the enactment of funerary rituals, both in the present and past, enable Sara to make that connection while

giving her strength to move into the future on her own terms.

Oral tradition and cultural heritage are central to Sara's identity, even as she tries to distance herself from her "roots" when she first begins college in Wisconsin. However, as she becomes more involved in her education and more aware of her position as a "representative" charity case from "the bush" in the school and, by extension, in the United States, Sara finds stronger connections to her home, her family, and her Caribbean and African Diasporic identity. She creates this (re)connection through memories of stories told to her by various members of her family and recollections of ritual performances she participated in back home, as well as through the performance of funerary rituals and shared cultural transmission of beliefs with Courtney.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of notions and beliefs about death and funerary rituals such as wakes, funerals and remembrance rituals in Caribbean women's literature serves many purposes. They work as moments of cultural transmission wherein the characters encompass the role of storyteller and tradition bearer and transmit cultural knowledge and history to members of the community in which the author is writing. They also become written documents of how and when to perform rituals pertaining to death, and to reinscribe appropriate gender roles and behaviors related to those rituals. In addition, as in *Beyond the Limbo Silence*, the reader is introduced to possibilities for transgression within the cultural framework, specifically relating to gender roles and codes of conduct expected at wakes and funerals.

The focus on death, dying and the remembrance of the ancestors is particularly important in contemporary Caribbean women's literature because of the prevalence of violence in the communities. The theme of death, dying, and respect for the past seems particularly vital to the traditions that Caribbean women writers, as contemporary tradition bearers, need to share with future generations and other readers that happen to see/read their works.

According to Caribbean scholar Tafari-Ama, the prevalence of violence in the Caribbean, and specifically in Jamaica, has created a resurgence of funerary ritual performances, specifically the wake. She believes that:

> As an institution of both rural and urban life, demonstrating strong African retentions, the wake not only encodes meanings of spiritual resistance but also provides a psychosocial coping mechanism for socialization; in addition, to seeing family members and friends who only come together on such occasions, eating fried fish and harddough bread, drinking coffee and chocolate tea, drinking alcoholic beverages and

> smoking marijuana, are some of the highly anticipated benefits of participation. (178)

Singing at the wake is extremely important, and "there is a sense of satisfaction if the ritual had gone on until the wee hours of morning. The departed soul should have been satisfied at the outpouring of energy, which would have sustained the singing mourners throughout the night[…] This tradition—the wake—might have died out as a cultural practice if it was not for the pervasiveness of violent deaths" (178-9). In addition to satisfying the departed soul with the outpouring of support, grief, and singing, "The wake also provides a space for cultural socialization" (186) which is vital to a community that some feel is losing it's sense of culture and tradition and that is simultaneously being ripped apart by violence.

By incorporating themes of death and dying, and including passages that characterize and describe the performance and enactment of funerary rituals, these Caribbean women writers are taking it upon themselves to perpetuate their culture's history, traditions, and beliefs through published written works. And it may be vital for

them to do so, as the contemporary, globalized world continues to push down on cultures everywhere, but especially for parts of the Caribbean where, as Jamaica Kincaid says, through her protagonist in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, "death is the only reality, for it is the only certainty, inevitable to all things" (228). For each of the women discussed earlier, Queenie, Hopie, and Pearlie in *QPH*, Annie in *Annie John*, and Sara in *Beyond the Limbo Silence*, death is a reality and a constant presence. Perhaps for these women, their creators, and even their readers, death is not the only reality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrahams, Roger D. "Storytelling Events: Wake Amusements and the Structure of Nonsense on St. Vincent." *The Journal of American Folklore* 95.378 (1982): 389-414. Web. *JStor.* 8 Jan 2010.

Akoma, Chiji. *Folklore in New World Black Fiction: Writing and the Oral Traditional Aesthetics.* Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2007. Print.

Anim-Addo, Joan, ed. *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writing.* London: Whiting and Birch Ltd, 1996. Print.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in post-colonial literatures, 2nd Edition.* New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Babcock, Barbara. *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society.* Introduction. Ithaca: Cornell Univeristy Press, 1978. Print.

Barber, Karin. "Text and Performance in Africa." *Oral Tradition* 20.2 (2005): 264-277. *Project Muse.* Web. Jan 2010.

Beardslee, Karen E. *Literary Legacies-Folklore Foundations. Selfhood and CulturalTradition in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century American Literature.* Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001. Print.

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

Cliff, Michelle. *No Telephone to Heaven.* New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987. Print.

Cole, Susan Letzler. *The Absent One: Mourning Ritual, Tragedy, and the Performance of Ambivalence.* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985. Print.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory.* New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Print.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Krik?Krak!* New York: Soho Press, Inc, 1991. Print.

Dash, J. Michael. *Culture and Customs of Haiti.* Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001. Print.

de Caro, Frank and Rosan Augusta Jordan. *Re-Situating Folklore: Folk Contexts and Twentieth Century Literature and Art.* Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004. Print.

Drewal, Margaret Thompson. *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992. Print.

Dundes, Alan. "The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture: Identification and Interpretation." *The Journal of American Folklore* 78. 308 (1965): 136-142. *JStor.* Web. 13 Jan. 2010.

Espinet, Ramabai, ed. *Creation Fire: A Cafra Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry.* Toronto: Sister Vision, 1990. Print.

Georges, Robert A., and Michael Owen Jones. *Folkloristics: An Introduction.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. Print.

Ghosh, Bishnupriya, and Brinda Bose, eds. *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film.* New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1997. Print.

Green, Sharon L. "On A Knife Edge: Sistren Theatre Collective, Grassroots Theatre, and Globalization." *small axe* 21 (October 2006): 105-118. *Project Muse.* Web. Oct 2008.

Green, Sharon L. "Sistren Theatre Collective: Struggling to Remain Radical in an Era of Globalization." *Project Muse.* Web. Oct 2008.

Hodges, Hugh. "Start-Over: Possession Rites and Healing Rituals in the Poetry of Lorna Goodison." *Research in African Literatures* 36.2 (Summer 2005): 19-32. *Project Muse.* Web. Jan. 2010.

Japtok, Martin, ed. *Postcolonial Perspectives on Women Writers From Africa, the Caribbean and the U.S.* Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc, 2003. Print.

Jones, Steven Swann. *Folklore and Literature in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies of Folklore in American Literature.* New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1984. Print.

Katrak, Ketu H. *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World.* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006. Print.

Kerns, Virginia. *Women and the Ancestors: Black Carib Kinship and Ritual.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997. Print.

Kincaid, Jamaica. *The Autobiography of My Mother.* New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1996. Print.

Marshall, Douglas A. "Behavior, Belonging and Belief: A Theory of Ritual Practice."*Sociological Theory* 20:3, November 2002. Web.

Maver, Igor, ed. *Diasporic Subjectivity and Cultural Brokering in Contemporary Postcolonial Literatures.* New York: Lexington Books, 2009. Print.

McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism.* New York: Manchester University Press, 2000. Print.

Olwig, Karen Fog. *Caribbean Journeys: An Ethnography of Migration and Home in Three Family Networks.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. Print.

Paton, Diana. "Obeah Acts: Producing and Policing the Boundaries of Religion in the Caribbean." *small axe* 28 (March 2009): 1-18. *Project Muse.* Web. Jan 2010.

Paul, Annie. "No Grave Cannot Hold My Body Down: Rituals of Death and Burial in Postcolonial Jamaica." *small axe* 23 (June 2007): 142-162. Web. *JStor.* Oct 2010.

Preston, Cathy Lynn, ed. *Folklore, Literature, and Cultural Theory: Collected Essays.* New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1995. Print.

Puri, Shalini. *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Print.

Pyne-Timothy, Helen, ed. *The Woman, the Writer & Caribbean Society: Essays on Literature and Culture.* Los Angeles: Center for African American Studies, 1999. Print.

Rosenberg, Bruce A. *Folklore and Literature: Rival Siblings.* Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991. Print.

Scott, Helen. *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization: Fictions of Independence.* Burlington: Ashgate, 2006. Print.

Sistren Theatre Collective. *QPH*. Ed. Helen Gilbert. *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. 153-178. Print.

Smith, Jennifer J. "Birthed and Buried: Matrilineal History in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*." *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 9.1 (2009): 141-162. *Project Muse*. Web. Jan 2010.

Stitt, Jocelyn Fenton. "Gendered Legacies of Romantic Nationalism in the Works of Michelle Cliff." *Small axe* 24 (October 2007) 52-72. *Project Muse*. Web. Jan. 2010.

Toelken, Barre. *The Dynamics of Folklore*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996. Print.

Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Paj Publications, 1982. Print.

van Gennep, Arnold. *Rites of Passage*. Trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960. Print.

Walker, Keith L. "Art for Life's Sake: Rituals and Rights of Self and Other in the Theatre of Aime Cesaire." Eds. Paul Carter Harrison, Victor Leo Walker II, and Gus Edwards. *Black Theatre:Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. Print.

Wardle, Huon. *An Ethnography of Cosmopolitanism in Kingston, Jamaica*. Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983. Print.

Wisker, Gina. *Post-Colonial and African American Women's Writing: A Critical Introduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. Print.

Young, Jean. "Ritual Poetics and Rites of Passage in Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf.*" Eds. Paul Carter Harrison, Victor Leo Walker II, and Gus Edwards. *Black Theatre:Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. Print.