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Unifying the Oppressed Through Biofiction

Why does Zora Neale Hurston combine the histories of African Americans and Hebrews in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*? For what reason does Colum McCann include Frederick Douglass in his otherwise Irish-centered novel *TransAtlantic*? Furthermore, why does Mario Vargas Llosa's protagonist repeatedly compare the oppression of the geographically disparate Irish, Congolese, and Amazonian people in *Dream of the Celt*? By closing the gaps between cultures and continents, these three bionovels convert the story of separately oppressed groups into a global story. The Lukács model — a theory formulated by Georg Lukács which asserts that historical facts and figures should not be changed in fictional narratives — is violated by these bionarratives which appropriate the interiority of historical figures and occasionally fictionalize historical details in order to refute the ethnically singular narratives of popular history. My main argument is that by freeing themselves from the Lukács model and violating popular history, these narratives are then allowed to synthesize stories of oppression which are traditionally kept separate by the dominant historical narrative. While referring to Michael Lackey's groundbreaking work *Biographical Fiction*, I will begin this paper by demonstrating how popular history is often used as a tool to instill racial inferiority into minority groups. This section will conclude with an assertion that in the 21st century postcolonial novelists must be, at least partially, biofiction novelists if they wish to overturn the dominant historical narrative. I support this argument by showing how freed from popular history, biofiction allows Hurston to deconstruct the concept of God's "chosen people" concept; McCann is able to deconstruct the

dividing of histories by race; and Llosa is able to deconstruct the colonial definition of “civilization.” All three of these authors replace these narratives with more inclusive concepts which form alliances amongst the globally oppressed.

I. The Oppressive Historical Novel

Forcing an ethnic group into submission requires the oppressor to convince the oppressed that they should not have a voice; this goal is most effectively reached by diminishing the self-worth of minorities by distorting their historical consciousness. The goal of postcolonial fiction, literature responding to the cultural and historical legacy of colonialism, is to privilege narratives that are freed from this system of oppression by way of regaining control of the historical narrative. I will demonstrate in this section how self-determination is nearly impossible to achieve through the historical novel or biography as defined by the 20th century philosopher Lukács in his 1955 work *The Historical Novel*.

His unflattering formulation of the biographical novel functions within a paradigm where history’s events and people are regarded as sacred, and therefore any smearing of history’s dominant narrative is an invalid form of fiction. Accordingly, the Lukács model views the biographical novel as “a bastardized version of the historical novel,” because by daring to appropriate the interiority of historical figures, the biographical novel puts “excessive focus on the psychological subject’s interiority” and therefore “necessarily distorts and misrepresents the objective proportions of history” (Lackey, 1). Lukács suggests that a “mediocre, prosaic hero” is the only option for a protagonist in a novel involved with history, and that while “actual historical figures can appear in the novel” they should be limited to “the periphery” (Lackey, 6). These are all parameters followed by the historical novel and not followed by the biographical novel. Overall, the Lukács model sanctions and protects the use of history as a tool of oppression

by debunking its use in biographical fiction, a form of fiction which would allow oppressed peoples a vehicle for challenging the popular historical narrative. Certainly, there is little room for argument in the fact that the popular historical narrative is a common tool of oppression. At the 1968 colloquium titled “the Uses of History in Fiction,” author Ralph Ellison explains this circumstance. He lectures, “Here in the United States we have had a political system which wouldn’t allow me to tell my story officially. Much of it is not in the history textbooks” (Lackey, 141). Indeed, not only do the public school textbooks of Ellison’s home state not tell his story under the colonial “political system,” they actively oppressed it. For example, history textbooks from the 1950’s and 60’s lauded the Ku Klux Klan “for keeping ‘foolish Negroes’ out of government” and plantation slaves as “happy” (Jonathan Zimmerman, 46). As one can see here, the historian completely distorts the Black’s narrative by underplaying past injustices — aiding the power system by justifying their present oppression. This example is not an anomaly but part of a systematic colonial effort; for example a geography textbook from the same era of New York public education displays a map of Africa and in the margins explains how the political boundaries came to be, saying “the greater part of the continent has come under the control of European nations because the native people are very backward” (Jonathan Zimmerman, 53). In other words, the voice of history is being used here to assert that Africa’s colonial oppression is justified because Africans are not capable of self-determination. These examples are important because if history cannot be violated in the Lukács model, then this history must also be left unchallenged.

At the same 1968 colloquium, Ellison asserts that fiction is the best response to the colonial weaponization of popular history. To support his case, he points out that the veiled critiques of popular history through fiction’s ahistorical symbols have “tried to tell that part of

the human truth which we could not accept or face up to in much historical writing because of social, racial, and political considerations” (Lackey, 141). Indeed, that is exactly what Ellison’s 1952 novel *Invisible Man* does, forcing readers to confront a reality of the Black condition that is totally different than the one presented in popular history.

Today, Ellison’s weaponized version of fiction has been mostly castrated by the ascendance of postmodernism. For example, the “Brotherhood,” Ellison’s socialist symbol in *Invisible Man*, is too “general and abstract” for the typical postmodernist who would be suspicious that Ellison is using this symbol to bias his readers towards his own “ideological and/or political agenda” (Lackey, 6). As Lackey points out, “in our postmodernist age, we have become more suspicious of such overarching, ahistorical symbols,” a fact which renders Ellison’s fiction, relying on vague symbols rather than concrete historical figures and situations, increasingly obsolete in the postmodernist age (Lackey, 6). Therefore, fiction that relies solely on empirically disconnected symbols is no longer sufficient in fighting the historical narrative.

Deeper analysis of Ellison’s arguments for ahistorical fiction reveal that his insistence on the form is at least partially rooted in an implicit acceptance of the Lukács model. For example, although Ellison rejects the “truth” set forth in dominant history, he defends its sacred status when he chides William Styron, author of the controversial bio-novel *Confessions of Nat Turner*, for naming his protagonist after a real historical figure. Ellison reasons that an author of fiction “must lie and disguise a historical figure” and that:

“Damn it, there is a *problem* about recreating historical figures. That’s why I said it’s poison to the novelist; he shouldn’t bother them. Don’t appropriate the names. Don’t move into the historian’s arena, because you can only be slaughtered there” (Lackey, 157).

Ellison has just admitted previously that the “political system” is setup to deny his story, so of course the official historians of this system would try to slaughter him for disregarding their authority and re-appropriating history. When Ellison goes on to concoct a theoretical novel for his argument, one that uses Robert E. Lee for a protagonist, I argue that he unwittingly provides further evidence that history *should* be used in fiction when he says, “I’d damn well be very careful about what I fed my reader” because: “Lee is no longer simply an historical figure. He is a figure who lives within us. He is a figure which shapes ideals of conduct and of forbearance and of skill, military and so on. This is *inside*, and not something that writers can merely be arbitrary about” (Lackey, 145). My point is that if the pro-slavery Robert E. Lee lives inside the psyche of Americans like Ellison says, should this be something that is left, unquestioned, to “live within us” and therefore program our national consciousness? Overall, fiction cannot fight history if it is not willing to move into the “historian’s arena.” This is exactly the problem which postcolonial novelists can solve by appropriating history in their work.

Furthermore, Ellison himself points out that the barrier that is maintained between the fiction writer and the historian can be, at times, quite arbitrary. He muses on the fact that in both pursuits the writer “can suppress, he can emphasize, he can project, and he can carve out his artifact” for whatever agenda he desires (Lackey, 135). Certainly, a good illustration of this can be found in a 2016 textbook implemented in the public school system of Texas. The educational textbook clearly uses the toolbox Ellison cites in order to support a racist agenda, underplaying Christopher Columbus's role in the genocide of the Arawak people and asserting that Chicano activists "adopted a revolutionary narrative that opposed Western civilization and wanted to destroy this society" (Wang). Clearly, the weaponization of history has continued on in the same fashion as it did in Ellison’s time. Yet, as mentioned before, the major difference between

Ellison's time and today is that the postmodern novelist is much more likely to acknowledge the absurdity of the Lukács model in light of examples like the Texan textbook. In fact, many would use this text as an example of why the Lukács model is outdated, and would say "You are not giving me anything that is *nonfiction* even though you pretend that it is history and that it is somehow above or outside fiction" (Lackey, 235). For example, Bruce Duffy, author of the critically acclaimed bionovels *The World As I Found It* and *Disaster Was My God*, articulates this postmodernist view by saying that:

"To me, Lukács has a very totalitarian, Soviet-style view of history, very out of step with the times. Just think of the Web in which ordinary people directly participate in the news process, with immediate access to almost any facts. True, they may be less scholarly in a classical sense, but they are also more savvy and cynical about the news and received history than they were in Lukács' day" (Lackey, 217-218).

In this quote, Duffy sheds light on the increasing trend of democratizing history in the 21st century, describing how the postmodernist age is shifting the paradigm — making history "less scholarly" and therefore less elite by wrenching it from the hands of the historians and therefore allowing it to be appropriated and examined through other formats as well, in this case fiction. Therefore, the rise in popularity of the biographical fiction genre signals the increasing liberation of oppressed voices from the silencing force of dominant history. This liberation to tamper with history has allowed postcolonial authors to deconstruct certain aspects of dominant history. For example Hurston tackles the "chosen people" concept; McCann challenges the division of people by phenotype; and Llosa meditates on the validity of the popular definition of "civilization." Meanwhile, all three authors cross colonialism's artificially separated narratives in order to depict the intertwined stories of the oppressed.

II: Deconstructing the “Chosen People” Narrative

Hurston defiles the Lukács model by violating what is arguably the most revered historical text of all time: the Bible. Hurston’s 1939 biographical novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain* muddles the racial identity of Moses, making him Egyptian by birth, Hebrew by affiliation, and African American through vernacular, therefore undermining the Bible’s assertion that the Levite Moses was put on Earth to lead the “chosen” Levite people. Furthermore, Hurston depicts God as a construct of Moses, implemented in order to claim a “chosen people” and enslave them. My main point is that Hurston’s Biblical narrative purposefully muddles race and reveals God as a tool of fascism in order to denounce the “chosen people” concept, while using a dual temporal system to denounce the Third Reich and U.S. racism. Furthermore, the section of the narrative in which Moses “crosses over” national borders and is temporarily released from the “chosen people” concept reveals the narrative’s alternative to tribalism: by shedding nationalism and its religious, racial, and social trappings, humans can be freed from the evils inherent to the “chosen people” system. This solution stands in stark contrast to the route Moses ultimately takes.

To begin, Hurston purposely confuses her readers in order to destabilize the colonial boundaries of race. For example, the opening lines spoken collectively by Hebrew women are “Have mercy! Lord, have mercy on my poor soul” (Hurston, 1). This quote is unmistakably an example of African American vernacular yet it is coming from the mouths of Hebrews. This characteristic of the narrative is the most explicit form of race fusing in the novel. As Deborah E. McDowell acknowledges its existence in her essay “Lines of Descent/ Dissenting Lines,” pointing out how a “triadic parallel between ancient Hebrew slavery, Negro slavery, and females oppression” is constructed in the first half of the novel, something which effectively formulates a

Judeo-Black fusion (McDowell, 13). Therefore, when the narrator recounts the reason why the Hebrew women are lamenting, saying the Pharaoh had “entered the bedrooms of Israel” and that the “Hebrew womb had fallen under the heel of the pharaoh,” Hurston concurrently represents the systematic rape of African Americans, Hebrews, and women by government (Hurston, 1).

Fusing these three groups allows Hurston to make a fusion of their oppressors as well. Hurston uses a dual-temporal-truth system, in which the historical oppression of African Americans, Hebrews, and women in ancient Egypt allude to their current oppression in the present. McDowell agrees that the novel contains a “political allegory analogizing Hebrew oppression in biblical antiquity, Black oppression in the contemporary United States, and Jewish oppression in Nazi Germany” (McDowell, 20). This allegory is clearly demonstrated in the narrative’s depiction of the Pharaoh’s decree. The document reads: “1. Israel, you are slaves from now on,” the declaration going on to cite stipulations like “a. No sleeping after dawn. Fifty lashes for being late to work” and “b. One hundred lashes for sassing the bossman” (Hurston, 2). While describing the ways in which the ancient Hebrews are to be oppressed, the declaration’s use of the African American colloquialism “bossman” and the mention of whipping also conjures the image of plantation slavery to readers familiar with the historical atrocities of the southern United States. The layering of meaning does not stop there, as the narrator describes the ramifications of this frightening declaration by concluding that the “Hebrews were disarmed and prevented from becoming citizens of Egypt, they found out that they were aliens, and from one new decree to the next they sank lower and lower” (Hurston, 2). Certainly, it would be difficult to read this in 1939 and not think of the 1935 *Nuremberg Laws: Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor* which similarly disarmed Hebrews of any autonomy and prevented them from becoming citizens of Germany. For example, section 4 reads “1. Jews are forbidden to

display the Reich and the national flag or the national colors. 2. On the other hand they are permitted to display the Jewish colors. The exercise of this right is protected by the state” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). The Third Reich’s *Nuremberg Laws* closely mirror the Pharaoh’s laws in Hurston’s novel, both making Hebrews into aliens and degrading them through law. Taken together, all of these examples demonstrate how the narrative is using its dual-temporal-truth system to link the oppression of Blacks in the American South and the Hebrews under the Third Reich with the ancient oppression of the Hebrews in Egypt, illustrating how the same strain of continual subjugation suffered by Judeo-Black peoples has continued throughout the ages.

Law is not the most important tool in implementing this continual subjugation. The novel reveals the source of Judeo-Black oppression as being rooted in the “chosen people” concept, the belief that a race is “chosen” by God and therefore inherently more valuable than other races. Hurston demonstrates this tool of the system by showing how the Judeo-Blacks are systematically excluded from this category because Egyptians (and therefore Nazis and the U.S. government) keeps strict control on the access to God. The character of Amram, Hebrew slave, alludes to this overarching pattern, says, “Horus may be all those good things to the Egyptians, brother, but that sun-god is just something to fry our backs” (Hurston, 3). In other words, Amram is catching on to the fact that the elite Egyptians keep a monopoly on access to the divine in order to keep their authority secure. This authority allows the Pharaoh himself to claim the status of a divine being and violate the masses with impunity. Like Moses, the Pharaoh is the sole communicator of divine law and therefore he is a precursor to Moses and his Ten Commandments within the novel. In all, the narrative demonstrates early on that the key component to the Pharaoh's dismantling of Hebrew autonomy is found in his efforts to deny

them access to the gods. Accordingly, the narrative recounts how “the dishonesty and the wickedness of the Hebrews had reached the gods in their remote retreats and the gods had cried out for cleansing. The gods had announced emphatically that they would visit no altars which Hebrews were allowed to approach. Hebrews must not approach a single temple in Egypt. Neither must they build temples to Egyptian gods in Goshen” (Hurston, 20). Surely, this passage symbolizes a weaponization of the divine. The Egyptians are “chosen” to have full access to the gods while the authorities assert that the gods insist contact with the Hebrews would pollute the gods and therefore the Hebrews are “unchosen.”

As an Egyptian, and therefore a “chosen” person, the narrative introduces Moses as an arm of the Pharaoh’s oppressive agenda. Indeed, as a military leader of Egypt, Moses is busy spreading the dominance of his gods throughout various human societies, his conquests helping “The might of Egypt” stretch “across the world” (Hurston, 57). The narrator recounts how “Ethiopia was conquered; Assyria kept in fear, Babylonia was terrorized. All tributes flowed towards Ramses and Memphis and the returning armies of Egypt staggered home under the weight of booty and led slaves in hordes” (Hurston, 57). The Pharaoh, Egyptian God-King, and orchestrator of all these conquests, reveals through his regime’s actions that divinity is something which requires submission and subjugation of all “non-chosen” peoples. Evidently, Moses is an instrument of this colonial agenda as he subjugates others for the Pharaoh’s glory.

Of course, race is critical to this mission of global subjugation, and therefore Moses is politically sabotaged when the Hebrews claim him as their own. He is swiftly ousted from the “chosen” people’s umbrella of safety. “Hebrew? I a Hebrew? Whatever put that notion in your head?” he responds when his wife accuses him of being Jewish (Hurston, 63). As he reflects on

his new Jewish identity, he is awakened to the reality of life as a “non-chosen” person; he thinks to himself:

“I feel the cursing thought of the law and power. I had always felt the beneficence of law and power and never stopped to consider that it had any other side. It is a sword with two edges. Never mind whether it is directed against me honestly or not. That has nothing to do with its power to injure me” (Hurston, 73).

Moses is now forced to consider the condition of the Hebrew in ancient Egypt, while the dual-temporal-truth system simultaneously puts him in a position symbolic of an African American in the U.S.A., and a Hebrew person in Germany as well. All three of these groups are incredibly vulnerable to the law as they are without God’s special protection. Yet by exiling Moses from the “chosen race,” the Egyptians have made a formidable mistake: Moses knows the rules of the game — he can access the divine. Alongside his ambitious mentor Jethro, Moses is capable of constructing a God in order to regain his “chosen people” status.

Through the depiction of this process, Hurston’s narrative reveals God as an artificial construct and tool of oppression by which one can elect a certain people as “chosen” and therefore allow them the “non-chosen” peoples. For example, when Jethro first suggests Moses take up life as a preacher, Moses responds,

“But, Jethro, everywhere you go, the people got gods already. They won’t hear about no more. In my travels I been way past the Jordan into the land of the Amorites, and the Canaanites and the Philistines and they all got gods that suit them. Who would listen to us? Where would you get the people to make converts out of” (Hurston, 121)?

In other words, each of these tribes has constructed a god to serve them as “chosen people” and therefore provide them with protection. Privy to this system, Jethro cites the vulnerability of the

Hebrews, who have been systematically prevented from having gods of their own, a characteristic which makes the Hebrews a perfect prey for Jethro and Moses's new God. Jethro suggests, "How about them Israelites? They're down there in Egypt without no god of their own and no more protection than a bare headed mule. How come you can't go down there and lead them out" (Hurston, 121)? By comparing them to livestock who need to be led out, Jethro reveals the predatory nature of choosing "chosen people." His pretension towards charity becomes transparent when he says things like "Those people, I mean those Hebrews, need help, Moses. And besides, we could convert 'em, maybe. That really would be something — a big crowd like that coming through religion, all at one time" (Hurston, 122). Jethro's use of "those people" is depicted as a slip, referring to a racist colloquialism of the U.S.A. often used with a negative and essentialized slant to refer to African Americans and other minorities as a monolithic category . Furthermore, his appeal of being charitable towards the Hebrews seems to be a thin veneer that covers his vision of the Hebrew person as chattel for capital, each convert contributing to the strength of Jethro's God.

Aware of this agenda, Moses continues to resist the idea of becoming a holy leader, saying "but I don't want to be the preacher. I'm through trying to regulate other folks' business. There ain't no future to it at all — just a whole lot of past" (Hurston, 122). With this quote, the novel reveals its true intentions: depicting the history of God as a tool of domination and therefore rebuking its future use. Through the dual-temporal-truth system that alludes to the Third Reich and American slavery, the narrative suggests that history is, in fact, repeating itself throughout the ages. Indeed, even within the novel history repeats itself with Moses subjugating people under the banner of Egyptian Gods and then under the protection of the Judaic God. Both sides are revealed to construct divinity as a means of oppressing their opposition.

This cycle is further supported by the moments in which Moses reveals the tendencies of a genocidal maniac. Jethro encourages this mindset in Moses by belittling those around him, especially women in order to elevate Moses's feelings of self-importance. For example, when Moses marries into Jethro's family, Jethro even belittles his own daughter, telling Moses "you are an over-average man, Moses, I hate to see you wasted on a woman" (Hurstun, 105). Further reinforcing the God-King status of Moses, Jethro even begins to belittle himself in front of the leader, saying things like:

"No, Moses. You are a hundred times my superior. The great I AM took the soul of the world and wrapped some flesh around it and that made you. You are the one being waited for on this mountain. You have the eyes to see and the ears to hear. You are the sun of the mountain. The mountain has waited for the man" (Hurstun, 105).

Here, Jethro is conflating the ego of Moses with complements meant to instill a messiah-complex so that Moses will view nature as something below him on the natural hierarchy. He wants Moses to believe that he alone has the authority and the perception capable of organizing society. For example, Jethro identifies Moses with the sun and is therefore staging a subtle coup in which Moses deposes the Egyptian sun-God Horus. Furthermore, Jethro is claiming that the mountain is submitted to Moses, "waiting" for him in fact. Mountains are a symbol of nature's strength and therefore its submission to Moses symbolizes man's power dominating over the natural world. Eventually, Jethro's stoking of Moses's ego works and the latter accepts the position on the mountaintop. The narrative relates how:

"Moses sat up on the mountain passing nations through his mind, constructing a global system. Way late in the day he climbed up to a place where he had been resting every afternoon for a long time. The Earth, latecomer to humanity, not having seen the

beginnings; no context; So he went on up putting words into the mouths of the various little creatures that he saw on the way. What these creatures had to say about people had plenty of seasoning” (Hurston, 144).

In other words, Moses is now a “Man of the Mountain,” his physical elevation denoting his social elevation as a god-king, who is looking down on the world and orchestrating it into “a global system.” His method of organization is race, and he accordingly divides the globe into nations, made up of “chosen” and “unchosen” people. As encouraged by Jethro, Moses pretends his man-made system predates the natural world. Certainly, asserting that “Earth is a latecomer to humanity” shows this paradigm of man controlling and making the natural order. Indeed, the natural world becomes a puppet of the god-king as he anthropomorphizes it to suit his own purposes. Unsurprisingly, nature from then on tells him what he wants to hear about people, apparently having “plenty of seasoning” when it says it. Moses’s subsequent actions indicate that these “truths” are constructed in order to allow Moses to subjugate other people with the power of divine law. By fashioning himself as the instrument of God and therefore the ultimate authority, Moses becomes a fascist and the Hebrews are enslaved by God rather than liberated.

Evidence for this interpretation can be found in Hurston’s letter to Carl Van Veghten, in which Hurston cites how the Hebrews are violated and abused by the Biblical commentary which describes them as “stiff-necked” and as a “generation of evil people” for not listening to the laws of Moses (Kaplan, 529). Hurston tells her friend that “nobody seems to consider that the Hebrews did not value those laws” and that Moses’s God was “forced on them” (Kaplan, 529). She continues that “It is all too evident that Moses did not care a fig for those Hebrew people. Moses had worked out an idea for a theocratic government, and the Hebrews were just so the available laboratory material” (Kaplan, 529). Indeed, this process of planning is shown in the

scene where Moses constructs his own natural law upon the mountain. Taking this into account, it is reasonable to assert that Hurston's narrative subverts the symbol of Moses from an archetype of heroism to an archetype of a tyrant as she depicts him carrying out these laws. This subversion certainly would be striking to the Black community in Hurston's time.

Indeed, by this point, the reader may wonder whether the Judea-Black fusion still has a function in the narrative. Ellison certainly did not think it did. In the August 5, 1941, issue of *New Masses*, Ellison panned Hurston, asserting that "For Negro fiction *Moses, Man of the Mountain* did nothing" (McDowell, 10). I disagree, and assert that Hurston was addressing the African American community: my main argument is that the Hebrew's use of Black vernacular creates a Judeo-Black fusion so that when the historical figure of Moses is subverted so is the "Liberation Theology" that appropriated the story of Moses. "Liberation Theology" is defined in the Online Oxford English Dictionary as "A theory, originating amongst Roman Catholic theologians in Latin America, which interprets liberation from social, political, and economic oppression as an anticipation of ultimate salvation" ("liberation theology"). It is a movement that spread to Black America and Hurston's narrative is strongly rebuking this movement which transforms Moses into a champion of Negro liberation. A popular Negro spiritual from the 19th century, used by Harriet Tubman (who was nicknamed Moses herself) as a code song on the Underground Railroad, illustrates why Hurston's narrative is so fixated on debunking the "chosen" people concept that is inherent to the African American version of "Liberation Theology:"

*"The Lord, by Moses, to Pharaoh said: Oh! let my people go
If not, I'll smite your first-born dead—Oh! let my people go
Oh! go down, Moses*

Away down to Egypt's land

And tell King Pharaoh

To let my people go” (Lockwood).

In this song, Moses is aiding the “chosen” Hebrews by threatening the “unchosen” Egyptian babies. Therefore, using a dual-temporal-truth system, Black Moses would aid Black Americans by turning them into a “chosen” people while smiting and “unchoosing” the children of White Americans. Hurston’s narrative in which Moses is depicted as a fascist with no race loyalty rebukes this thought system in which God “chooses” one ethnicity at the expense of another. This critique of categorization according to race is consistent with the themes of Hurston’s previous anthropological studies with Franz Boas and essays like “How it Feels to be Colored Me.” Therefore, in all, one can assume that Hurston’s message is that to appropriate Moses into the Negro’s “internal history of values”* is to internalize the same logic that warranted their own subjugation and genocide while enslaving themselves to a new master of their own kind.

Accordingly, once Moses is “re-chosen,” this time as a Hebrew, he becomes the Biblical Moses which Hurston maligns. Unsurprisingly, this version of Moses is depicted as a power hungry fascist rather than as a Biblical liberator. He is the one Hurston decries in her letter to Van Veghten in which she asserts that Moses, in an effort to implement his new system, was “responsible for the actual death of at least a half million of the people in his efforts to force his laws upon them. 3,000 were slaughtered right at Sinai in the very beginning” (Kaplan, 529). Hurston alludes to the fact that this version of Moses is similar to the one she critiqued in her letter. The evidence can be found in the novel’s “Author’s Note,” which says Moses alone had “the power to command God, to go to a peak of a mountain and there demand of Him laws with

which to govern a nation” (Hurston, vii). Of course, this governance is implemented by terror and violence rather than God’s love.

As mentioned before, Moses carries his agenda out with his techniques of subjugation learned in Egypt; keeping a tight hold on divinity in order to implement its power for personal gain. For example, when Moses and Jethro are constructing God, spending “hours talking over meaning and symbols,” Moses relates how the Egyptians had a sacred bull “with unknown history” and how “The priests in selecting the young bull for worship always pretended that it had appeared in their midst mysteriously, by divine guidance. No one was supposed to know anything about its origin. Divine origin was claimed for it” (Hurston, 98). Keeping an air of secrecy in order to ensure he is the only one with access to the divine is a strategy that this passage suggests Moses and Jethro stole from the Egyptians. Accordingly, Moses utilizes a pillar of smoke, similar to a smoke screen, that follows Moses and that

“It made the voice of the unseen Moses speaking behind the altar seem like the voice of God. It seemed to the people that Moses but lifted his right hand and the cloud from Mount Horeb appeared upon the altar. So when Moses lifted his hand the smoke of the incense ceased to be smoke. It became the Presence. If it was not the actual Presence, then it enclosed and cloth the Presence. Finally, the smoke itself was deified. It was not understood so it became divine” (Hurston, 116).

Here it is shown how obscuring one’s actions, keeping the public in the dark and therefore wrapping oneself in mystery, allows for the creation of divinity. Moses exemplifies this tactic of keeping the public in the dark with his abuse of the Egyptians. While pretending to free the Hebrews, Moses simultaneously brings terror to the Egyptian public: conjuring plague after plague, torturing them for the assumed reason of retribution. In reality, Moses is most likely

following Jethro's advice and "practicing" his sorcery on the Egyptians in order to refine his techniques of terror, which will allow him to better control the Hebrews (Hurston, 122).

Accordingly, Moses uses his divine power to take away the sun, the embodiment of Horus falling victim to Moses, the new sun-god. With Moses in power, the Egyptians are no longer protected by "chosen" status and are therefore left in darkness for three days, a period of confusion and panic amongst the populace. Once the light returns, the narrator states that "what they saw with their eyes was terrible. Old ones, sick and poor; children, women trampled to death during the darkness when the nation was stampeded by fear. Bodies on steps and in doorways" (Hurston, 175). In this scene Moses demonstrates how as a Hebrew he can incite the same terror as when he was an Egyptian general. Hurston's epigraph recounts the Biblical passage that inspired this part of the story,

*"In all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent
him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and
to all his servants and to all his lands, and in
all that mighty hand and in all the great
terror which Moses showed in the sight of all
Israel"* (Deuteronomy 34:11-12)!

In the context of the 20th century, the displaying of a "mighty hand" and "great terror" recalls images of terrifying dictators and fascism.

This cruel behavior is not limited to his Egyptian enemies. After Moses's reign of terror on Egypt commences, he continues "practicing" with his "mighty hand" on the Hebrews. He tells his people that "If this is to be a great nation, it must be purged of such evil-doers, or all Israel must perish. You have your eager weapons, men. Spare not a soul who is guilty" (Hurston, 239).

Recalling *Mein Kampf* (which translates to “My Struggle”), the narrator remarks how “The struggle began” (Hurston, 239). The “struggle” is coded language for a mass-killing in which “for hours” unarmed civilians are “fleeing and screaming and hiding;” certainly, describing this endeavor as a “struggle” is an interesting rhetorical choice, as it appears like mass-killing (Hurston, 239). Of course, only one side of the narrative is being told at this point because Moses’s smoke-screen God is not a democratic God, and therefore he is required to purge his nation and the narrative of any vocal dissenters. He is subdividing his “chosen people” into those who are more “chosen” because of their obedience. In this section Hurston is demonstrating the logical results of the Deuteronomy passage in which “the Lord, the God of Israel” tells his people

“Put your sword on your hip, every one of you! Now go up and down the camp, from gate to gate, and slay your own kinsmen, your friends and neighbors!” The Levites carried out the command of Moses, and that day there fell about three thousand of the people. Then Moses said, ‘Today you have been dedicated to the Lord, for you were against your own sons and kinsmen, to bring a blessing upon yourselves to this day’” (*The Holy Bible, King James Version, Exodus 33: 27-29*).

Hurston’s assertions about God as artifice and a weapon subverts this Biblical passage of man following “God’s will” into a depiction of Moses as a tyrant, fixated on accumulating power. Certainly, if a ruler did not have a God to justify these atrocities one would have to be made. Therefore, Hurston’s characterization of Moses works to recontextualize the Biblical Moses and refute the dominant narrative’s assertion that this is an archetype of an ideal leader.

In contrast, Hurston’s Moses is at his most complex and sympathetic when he is physically and mentally between the Egyptian and the Hebrew tribes — instead occupying an

“every-man” status which the narrative seems to encourage. This non-aligned status liberates Moses from the race and God dependent “chosen” concept. For a brief moment Moses is able to exist in a state of plurality, one reminiscent of Moses’s prior musing when he thinks about how he is “wishing for a country he had never seen. He was seeing visions of a nation he had never heard of where there would be more equality of opportunity and less difference between top and bottom” (Hurston, 75). In other words, he is wishing for an egalitarian society that does not have the “chosen people” concept. Moses is unable to realize this vision in Egypt or Israel, and Hurston does not employ her dual-temporal-truth system here because she likely did not think it existed in her time either. Therefore, Hurston’s narrative provides this Godless, non-racialized space for Moses in the ocean. When the tide recedes, clearing the way for Moses, Hurston provides a much different version of the famous Biblical scene where Moses parts the water by making it an act of nature rather than God. In fact, God is not present here, something the narrative alludes to when it says “The sun who was his friend and ancestor in Egypt was arrogant and bitter in Asia. He had crossed over” (Hurston, 78). Neither Horus nor Moses control the sun in this in-between region and therefore it loses its associations with grandeur. Indeed, the passage reads like a purge, the narrator relating how “Moses had crossed over” thirteen times in one paragraph, each repetition signaling the shedding of yet another false identifier which had symbolized his “chosen” status in Egypt (Hurston, 78). For example, when Moses gets rid of his “short sword” and “jewelled hilt” the narrative explicitly states that “it was no longer the sign of high birth and power” (Hurston, 78). Having fully purged his societal trappings, Moses “felt as empty as a post hole for he was none of the things he once had been” (Hurston, 78). Surely, this emptiness is a profound and beautiful occurrence in a novel where loading something with meaning is so often a menacing action. When the tide moves in again, Moses loses this sacred

space and is forced to realign with the Hebrews and throw on societal trappings once more. This passage is an illustration of how peaceful the world could be if it stopped organizing the world according to “chosen” nation and “chosen” race. In all, by demonstrating how God’s “chosen people” concept is an oppressive construct, Hurston reaches her goal of destabilizing and fusing racial boundaries in order to briefly offer a glimpse of what it would look like to “cross over.”

III. Deconstructing the Race Narrative

In “A Conversation with Colum McCann and Elizabeth Strout,” McCann tells Strout that his bionovel began precisely because he was interested in the question of “who owns history” (McCann, 309)? McCann expresses distrust of those who pretend to own history in an attempt to draw a “line between fiction and nonfiction” (McCann, 309). He specifically accuses news outlets like Fox news of organizing the world according to simplistic truth-system of the dominant narrative which serve a specific agenda (McCann, 309). Accordingly, in his bionovel *TransAtlantic*, McCann unapologetically accesses the interiority of a historical figure, the famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass, in order to undermine the simplistic truth system which organizes race by phenotype. To combat this agenda, McCann’s narrative constructs a global race of oppressed people which transcends phenotypical differences. To illustrate, in the same interview McCann says, “I supposed I wanted to write about Douglass because he could lead me up to examine some issues in contemporary Ireland” (McCann, 311). By using a Black American to illuminate the oppression of Ireland, McCann undermines the dominant system of grouping people by phenotype. This process is revealed through the transformation of Douglass’s quest for freedom. Initially, this is exclusively a Black struggle, but as he begins to understand the nuances of enslavement his quest becomes more inclusive.

Phenotypic profiling is the root cause of Douglass's blind spot in the narrative, a characteristic which makes the abolitionist unable and unwilling to recognize the enslaved condition of many Irish people. Douglass's stream-of-consciousness reveals how this mindset is a product of racial loyalty, trapping the character within the colonial idea of his own inherent "Negritude." This struggle is illustrated during a scene in the Webb residence, when Douglass confronts himself in the mirror and characterizes his Blackness as an undesirable abnormality. In the middle of writing his autobiography, Douglas takes a break to glance at himself and sees blue ink on his face. He recalls "that the Irish words for a Black man is *fear gorm*, a blue man" (McCann, 51). In response to this thought, he begins to scrub his face and hands with fervor and when "He looked at himself again in the mirror, lashed out, stopped short, his knuckles trembling at the glass" (McCann, 51). Although he scrubbed off the blue ink, Douglass is upset by the fact that he could not scrub off his Blackness. When he sees his skin color he does not see freedom, because he has learned to identify certain phenotypes with specific characteristics. Indeed, the weight of Douglass's Negritude is crippling, and it is a weight this character brings wherever he goes. This weight is symbolized by the barbells he travels with. He lifts these barbells in secret, at one point remembering their origins and how:

"The blacksmith told him that he had melted them from slave chains that had once been used in the auction houses where men, women, and children were sold. The blacksmith had gone around and bought all the chains, melted them, made artifacts from them. In order, he said, not to forget" (McCann, 50).

McCann claims to have invented this symbol of the barbells forged from slave chains to represent Douglass's "vanity, stubbornness, his awareness of his body in space, his forward thinking, and his stamina" (McCann, 313). I assert that it is more representative of the burden of

Douglass's "Negritude," which haunts him at all times because it turns him into a representative for all Blacks, and therefore if he embarrasses himself he embarrasses his race. At one point, Douglass compares his condition to that of a "poodle on a leash," a Black man being showcased around Europe. As miserable as this may be, he needs to persevere in order to gain support for Black America. This weighty responsibility results in Douglass's singular focus on the Black struggle, something which ends up taking precedence over his professed ideal of universal freedom.

For example, during his first speech in Dublin, Douglass proclaims that "If you cast one glance upon a single man you shall cast a glance upon all humanity" (McCann, 64). Ironically, after Douglass says this he pauses to glance upon the men crowded into the auditorium and fails to see himself in them. His audience is more familiar with the curse of chattledom than he realizes, but the Caucasian features of the Irish blinds Douglass to their oppression. Douglass has been trained to equate their phenotype with automatic privilege and is therefore incognizant of the fact that their condition is similar to his. When Douglass continues his speech, saying "A wrong done to one man is a wrong done to all" (McCann, 64), the abolitionist's claim is put to the test by a man in the rear of the hall who screams out:

"What about England? Would he not denounce England? Wasn't England the slave master anyway? Was there not wage slavery? Was there not the chains of financial oppression? Was there not an underground railroad that every Irishman would gladly board to get away from the tyranny of England" (McCann, 64)?

Surely, Douglass is no longer able to fully ignore why the Irish faces look different from other White faces, as this heckler has made a clear connection between African American enslavement and Irish enslavement by asserting that the Irish need an Underground Railroad too. Douglass

concedes to the Irish crowd, in order to maintain their favor, that “he believes in Erin’s cause,” but after they nod in agreement he drops the subject immediately as he thinks of the punishing articles English and American journalists may write if he is too outspoken about Irish liberation (McCann, 64-65). He cannot risk this because, as he later thinks to himself, “it was to his own known cause that he had to remain entirely loyal. Three million voices” (McCann, 85). These three million voices are African American, and therefore Douglass, bound to his racial paradigm, does not feel like he can fight for the voice of the enslaved Irish while fighting for Blacks as well. While Douglass asserts in his speech that a wrong done to one man is a wrong done to all men, he seems to be following a different model entirely: one in which a wrong done to an Irishman is a wrong done to the Irish, while a wrong done to any African American is a wrong done to Douglass. In all, the racialized lens with which Douglass views humanity keeps him from living up to his proclamations regarding universal freedom. He consoles his conscience by maintaining that “The Irish were poor, but not enslaved” (McCann, 85). But the question the narrative asks is: is Douglass really able, or willing, to recognize the multiple faces of slavery?

Initially, Douglass is unwilling to identify Lily Duggan, an indentured servant in the Webb household, as an ally in his cause. For example, as he sits in his room feverishly writing an account of his enslavement, he is irritated by Lily’s footsteps above him. Instead of making a connection between the story of his enslavement he is writing and the maid’s enslavement, he is instead only glad when the sound ceases (McCann, 61). On the contrary, she is inspired by Douglass’s idea of freedom. So much so that when Douglass goes across the country, he comes down from dinner one night and finds that she has traveled to his new residence to inform him of her pending journey to find freedom in America. When his hosts explain this situation to Douglass, he congratulates her but remains cold. He feels no kinship with the Irish Woman and

wonders to himself, “What exactly was he expected to do” (McCann, 90)? This thought shows that Douglass has no ties to the liberation of Duggan, and sees her as irrelevant in his quest for Black freedom.

Decades after Douglass rebukes Duggan, the prior reveals that he has amended his quest for freedom, and now fights for freedom for all enslaved people. This is revealed at Douglass’s speech in St. Louis which Duggan and her daughter Emily attend. When Douglass first comes out to greet the crowd, Duggan cannot help but think that his gaze is fixed on her (McCann, 187). This recognition is important because when he speaks his words seem to address her directly, finally allowing her struggle for freedom to stand beside his. When he looks out at the auditorium of mostly Caucasian people, he does not make the same mistake as he did in Dublin. He tells them “When the true history of the anti-slavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages” (McCann, 189). Interestingly, Douglass alludes to the fact that the dominant history of anti-slavery is not true, saying it has not been written yet, and he does not specify the race of the key players in this anti-slavery history. He is now working with a more inclusive definition of slavery, one that recognizes the enslavement of all phenotypes and the struggle against this enslavement as a common struggle. Duggan is validated by Douglass’s recognition of the similarity between the famous abolitionist and herself. The narrative relates how at this moment “What she felt was incomparable, singular, yet ordinary, too, all the living moments gathered together in this one” (McCann, 190). Indeed, Douglass’s fully realized ideal of universal suffrage produces a fusion of the African American and Irish struggle.

This revelation causes Duggan to have a moment of spiritual awakening amongst the audience, in which she visualizes Douglass’s room at the Webb residence from years before. When she opens the door she does not find Douglass but her own daughter. Duggan now sees

“her own history and flesh and darkness, leaning down by the light of an ancient lantern, to read” (McCann, 190). Previously, this desk was used in the narrative as the place where Douglass was writing his autobiography. Here it is being used by Emily to read her own history. One can conclude that this singular feeling that Duggan feels has resulted in this vision of Emily reading Douglass’s story as one of her own “history, flesh, and darkness.” The enslaved Irish and the enslaved Blacks are now joined together in a common struggle against oppression, undermining the dominant narrative that there is a fundamental differences between these two groups.

This commonality is further exemplified by Lily Duggan’s great great granddaughter Hannah, who pieces together the common struggle of Blacks and Irish in her native Ireland. Indeed, as Hannah tries to pawn what she believes is an unopened letter from Frederick Douglass, she begins to identify with Douglass’s non-white struggle against Anglo-Protestant rule, a reality made more concrete as she learns that she would once have been considered “non-white” herself. The exclusive and arbitrary nature of Whiteness comes to the forefront when she speaks with a colonial scholar so he may evaluate the financial worth of her letter. When he refers to the Irish, Hannah notices how he “used the word they like a doorway he could open and close” (McCann, 275). The more the colonial scholar speaks about the exclusivity of “Whiteness” the more the Black and Irish struggle coincide; she listens as he continues on about how

“The academic question was when, in fact, they, the Irish, had become white. It was stitched in with notions of colonialism and loss. He had studied political figures in Australia, Britain, and the Tammany Hall of old New York and how they braided into the literature of the time, how this whiteness emerged. He was wary of scholars who aligned themselves too closely with what he called the darker edges” (McCann, 275).

The phrase “darker edges” has a racialized tone to it, characterized as something on the periphery of the Colonial scholar’s Anglo-Protestant-centric worldview. Regardless, he recommends Hannah talk to David Manyaki, a Kenyan aligned with the “darker edges” because he is a postcolonial scholar and Black.

Hannah initially sees Manyaki as an exotic anomaly, a person from the “darker edges” as well. For example, when she first sees him, she simply looks at him agape and says “dreadlocks” (McCann, 283). As Hannah becomes more familiar with Manyaki she begins to see Manyaki in a different light, wondering to herself “How had he ended up here, at the edge of the Irish Sea? What was it that brought us such distances, rowing upwards into the past” (McCann, 287)? As one can see here, Hannah is beginning to believe that this Kenyan man has a reason for bridging the distance between herself and Africa. Therefore, she begins to look at history without her phenotypical lens, instead thinking in terms of the oppressed struggling against their oppression. For instance, Hannah remembers her Grandson and how when she dropped him off at college “in 1976, there were students out along the footpaths with their Martin Luther King posters and Miriam Makeba T-shirts. Eight years since the Troubles began and they were still singing: we shall overcome” (McCann, 276). This is a strong visual: the Irish idealizing Black civil rights leaders. At this point, Hannah awakens to the fact that her struggle and Manyaki’s struggle are one in the same. She is now aligned with the globally oppressed, not her phenotype. This new state of being is demonstrated when Hannah takes a bath at the Manyaki residence, and begins to daydream that “from a distance I could hear the ship horns “the same port that Frederick Douglass came through all those years ago. The water lapping around me. Traveling the widening splash” (McCann, 289). This vision is strongly reminiscent of Lily’s vision, Frederick Douglass acting as an agent for their mental liberation from the chains of phenotype. She reaches

this singularity, and overcomes her minor, socially instilled prejudices. She looks approvingly at African Manyaki and his Irish wife, their mixed children, and deems the pair a “good couple” (McCann, 289). This union resembles the previous union of Douglass with his White wife, symbolizing the fusion of Caucasian and African phenotypes in the same struggle against oppression.

In all, the narrative within *Transatlantic* formed because McCann was interested in the “history between the Irish and the African Americans” and dissatisfied with how it had been “largely omitted from the Irish history books” and “relegated to the footnotes of history” (McCann, 311). This bionovel is intent on closing the gaps between Black and White phenotypes in an effort to undermine the colonial agenda of race division, a tool of global oppression.

IV: Deconstructing the “Civilization” Narrative

Brainwashed by the British Empire, the young Roger Casement in *Dream of the Celt* is indoctrinated to believe that colonial powers like Britain have a monopoly on the definition of “civilization,” and are charitably spreading it to the rest of the world in order to “advance” tribal peoples. Eventually, Casement rejects this harmful definition of “civilization” and instead formulates a new definition — one which recognizes the sovereignty of the globally oppressed, the inclusivity of Casement’s definition binding his Irish identity with that of Congolese and Amazonian tribes.

A close-analysis of the novel’s second chapter reveals that a skewed version of global history is essential for understanding the British definition of “civilization.” For example, the narrative recounts how Casement, working for the British Empire, puts a lot of time into studying colonial pamphlets and how, after finishing studying these texts, Casement “would repeat with conviction the ideas that permeated those texts” (Llosa, 13). In other words,

Casement is overseeing his own indoctrination; the idealistic young man repeats aloud the professed ideal from the pamphlet of how “Bringing European products to Africa and importing the raw materials that African soil produced was, more than a commercial operation, it was an enterprise in favor of the progress of peoples caught in prehistory, sunk in cannibalism and the slave trade”(Llosa, 13). This distortion of reality and the history of the world in these pamphlets resemble the falsehoods propagated in the 1950’s geography textbooks of New York (mentioned in “The Oppressive Historical Novel” chapter). This skewed vision of the world, in which all non-European societies are denied their own historical narrative but instead relegated to “prehistory,” allows Casement to be inculcated with the belief that the British Empire is chiefly interested in being a humanitarian organization, spreading the gift of British “civilization” to those who lack it.

At this point, Llosa’s narrative makes sure to remind the reader that although Casement is serious and hardworking he is naïve, and therefore “not very well prepared intellectually” (Llosa, 13). In other words, Casement is unable to interrogate this simplistic paradigm of “civilized” vs “uncivilized” and therefore becomes a pawn in colonialism’s global game of “civilization” building. Supporting this point is the fact that “his office colleagues exchanged mocking looks and wondered whether young Roger Casement was a fool or a smart aleck, whether he believed that nonsense or declaimed it in order to look good to his superiors” (Llosa, 13). This detail makes it seem like his co-workers, supposedly more well-versed in this game of “civilization” than Casement, are aware that the spread of “civilization” is a front for a more sinister agenda. Accordingly, over the course of the next “Twenty years in Africa, seven in South America, and a year or so in Amazonia” Casement comes of age working for colonialism’s advancement of “civilization” and therefore comes face to face with this more sinister reality (Llosa, 102). Wage

slavery, rape, and genocide cross his path regularly and he begins to realize that “civilization” is in fact a weapon employed for the purpose of plundering undeveloped societies rather than one used for humanitarian interests.

This epiphany about “civilization” makes Casement question the harm this concept has done him in his own life. For example, while in Central Africa, Casement writes to his cousin Gee that he learning about the effects of “civilization” has made him rethink his entire identity. He writes: “This journey into the depths of the Congo has been useful in helping me discover my own country and understand her situation, her destiny, her reality. In these jungles I’ve found not only the true face of Leopold II. I’ve also found my true self: the incorrigible Irishman” (Llosa, 80). Indeed, he now knows that the true face of colonial “civilization,” symbolized by Leopold II, is brutality and murder. By resolving to be an “incorrigible Irishman” Casement seems to be making a vow to be colonized no longer. Of course, in order to do this Casement is forced to purge the lifetime of indoctrination he has received. This is exemplified by a memory Casement has of his primary education, in which he was “made to believe that Ireland was a savage country with no past worth remembering, raised to civilization by the occupier, educated and modernized by the Empire, which stripped it of its tradition, language, and sovereignty” (Llosa, 102). One can see here how being raised to “civilization” is no longer idealized by Casement. In school he had learned that Ireland was a place of “prehistory” just like how the pamphlets had taught him that Africa and Amazonia were places of without their own narrative. Instilling this belief of inferiority into non-British peoples allowed the Empire to come in and smother indigenous cultures with the facades of education and modernization. In all, Casement deconstructs the colonial definition of “civilization” so he can examine how it has violated him in the past. This

intellectual journey transforms Casement from a colonizer to an “incorrigible Irishmen,” or a person who resists becoming “civilized” at the expense of forfeiting their culture.

Realizing that he is colonized makes Casement identify with all peoples around the globe who are oppressed by the endeavors of “civilization.” He is now thinking on two levels: as an Irishman and as a globally oppressed person. In the same way that Lily and Hannah Duggan compared their conditions with Frederick Douglas and David Manyaki, Casement also does a comparative analysis of the Irish oppression and the African oppression, thinking:

“Wasn’t Ireland a colony too, like the Congo? Though for so many years he had insisted on not accepting a truth that his father and so many Ulster Irishmen like him rejected with blind indignation. Why would what was bad for the Congo be good for Ireland? Hadn’t the English invaded Ireland? Hadn’t they incorporated it into the Empire by force, not consulting those who had been invaded and occupied, just as the Belgians did with the Congolese? Over time the violence had eased, but Ireland was still a colony whose sovereignty disappeared because of a stronger neighbor. It was a reality that many Irish refused to see” (Llosa, 186).

Of course, the colonial propagation of race as a fundamental core of human differentiation keeps most Irish people from comparing their situation to that of non-Europeans. Yet Casement has begun operating with a global lens and therefore begins categorizing people in a new way, forming a consciousness for the globally oppressed. This allows him to begin thinking of ways in which the globally oppressed can combat the colonial agenda. For example, in Amazonia Casement reflects on how “We Irish are like the Huitotos, the Boras, the Andoques, and the Muinanes of Putumayo. Colonized, exploited, and condemned to be that way forever if we continue trusting in British laws, institutions, and governments to attain our freedom” (Llosa,

186). In other words, Casement shows that across the board the concept of “civilization,” identified by colonial “laws, institutions, and governments” is one which needs to be rejected. Casement’s identification of Irish peoples alongside Amazonian and Congolese tribes reveals how the man who once saw non-Anglo peoples as “sunk in prehistory” is now forming an idea of a global history, in which all colonial have been violated by “civilization” rather than advanced by it. In all, Casement uses a common enemy to draw populations from three different continents together and form a globally oppressed people.

This line of global thinking encourages Casement to formulate a new definition of “civilization,” one aimed at disarming the oppressive colonial definition. Casement’s new definition is most clearly articulated during a conversation he has while onboard a boat in the Amazon. A fellow passenger, inculcated with the same colonial beliefs about “civilization” as Casement once had, becomes indignant when Casement challenges his long-held beliefs. He asks: “Do you put the cannibals of Amazonia on the same plane as the pioneers, entrepreneurs, and merchants who work in heroic conditions and risk our lives to transform these forests into a civilized land” (Llosa, 161)? It is an ironic and not insignificant narrative detail that at this point Casement begins to fear for his life, wondering whether this “civilized” man will pull a knife out and try to murder him over this ideological dispute (Llosa, 161). Indeed, this man’s definition is undercut when the reader begins to wonder if this man is any less violent than the “cannibals of Amazonia?” Casement is cognizant of this discrepancy and tells this man that a “civilized” land “could be summed up by saying that it’s an idea of a society where private property and individual liberty are respected” (Llosa, 161). Predictably, the two men remain at odds, and this conflict serves as a useful microcosm for analyzing the larger struggle in this narrative — in

which Casement's pluralistic definition of "civilization" must battle the authoritarian, racist, and contradictory nature of the colonial definition.

In all, Casement's journey is chiefly one of etymology. He realizes that the definition of "civilization" had been set up by the colonial agenda in order to conceal and excuse the violation and plundering of tribal people. By dismantling and reconstructing the definition of "civilization" for his own humanitarian purposes, Casement is able to undermine the dominant colonial narrative and therefore articulate the history of those slandered by the colonial enterprise as people of "prehistory."

V. Constructing A Global Narrative of Empowerment

All three of these authors access the interiority of historical figures in order to destabilize popular history's various tools of division. The narratives of Hurston, McCann, and Llosa undermine the Lukács model in order to construct a global narrative. Hurston articulates why this trend of the global narrative is gaining currency in fiction in her "Author's Introduction" to *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. She informs her readers that although they are likely only familiar with the figure of Moses from the dominant narrative, "there are other concepts of Moses abroad in the world" and that "They are so numerous and so varied that some students have come to doubt if the Moses of the Christian concept is real" (Hurston, vii). Surely, one of the main goals of fiction writers is to inform the world that there is more than one account of history. Accordingly, the future of biofiction rests in the hands of postcolonial authors who are willing to diversify and question dominant history, organizing humanity's multifaceted narratives, especially those of the globally oppressed, into one that allows for diversity while challenging the idea of a singular and authoritarian narrative.

*This is a term coined by Ellison in “The Uses of History in Fiction” colloquium in 1968 (Lackey, 141).

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