

Commodity Modernism:
Tobacco and Sugar in Twentieth-Century Global Literatures

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Abstract

Commodities have helped to form modernity. Additionally, the items we produce and consume point to cultural, national, and individual identities. This wide-ranging thesis seeks to use commodities tobacco and sugar to shed light on the intersection between production, consumption, and modernist literature. By placing areas of production into conversation with areas of consumption through comparative literary analysis and historical context, I make the case for a broader conception of modernist literature that celebrates the literature of commodity production alongside the cities of modernity. I organise this study into two parts: the first placing representations of tobacco into contention, mirrored by the second on sugar. With an approach that combines local, national, regional scales I use tobacco and sugar to compare and contrast otherwise disparate early twentieth-century texts from around the Atlantic. The texts in question contrast the commodity-producing regions of modernity—the Caribbean, South America, the U.S. South—with the sites of metropolitan consumption of London, Trieste, and Dublin. Transnational modernism must walk a highly nuanced line between engaging with national boundaries whilst transcending them through comparative methodologies. By exploring the concept of Commodity Modernism I make the case for a hybrid, multi-valent, multi-polar and stratified model that supports an avowedly interdisciplinary approach.

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General Introduction: Commodity Modernism

Commodities have long been an integral part of world history. The production and consumption of key items have been used as justification for entire industries which helped to enslave and transport people across the Atlantic, providing the engine for empires which spanned the globe.¹ A key inspiration for this thesis, Frank Trentmann's work focusses on consumption and material culture with an interdisciplinary approach.² Trentmann writes that, from the sixteenth century onwards, 'A quintet of exotic drug foods conquered Europe: tea from China; coffee and cane sugar from Arabia, and tobacco and cocoa from the New World'.³ The production and consumption of these drug foods would grow rapidly, so much so that 'By 1900, the conquest was complete. [...] Once precious luxuries, exotic drugs had become everyday items'.⁴ This great democratisation of commodities is reflected in literary modernism, becoming intertwined with questions surrounding class consciousness, nationalism, emancipation, and economic freedom. In recent dialogues on trade and commodities the argument has been focused on globalisation versus nationalism.⁵ However, the trade links created in the second millennium ushered in an age of unprecedented human connection that spanned the globe. This was a global modernity, though it was not experienced in the same way all over the globe. Furthermore, solidifying conceptions of nationhood bolstered more regional conceptions of the term, in relation to the global. The

¹ See: Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First*, 1st edition (Penguin, 2016); Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Sifton, 1985).

² Trentmann's work draws on insights from history, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science.

³ Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, p. 78.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ I examine these arguments later in this introduction.

imposition of U.S. and Euro-centric standards of modernity are therefore problematic in the sphere of modernist studies. One means of exploring new facets of modernity is in tracing literary representations of commodities that helped to define global and national conceptions of the term, alongside a dialogue between rural and urban texts.

In this thesis, I propose Commodity Modernism as a critical reading method within global modernist studies. It is an approach that foregrounds the economic, cultural, and symbolic significance of commodities, such as tobacco and sugar, relating production and consumption to modernist literary texts. Recent developments in modernist studies have opened up a planetary or global perspective that will help to inform this study, revealing a multi-polar conception of modernity that ushered in stronger global trade networks, new machinery for production and manufacturing, and societies that were increasingly demanding emancipation from empire for more equitable living standards and political freedom.⁶ Through a comparative analysis of modern texts from different parts of the world—particularly the Caribbean, Europe, and North America—we can gain a better understanding of early twentieth-century modernity and the impacts of a burgeoning culture of mass consumption that united individuals and nations alike. To explore the field of modernist studies a crucial part of my methodology assesses the links between trading nations. Production and consumption are intrinsically related to modernity—particularly the modernity presented by capitalism at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the initial pages of Fernando Ortiz's work of Cuban nation building, *Cuban Counterpoint*, he writes that 'Even in the universal history of economic phenomena and their social

⁶ I detail some of these developments below.

repercussions, there are few lessons more instructive than that of sugar and tobacco in Cuba'.⁷ The two heavily commodified crops' importance in historical, cultural, and literary terms stems from the immense power and influence they have held over their producers and consumers for centuries. In looking at tobacco and sugar we can see how commodities played a role in different conceptions of modernity that have become omnipresent across the globe. What has been under-explored is the relationship between these era-defining commodities and literature. This project seeks to examine tobacco and sugar as two pivotal commodities that held shared and unique meanings ascribed to them by the literature of the early twentieth century. The way these consumables are represented in literature provides a unique insight into how modernist writers perceived the commodity cultures in which they were writing.

Modernist writers, modern myths, and contrasting notions of modernity

To achieve a comprehensive analysis of these two commodities, I will pose three primary research questions: 1) How are tobacco and sugar represented by twentieth-century writers from around the Atlantic? 2) How are modern myths—including narratives of national identity—influenced by commodity culture? 3) What did the commodities tobacco and sugar signify in the context of different literary modernisms around the Atlantic? These questions respond to a need to explore further the relationship between twentieth-century consumerism and how that relates to the production of commodities. As Clukey and Wells note, 'Narratives of the development of modernity have traditionally focused on the city (in particular the northern European city) as the

⁷ Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, translated by Harriet de Onís, Illustrated edition (Duke University Press Books, 1995), p. 5.

locus of change’.⁸ This project serves as an exploration of how commodities helped to create modernity and builds upon existing scholarship on twentieth-century Caribbean modernism in relation to Eurocentric modernism.

The notion of contrasting the centre versus the periphery highlights debates surrounding world systems analysis that are worth acknowledging here. Represented by ‘Immanuel Wallerstein (1984), Andre Gunder Frank (1978) and Giovanni Arrighi (1994)’, world systems analysis created contradictions in literary scholarship on underrepresented regions of cultural output.⁹ Kaps and Komlosy note that ‘The narrative of the modern world-system clearly locates the center of gravity of historical agency in north-western Europe, whence the capitalist division of labor gradually spread over the whole European continent, to the Americas and, later, to Asia and Africa’.¹⁰ Rather than being defined and evaluated solely in relation to the centre (Europe or the U.S.), places outside of these dominant regions exist within a complex, entangled global structure. Kaps and Komlosy further note that ‘the center-periphery model moves away from the binary-linear relationship that has prompted so much criticism. The model is now better described as a multi-layered, polycentric, although not polyvalent, network of spatial hierarchies’.¹¹ This shift enables a more flexible understanding of global modernity, in which cultural production is neither wholly local nor fully global, but instead operates within overlapping and contested networks of exchange. Providing a

⁸ Amy Clukey, and Jeremy Wells, ‘Introduction: Plantation Modernity’, *The Global South*, 10.2 (2016), p. 3.

⁹ Klemens Kaps and Andrea Komlosy, ‘Centers and Peripheries Revisited: Polycentric Connections or Entangled Hierarchies?’, *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 36.3–4 (2013), pp. 237–238.

¹⁰ Kaps and Komlosy, ‘Centers and Peripheries Revisited’, p. 238.

¹¹ Kaps and Komlosy, ‘Centers and Peripheries Revisited’, p. 255.

foundation for this understanding of a global modernity, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) provides, as Kaps and Komlosy note, 'the basis for incorporating discourse analysis into both political history and world-system analysis'—suggesting that these networks are not just economic but also cultural and ideological.¹²

It is this conception of the centre-periphery model that I invoke as part of the conceptual basis for this thesis. Modernist literature is neither fully global nor fully local. Instead, the texts I have included here reveal a complex network of relationships between distinct conceptions of modernity via their representations of commodities. Twentieth-century authors interact with the concept of a global modernity while demonstrating their own conceptions of the term within national or regional boundaries. By focusing on the supply chain of tobacco and sugar, I work on Gilroy's suggestion that cultural theorists should 'take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in [...] discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective'.¹³ Dissenting from the centre-periphery model, Gilroy suggests here a perspective on Atlantic cultures that is more effective, accurate, and fair. Beyond these two distinct approaches, there is space for synthesis.

The approach I take here combines aspects of the centre-periphery model and the ideas found in Gilroy's work. As Kaps and Komlosy write:

By combining cultural studies and socio-economic approaches, the dichotomy "center/periphery" can be addressed in a new way. The formation of core and periphery

¹² Kaps and Komlosy, 'Centers and Peripheries Revisited', p. 255.

¹³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 15.

can be considered a social construction in the course of discursive practices—while also being considered the result of the unfolding of hierarchical entanglements in the course of the historical process.¹⁴

By analysing the literary representations of commodities from production to consumption, a different conception of modernity emerges with a comparative analysis of these contrasting areas. The significance of binaries is reduced in favour of a more expansive view, using a polycentric model that nonetheless acknowledges international links between literatures.

Commodities and literature

There is a common refrain found in many tobacco histories, repeated by Wagner, which goes: ‘In the story of tobacco, it is not always easy to distinguish between fact and fiction’.¹⁵ Considering the scope of this project, it is an idea that I will expand upon, with particular significance when considering questions of faith, myth, nationalism, and psychology. Building upon this, one of my chief aims will be to place my research into the already established field of global modernism. Modernism is often an area in which fact and fiction are blurred, making work combining the field with commodity history an intriguing prospect. Where I intend to intervene is in relating the literary analysis of several key modernist texts to the trade in commodities during the early to mid-twentieth century. I believe that this has the potential to shed new light on these works, revealing how commercial interests helped to shape increasingly commodity-driven societies in a post-

¹⁴ Kaps and Komlosy, ‘Centers and Peripheries Revisited’, pp. 255-256.

¹⁵ Susan Wagner, *Cigarette Country: Tobacco in American History and Politics* (Praeger, 1971), pp. 3-4.

colonial age of extreme technological innovation and nation-building.¹⁶ Proposing a view I work constructively against, Featherstone, Lash, and Robertson write that

[Globalisation] has in fact in a very important sense been the successor to the debates on modernity and postmodernity in the understanding of sociocultural change and as the central thematic for social theory [...] globalization should be seen as now no longer emergent, but as a more fully ‘emerged’ theory in the social sciences.¹⁷

However, although globalism has emerged as one of the defining aspects of modernity, it is not the full story. Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* focuses on the links between modernity as represented in the Caribbean with the modernity of Europe. His interest revolves around the intersection of identities that surround our conception of modernity. Spanning the Atlantic, Gilroy’s work is rooted in the notion of ‘double consciousness’ that was first voiced by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*.¹⁸ This multicultural, international perspective reveals the cracks in more ‘traditional’ conceptions of modernity and widens our understanding of the term, whilst also resisting a totally ‘global’ outlook. There is a tension here between the outlook of a single, overarching ‘global’ modernity and separate national or regional conceptions of the term. Whilst modernity is experienced globally, I will explore the concept on different spatial levels: international (around the Atlantic), national, and sub-national. This flexible approach allows for

¹⁶ The development of global modernity as we know it today can be seen in works such as *Global Modernities, Theory, Culture & Society* and *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*.

¹⁷ Featherstone, Lash, and Robertson, *Global Modernities*, p. 15.

¹⁸ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 1.

different aspects of twentieth-century modernity to come to the fore, whether it is the function of smoking in New York City, or the cultural legacy of the sugar plantation system across the American continent and the Caribbean.

The concept of parallel global and international conceptions of modernism and modernity are central to my thesis—that the production, trade, and consumption of commodities helped to shape our conception of modernity in the early twentieth century. This is informed by the advancement of both globalisation and nationalism in the era. David Edgerton posits that ‘The politics of capital—whether of free trade versus protection or national versus global—were the central political fights of the twentieth century’.¹⁹ Furthermore, O’Rourke and Williamson note that ‘most of the convergence between 1850 and 1914 was due to the open economy forces of trade and mass migration. By inference it also suggests that convergence stopped between 1914 and 1950 because of deglobalization and the retreat to autarky’.²⁰ This presents a complex economic, cultural, and historical picture that the authors I have included in this thesis seek to reflect in their work. Through a historic lens O’Rourke and Williamson expand on this point, writing that

The Argentineans call the transition from 1870 to 1913 the “*belle époque*,” North Americans refer to it as their “gilded age” of industrial take-off to world dominance, the English dub it their “great Victorian boom” carried on a wave of high imperialism, but

¹⁹ David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth-Century History* (Penguin Books, 2019), p. xxxii.

²⁰ Kevin H. O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (MIT Press, 1999), p. 5.

most economists are taught to view it as a liberal era of free trade under the gold standard.²¹

This boom, the subsequent chaos of the First World War, and the increasing efforts of colonies to gain their independence from Empire, accompanies the development of literary modernism. Looking at how commodities were represented in modernist texts helps us to shed light on the interaction between literary culture and a volatile economic landscape.

The twentieth century marks a rapid acceleration in the availability of consumable commodities to the masses. Ever greater consumption created a feedback loop that led to greater production, as well as a more intensive interest in how these products were produced. Trentmann writes that

If it was the consumer who directed the economy, not the producer, liberals, socialists and feminists asked: How was it that the consumer was treated as serf rather than king? Consumers needed to arise, assert their rightful place at the centre of society and put the power of their purse to civic use. What this meant in practice depended on national traditions and political cultures.²²

Trentmann's contention, that the rise of the consumer is central to national conceptions of twentieth-century modernity highlights the significance of examining the evolving relationship between producers and consumers. Across national boundaries, engagement with commodities serves as a key signifier of twentieth-century modernity, with their use becoming a way of showing wealth and status whilst demonstrating consumer power. Complicating the picture, Trentmann

²¹ O'Rourke and Williamson, *Globalization and History*, p. 14.

²² Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, p. 155.

writes that ‘The new local is the old global’, referring to the influence of globally traded food commodities on local consumption habits.²³ Tobacco and sugar, both grown within the plantation system, were formerly exotic plants that would become integral to the societies in which there were consumers to buy them. Perhaps more than any other commodities, tobacco and sugar helped to create new conceptions of identity through commercialisation and trade. As Trentmann notes, ‘Local food cultures, similarly, have been shaped by modernity rather than existing outside it’.²⁴ Both the production and consumption of commodities signified active participation in a fundamentally international system that helped to define twentieth-century modernity.

As a critical framework, Commodity Modernism refers to the representation and function of commodities within literary modernism. I use this term to explore how literature both reflects and critiques global systems of mass production and consumption that served as a defining aspect of the twentieth century. In this context, modernist authors become interpreters of commodity culture, using representations of goods—in this case, the addictive consumables tobacco and sugar—not only as narrative detail, but as charged symbols of cultural identity, anti-colonial resistance, and divergent experiences of modernity. The texts I explore here show how commodities and their circulation intersect with broader questions of nationhood, internationalism, and the individual’s role as a producer or consumer. By examining how writers across different contexts engage with the brutal realities of plantation labour, or the seductive pleasures of consumer goods, I reveal how commodities inform the thematic concerns, formal experimentation, and political aspects of literary modernism.

²³ Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, p. 582.

²⁴ Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, p. 581.

Nationhood: local-international-global

Nationhood forms a large part of what it means to be modern, particularly in relation to modernities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Literature produced in these areas of the world during the twentieth century were created in the context of liberation—and sometimes re-oppression—by global empires with power many orders of magnitude greater than their own. As Featherstone et al write, ‘our conceptions of both society and culture draw heavily on a tradition which was strongly influenced by the process of nation-state formation’.²⁵ By extricating themselves from empire, those living in former colonies—such as Cuba—would transform themselves from subjects into citizens, fighting for their place in a modern world in which they could decide their own fate. This is naturally an over-simplification, yet it reveals a truth that, for many new nations of the twentieth century, modernity meant independence from the Old World. This is further examined by Featherstone et al, writing

Not every nation-state can be fitted easily into a developmental sequence derived from Western experience of tradition—modernity—postmodernity, indeed the application of these concepts to other non-Western contexts may well be flawed and misses the politics of knowledge where a dominant particular is able to represent itself as the universal²⁶

This points to the existence of new and different forms of modernity that differ from the European conception of the term. Areas of production—in the case of tobacco and sugar, plantations—are conspicuously absent from more traditionalist conceptions of literary modernity. Likewise, urban

²⁵ Featherstone, Lash, and Robertson, *Global Modernities*, p. 16.

²⁶ Featherstone, Lash, and Robertson, *Global Modernities*, pp. 17-18.

living, an important facet of twentieth-century life, is bound to commodity consumption reliant entirely upon rural production. By placing twentieth-century texts from the Caribbean and South America with those from Europe and the U.S., I hope to develop a more nuanced conception on commodities and their place within literature of the period, placing texts about production on the plantation into conversation with texts which feature the consumption of those same commodities. Modernity exists on a local as well as a global level, creating a multi-polar modernity that incorporates many different conceptions of the term, depending on the location. To discount a multi-polar approach to literature is to discount the experience of otherwise overlooked writers and artists from the modern world. Although this thesis works within the norms of global modernism, the writers often express a strong sense of nationhood in their texts, and it is this that often defines their approach. For example: Ortiz, Svevo, Joyce, and James all function as national authors in their respective countries, helping to forge conceptions of culture that can be considered modern in local, national, regional or global contexts.

Commodities and the consumer

Before any literary analysis can take place, it is necessary to define our terms. Definitions surrounding ‘consumer’ and ‘commodity’ are contested, so it is worth delving into the theoretical basis behind the two concepts. Although my work here relates to only two consumable commodities, I hope that its focus is specific enough to demonstrate progress in the field while leaving space for further research within the field of modernist literary studies.

Commodities

A simplistic definition for a commodity, as defined by the OED, is ‘A natural resource, material, etc., which is of use or value to mankind; a useful product’ or ‘A thing produced for use or sale; a

piece of merchandise; an article of commerce; in later use frequently spec. a raw material, primary product, or other basic good which is traded in bulk and the units of which are interchangeable for the purposes of trading.’²⁷ It is a good starting point for a full understanding of the term, but is worth exploring further. Commodities, with this definition, are simply goods or raw materials of value that can be exchanged. However, there is more nuance to what fundamentally makes a product a commodity in the context of modern society.

Focussed predominantly on the means of production, Marx’s *Capital* begins with a definition of commodities: ‘an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind’ which possesses both a use value and an exchange value.²⁸ This distinction between the use value and exchange value of an object emphasises the notion that commodities are defined primarily by their perceived value in relation to the market. As addictive and sought-after substances, tobacco and sugar are valuable for both their physical effects on the consumer and their exchange value. Yet, this demand creates the need for complex and labour-intensive modes of production which both demands and creates large amounts of capital.

Jean Baudrillard introduces a post-Marxist conception of commodities within consumer society, pointing to their hedonistic and regressive qualities within a larger system of needs. The consumption of commodities is presented as stemming from a system of production which operates in a cycle: production stimulates consumption which, in turn, stimulates further production. Baudrillard writes that the consumption of commodities creates a system of needs in which

²⁷ ‘Commodity, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37205>> [accessed 17 November 2021].

²⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, ed. by Ernest Mandel, trans. by Ben Fowkes, New Ed. (Penguin, 2004), p. 125.

demand/productive force as a rationalized, integrated, controlled whole [...] in a process of total control of the productive forces and production processes. Needs as a system are also radically different from enjoyment and satisfaction. They are produced as system elements, not as a relationship of an individual to an object²⁹

In this analysis, individual needs are subsumed by structural forces. Just as workers are alienated from the means of production in Marxist thought, so too are consumers distanced from their own genuine needs. Instead, their needs are manipulated by a system of capital and control. To clarify, ‘By system of needs, we mean that needs are not produced one by one, in relation to the respective objects, but are produced as consumption power, as an overall propensity within the more general framework of the productive forces’.³⁰ This can be related to Thorstein Veblen’s notion of ‘conspicuous consumption’, an idea that I will show is particularly important in relation to representations of tobacco. The concept was initially introduced in Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) as a comment on the signification of wealth and social class through habitual consumption of luxuries. Relating the term to the idea of eating, Veblen writes ‘The ceremonial differentiation of the dietary is best seen in the use of intoxicating beverages and narcotics. If these articles of consumption are costly, they are felt to be noble and honorific’.³¹ The drive to consume is, in part, created by the outward expression of supposed needs. In this sense, the production and consumption of commodities in literature shows us the preoccupations of the era in which the texts

²⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, Theory, Culture and Society (Sage Publications Ltd., 1998), p. 75.

³⁰ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, pp. 74-75.

³¹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, ed. by Martha Banta, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 50.

were written.

Crucially, in an era in which free trade was falling away in the wake of greater national protectionism, controls over both production and consumption became an important means of nation-building. As Trentmann notes, ‘nationalists wanted to gain control over consumer industries. They understood what Marx had not: goods did not only alienate, they could also unite’.³² As I show in this project, tobacco and sugar have contributed in different ways to dissolution and unification on national, societal, cultural and even individual levels. The complex and often contradictory arguments surrounding commodities—tobacco and sugar—are worth exploring further. The literary authors of the early twentieth century can provide insight on how commodities featured in a more globalised world that was nonetheless fragmenting into nation states. Furthermore, they can tell us about the unique role commodities played in the local societies where they were produced and/or consumed. However, while Trentmann raises a crucial point regarding nationalism and cultures of consumption, his reading of Marx here is substantially flawed. Marx’s theory of alienation is fundamentally concerned with labour rather than goods themselves. Marx and Engels emphasise in *The Communist Manifesto* the integrative potential of commodities and cultural products alike, writing that:

In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more

³² Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, p. 298.

impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.³³

Both Trentmann and Marx therefore acknowledge the power that goods had to unite, yet Marx and Engels explicitly state this unity within a broader Capitalist context marked by uneven and combined development through colonial and imperial relationships. Despite Trentmann's mischaracterisation of Marx's argument, the broader point about national cultures and consumption remains insightful.

In comparing and contrasting both sides of the commodity coin in modernist literature I hope to complicate both the notion of a single global modernity, and of a Eurocentric modernity. In opening a dialogue between the predominantly producing areas of the modern world and the consuming areas, the foundations of commodity culture hove into view. Commodities are closely linked with their individual histories of production and consumption. On the proliferation of commodity histories since Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* (1985) Trentmann writes that

Following the life of a food reveals the interdependence between regimes of production and consumption separated by oceans and national histories. The warm comfort of a cup of sweetened tea served in Britain is connected with the brutality of slave plantations in the Caribbean. A second insight is that goods, like people, have a 'social life'. Their character and value changes along the food chain and across time.³⁴

³³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Isaac, Rethinking the Western Tradition (Yale University Press, 2012), p. 77.

³⁴ Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, p. 79.

It is this connection that I explore in conjunction with literary texts. The authors I have chosen vary in their use of commodities to either explore the impact of transatlantic trade (in both goods and the enslaved), or to re-purpose and divorce from historical context. I believe that commodities—and their representations in literature from the period—can be used to reveal a bridge between the modernist texts of Europe and North America and texts from sites often considered outside of the traditional sphere of modernism, such as in the Caribbean. At the same time, cultures of consumption vary greatly in their representation, and are worth of individual consideration. This highlights the creation of transnational links between literatures through the creation and consumption of commodities, as well as the diversity of texts that incorporate them. My contention is that these texts from commodity producing regions should be examined in relation to other modernist texts featuring consumption of those same commodities.

While history provides plenty of important context for this thesis, particularly regarding the production of commodities, it fails to tell the complete story. The close reading of literary texts gives us the opportunity to analyse not only the historical record, but also a register of subjective experience. Crucially, literature also offers a diversity of perspectives, allowing for a more holistic view of how tobacco and sugar were produced, perceived and consumed. The texts are culturally important, with authors reflecting the societies in which they wrote, forming narratives that show a multiplicity of experiences.

However, I do not focus exclusively on fictional narratives; other literary traditions that differ from a straightforward fictional narrative are also explored. In *Cuban Counterpoint* (1942) Ortiz incorporates aspects of non-fiction, history, social critique, cultural formation, and myth to offer a cultural treatise on Cuban identity. *Cuban Counterpoint* serves as the text that inspired the conceptual core of the thesis: that tobacco and sugar are both culturally important and

have had a profound impact in modernist literature. Though not a narrative text, the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction are blurred throughout, demonstrating a Cuban conception of formal fluidity and modernity. Both tobacco and sugar are shown to be essential ingredients—via the catalyst of colonial domination—to the formation of the Cuban nation, developing while Ortiz was writing the text.

I have taken inspiration from Ortiz's approach to commodities and their role in shaping perspectives on modernity. Following Ortiz, I use a materialist approach to explore distinctive cultural perspectives, exemplified by C. L. R. James's exaltation of Toussaint Louverture in *The Black Jacobins*, and M. F. K. Fisher's poetic descriptions of food in her cookbooks.³⁵ James provides important insights into how pivotal sugar was to the revolutionary moment in Haiti, while Fisher shows a utilitarian approach to sugar consumption in the post-war U.S.. By first contextualising the histories of tobacco and sugar before an exploration of both fiction and non-fiction texts, I will demonstrate the profound impact of these commodities on the cultural output of diverse cultures around the Atlantic. As I explore in Chapter One, Ortiz used the opposition between tobacco and sugar to make the case both for a distinctly Cuban form of modernity, and position Cuba within a broader global discourse. Across the texts I have selected, tobacco and sugar are used to signify important and varying aspects of modernity.

The consumer

The consumer is often distanced from the means of commodity production, often in an attempt on

³⁵ For C. L. R. James see Chapter Five 'Haiti and the Literary Impact of Sugar Production'. For M. F. K. Fisher see Chapter Six 'Sweet Temptations: The Role of Confectionery in Modernist Literature'.

the part of the intermediary company to sanitise their product's image. Bruce Robbins states that 'Popular versions of commodity narrative tend to leave out anything that might make the consumer feel guilty. If they refer to the producers at all, they [...] carefully omit any suggestion of work-related suffering or deformity'.³⁶ In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams provides us with useful definitions of terms that are central to any discussion of modernism and modernity. For *consumer* Williams writes that from the eighteenth century 'In the new predominance of an organized market, the acts of making and of using goods and services were newly defined in the increasingly abstract pairings of *producer* and consumer, *production* and consumption'.³⁷ Williams also notes that 'The unfavourable connotations of consume persisted, at least until [the nineteenth century], and it was really only in C20 that the word passed from specialized use in political economy to general and popular use'.³⁸ This is contrasted with the word *customer* which implies 'some degree of regular and continuing relationship to a supplier, whereas consumer indicates the more abstract figure in a more abstract market'.³⁹ Here Williams aptly identifies the turn of modernity, transforming society from *customers* with highly individualised relationships within a community, to *consumers* who use commodities as part of a capitalist world system. It is highlighted too that early uses of the word 'had an unfavourable sense; it meant to destroy, to use up, to waste, to exhaust',⁴⁰ which is highly relevant to questions of how producing and consuming areas of modernity were considered differently in social, economic, cultural, and literary senses. This

³⁶ Bruce Robbins, 'Commodity Histories', *PMLA*, 120.2 (2005), p. 455.

³⁷ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Routledge Revivals (Routledge, 2011), p. 69.

³⁸ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 69.

³⁹ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 69.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Keywords*, pp. 68-69.

suggests a level of alienation related to the consumption of commodities, chiefly alienation between the consumer and the product's mode of production.

On the developmental side, although plantations constitute a form of development, their structures are chiefly there to extract wealth from the region for the benefit of more powerful, Western nations. Prabhat Patnaik echoes Marx, going beyond an overly simplistic definition to uncover 'the real nature of commodity production as we encounter it today'.⁴¹ He defines a commodity as 'a product that is sold in the market but represents to the seller only an exchange value, a pure sum of money (or command over other products) but not a use value'⁴², showing that commodity goods progress beyond subsistence by being of more use to the seller for their commercial value than for whatever their intended effect or use is. Additionally, modern commodity exchange is characterised 'by impersonality'⁴³ that lacks the personal connections of more traditional, local selling. It then follows, in Patnaik's analysis, that it 'is characterised by competition among the producers, and this necessarily implies that some producers outcompete others', forging the capitalist system of exchange with it.⁴⁴ Capitalists do not necessarily accumulate capital because the individual wants to but because 'they are compelled to do so, because they are engaged in a Darwinian struggle where survival depends upon accumulation'.⁴⁵ Central to Patnaik's argument therefore is that coercion is an integral part of commodity production and sale. Essentially it is market forces beyond the control of the individual that compel

⁴¹ Prabhat Patnaik, 'Culture and Commodities', *Social Scientist*, 43.7/8 (2015), p. 3.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

goods to be sold as commodities. This fundamentally changes the nature of social and economic relations between people, with personal relationships between the producer and consumer stripped away. With such a system in operation accumulation becomes a necessary facet of both international trade and everyday life. However, the exploitative practices encouraged in the pursuit of commodity accumulation eventually invite challenge, or a counterpoint.

My initial thesis was to explore the ways in which tobacco and sugar-producing nations interact with consuming nations through their national literatures. However, over the course of my research I have uncovered a more complicated relationship between production and consumption within national literatures than I had initially assumed. As Frank Trentmann notes, ‘Consumption was not centred on imperial metropolises. Cubans drank more coffee (from Costa Rica) than did the French and the Germans; the average Chilean twice as much as a Spaniard or Italian. The “South”, it is all too often forgotten, were not only producers. They were consumers, too’.⁴⁶ Tobacco and sugar, as commodities, were not solely exports. These two addictive commodities were consumed in the places of their production, complicating their representation in literature. Furthermore, there is an interesting difference between the way tobacco and sugar are represented in modernist literature: tobacco is consumed far more conspicuously than sugar. The ritual puffing on a cigarette can often be interpreted as a statement, revealing aspects of character of setting that would otherwise be hidden.⁴⁷ Clouds of smoke can be both seen and smelt, making tobacco an ostentatious commodity to consume. In contrast, sugar’s production is more obvious

⁴⁶ Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, p. 164.

⁴⁷ Examples that feature good examples of tobacco consumption include Fernando Ortiz’s *Cuban Counterpoint*, Italo Svevo’s *Confessions of Zeno*, and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

than its consumption. When sugar is consumed, it is eaten invariably in combination with other ingredients or hidden in a recipe. However, in terms of literary representation, the production of sugarcane within the plantation system is more often the setting by which texts present sugar as a commodity.⁴⁸ This speaks to the differing ways that both commodities were perceived by the writers and readers of the early twentieth century, as well as the complicated relationship between sites of production and consumption.

Positioning modernist literary studies

Modernist literary studies has since the 1990s been reconfigured with a global outlook, moving from Eurocentric modernism to a field that allows for the examination of multiple and diverse global conceptions of modernity. Alternative perspectives on modernity can be found in relation to the former colonies of the New World, particularly in relation to plantations and the growing of cash crops. However, it should be unsurprising that such alternative modernities invite more varied forms of expression. Fumagalli's work focuses on the 'othering' of alternative modernities by writers supporting the Eurocentric status quo, appropriately through the symbolism of the Ancient Greek monster Medusa. Indeed, on the first page of *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity* Fumagalli writes that for the gorgon of modernity to 'legitimize itself' it has to create an 'other' by '[petrifying] those who stand before it, freezing them into a state of what she calls perpetual backwardness, primitivism, or non-modernity'.⁴⁹ Just as with debates surrounding the Occident

⁴⁸ Examples that feature plantations include Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint*, C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and José Lins Do Rêgo's *Sugar Cane Cycle*.

⁴⁹ Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity: Returning Medusa's Gaze* (University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 1.

versus the Orient, modernity only exists in contrast to its absence. Furthermore, Fumagalli's analysis of the nature of North Atlantic modernity is useful in its explicit and urgent inclusion of plantations and slave labour at the very beginning of the modern world.

Exploring a North Atlantic vision for modernism, Fumagalli posits that 'from a North Atlantic perspective, modernity is conceptualized merely as the way in which the colonial powers shaped the world' that largely resists the incorporation of texts from outside the boundaries of the U.S. and Europe.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the acknowledgement that '[what] modernity is and how it affects you depends on where you are, on who you are, and, crucially, on how you respond to the North Atlantic project' remains of fundamental importance to the continued decolonisation of modernist literary studies.⁵¹ It is this contention that forms part of my methodology for this thesis, making the argument for a more expansive definition for modernity through a commodity-focussed lens. The contributions of sites of modernity outside of the U.S. and Europe offer fertile ground for interesting and holistic literary explorations, enabling a move to a more heterogeneous space. The opportunity here in broadening the scope of modernism is to incorporate diverse cultural experiences, narratives, and histories; thereby promoting a more holistic approach. Alternative perspectives on modernity point to a rich cultural tapestry that extends beyond the boundaries of U.S. and Euro-centrism. By first examining the expressions from these alternative sites of modernity before placing them in conversation with each other, I contribute to work in the field to decolonise modernist studies. For example, Fumagalli writes that 'the influence [the Caribbean] exercised on the development of Western art, literature, philosophy, and culture is gradually being

⁵⁰ Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity*, p. 4.

⁵¹ Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity*, p. 3.

revealed, positing modernity as the outcome of exchange, negotiation, and transculturation'.⁵² I hope to add to this idea through the representations of tobacco and sugar in literature, comparing and contrasting texts detailing both ends of their trade routes. My intervention, though limited to the Atlantic, seeks to build upon this work by looking at the products themselves and how they interact within the literature.

Predating Fumagalli, Emery presents the concept of planetary modernism, a form that is related to, yet distinct from, global modernism. Planetary modernism is defined by the relationship of literature to ecology and place. In this way it is an excellent framework with which to explore the effects of tobacco and sugar within modernist literature. Expressing established thought within modernist literary studies, Emery writes that

Countering the rationalist logic of received histories, Caribbean writers work also with a contramodern poetics of the past, as in Glissant's trope of marronage, the revolutionary flight and improvisational resistance of escaped slaves.⁵³

The contramodern, in conjunction with Fumagalli's conception of North Atlantic modernism as a blinkered gorgon, presents a fresh perspective from which Caribbean texts can be viewed. Acknowledging alternative modernities in relation to the production and consumption of commodities points to innovative links between texts and even canons that would otherwise remain hidden. However, whilst alternative modernities and modernisms have been examined in the past,

⁵² Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity*, p. 4.

⁵³ Mary Lou Emery, 'Caribbean Modernism: Plantation to Planetary', in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 49.

and form the basis of my thesis here, there has been less focus on the literary links created by the commodities trade.

Friedman advocates strongly for ‘planetary modernism’ and a comparative, multi-spatial approach. Relating to the notion of the planetary, Friedman proffers four modes of reevaluating modernism—Re-vision, Recovery, Circulation, and Collage—which serve as a useful framework to incorporate texts from disparate regions. Marginality, othering, and binary thinking are rejected. In their place, Friedman constructs a theory that welcomes rupture, innovation, diversity and divergence. Regarding transnational modernism, Friedman writes:

Models of planetary cultural traffic, mimesis, and translation need to supplant older concepts of modernist internationalism, which are typically based on binaries of Self-Other, modern-traditional, civilized-savage, high art-primitive art. The appropriation model in particular regards the modernists of the West as cosmopolitan producers of culture who cite or steal the traditions of the Rest to break out of the repressive, clichéd, or narrow representational conventions of the West.⁵⁴

Friedman’s disruptive work follows that of Emily Apter, Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell.⁵⁵ Here, Friedman is attempting to break down more traditional frameworks of modernist internationalism, to be replaced by a conception of modernity that transcends specific special and

⁵⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*, Modernist Latitudes (Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 64.

⁵⁵ Emily S. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (Verso, 2013); Wai-Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell, *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

temporal concerns. Apter writes that American literature should no longer be cast as ‘a self-governing, autonomous, sovereign domain but as an entity closer to a municipality or network, something resembling a Habermasian global civil society or postnational constellation’ with allusions to radically transtemporal and transcontinental comparisons.⁵⁶ Free from a constraining Western paradigm, literary comparisons can uncover a planetary modernity that has roots in national independence, as opposed to one that is Euro or U.S.-centric.

Transnational modernism must walk a highly nuanced line between engaging with national boundaries whilst transcending them through comparative methodologies. The radical approaches of Friedman, Apter, Dimock and Buell point towards a way forward. By broadening our understanding of what modernity entails, we can build frameworks that promote a more holistic approach. Certainly, the elimination of overused binaries—minor/major, metropole/colony, modern/traditional—creates fertile ground for innovative explorations of global modernities, away from Western-centricity. Although fully disavowing periodisation may render existing methodological strategies redundant, allowing space in which to expand the borders of modernism and modernity creates links that could lead to a more holistic understanding of both concepts. Combining literary fiction with commodity histories more expansively could provide a useful path to a more diverse understanding of the modern experience.

Translation and Commodity Modernism

Translation serves as a critical methodological tool within this thesis, facilitating a comparative, cross-cultural understanding of Commodity Modernism. My approach combines intertextual

⁵⁶ Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 104.

analysis with historical contextualisation, framed by an expansive view of modernist texts. Translation is not merely a practical convenience, but a necessary critical lens: it facilitates the comparative reading of works written originally in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese, making possible the interrogation and destabilisation of Eurocentric conceptions of literary modernism. Where multiple translations exist, I selected editions based on quality, recency, or scholarly consensus.

Analyses of shared cultures of production and consumption enable cross-cultural dialogues that are essential to decolonising transnational modernist studies. Through close textual and intertextual reading, supported by historical context, I use translation in this thesis to demonstrate the extent and diversity of commodity-focussed modernist texts around the Atlantic. Translated texts must be read in the context of that translation, with the potential for a fostering of deeper understanding through diverse interpretations of commodity culture. Susan Stanford Friedman's model of commodities undergoing 'exchange, adaptation, translation, and indigenization' is foundational to my own approach.⁵⁷ Just as commodities acquire culturally specific meanings through global circulation, so too do the authors of translated literary texts reinterpret the meanings of tobacco and sugar within diverse regional frameworks—frameworks that nonetheless invite comparison.

The exchange of commodities between the Old and New worlds helped to forge the conditions of modernity as represented in early twentieth-century literature. Tobacco and sugar became dominant engines of wealth and oppression; as literary symbols, they carry the historical

⁵⁷ Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms*, p. 170.

weight of empire, exploitation, and transculturation. By employing translation as a methodological strategy, this thesis reveals the complex relationship between international literatures and global commodity cultures. In so doing, it highlights how modernist texts across different linguistic and national traditions creatively engage with commodities to articulate distinct, yet interconnected, understandings of modernity.

Global, international modernism

Early twentieth-century texts provide insight into how views of a contested cultural past have changed over time. By focusing on literature through the twin lenses of economic and commodity history, I aim to shine a light on how these three elements combine to reflect the literary cultures of different regions. My central contention is that literary culture is intertwined with commodity culture, with authors imbuing consumables with meaning that directly relates to their conceptions of contemporary modernity. Furthermore, the meanings that surround tobacco and sugar are heavily dependent on cultural context, with both contributing to the commercial and literary cultures where they are produced and consumed. A major question arises from literary representations of commodity production versus commodity consumption: how far do authors go to link commodities with the plantation? This thesis is, in part, an assessment of how commodification in literature either forges alternative conceptions of literary modernity, or expunges the often harrowing past of these products. Building upon the work of others in the global modernist studies sphere I hope to recontextualise modernist cultural production from an (inter)national and regional perspective via the representations of commodities. In focusing on tobacco and sugar, the influence on both the plantation and the city can be placed in comparison.

Part of my methodology regarding literary analysis takes the lead of postcolonial modernist scholars such as Vicky Unruh, Gayle Rodgers, Laura Doyle, and Jessica Berman, all of

whom present different perspectives on global modernisms.⁵⁸ The collection of essays found in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* points towards the established scope of the modernist literary studies field. Friedman presents the concept of the planetary in ‘World Modernisms, World Literature, and Comparativity’, promoting a deliberate diversification away from a Eurocentric or periphery and diffusionist model.⁵⁹ Friedman’s body of work—such as ‘Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies’ and *Planetary Modernisms*—points towards a remarkably broad conception of what constitutes modernism.⁶⁰ Friedman posits that a planetary modernism ‘refuses the conventional approach to modernism as a definable aesthetic style, movement, or period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’, freeing the field from both temporal and spatial boundaries.⁶¹ Furthering the point, Emery, building on Friedman’s work, defines planetary as ‘Neither equivalent to the global nor opposed to it, the planetary registers possibilities of multiple spatial and temporal dimensions beyond the rational ordering of the global’.⁶² Rather than one global modernity, there are instead many interrelated examples, with authors from different regions

⁵⁸ For more information, see: Vicky Unruh, *Latin American Vanguard: The Art of Contentious Encounters, Latin American Literature and Culture* (University of California Press, 1994); Gayle Rogers, *Incomparable Empires: Modernism and the Translation of Spanish and American Literature*, *Modernist Latitudes* (Columbia University Press, 2016); Laura Doyle, *Freedom’s Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640-1940* (Duke University Press, 2008); Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

⁵⁹ Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘World Modernisms, World Literature, and Comparativity’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶⁰ Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 13.3 (2006), pp. 425–43.

⁶¹ Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms*, p. x.

⁶² Emery, ‘Caribbean Modernism’, p. 49.

rooted in their own conceptions of the term.

While the move away from a spatial conception of modernity is much needed, I question the value of a complete temporal unmooring. My approach instead explores different national and international modernisms around the Atlantic. Although a more expansive approach may be possible—by exploring sugar texts from Southeast Asia, for example—in limiting the geographical and temporal scope of this thesis to the Atlantic I aim to offer a deep and focussed analysis of texts involved in the production and consumption of tobacco and sugar. The Atlanticism promulgated by Gilroy presents an interesting and definable limit that promotes clarity, allowing textual comparisons within a broad geographical zone. The field is now distanced from restrictive, Eurocentric views of modernity—disavowing a diffusionist models of the term that inhibit recognition of alternative modernities. Regions previously marginalised or considered peripheral outside of Europe and the U.S. are no longer considered to be peripheral or illegitimate. However, while moving beyond spatial limitations is crucial to a more accurate and inclusive understanding, entirely abandoning temporal boundaries undermines the historical and cultural specificity that early twentieth-century authors were actively negotiating. One aim of this thesis is to reveal the interplay between multiple, national conceptions of modernity that are rooted in a specific, often colonial, histories. Adhering to stricter periodisation, therefore, ensures greater analytical clarity, allowing me to examine more effectively how twentieth-century perceptions of tobacco and sugar were re-evaluated in response to emerging national consciousnesses of the era.

Central to my theoretical basis for this thesis is cultural comparison across and within national borders. Through the direct comparison of texts across national boundaries, even different languages via translation, the tapestry of different modernities and their intersections with commodities are better revealed. Crucially, it allows us to further progress the field. The

transnational turn in modernist literary studies is well illustrated by Alexander and Moran, who note that work on regional modernism ‘challenges the Eurocentrism of older models of internationalism by attending to the imperial and post-colonial contexts for modernism’.⁶³ In focusing on regions of modernism, Alexander and Moran advocate for an approach to modernism that offers ‘a more detailed understanding of modernism’s sub-national and intra-national dynamics, and the ways in which these local ties are intricately braided with its more cosmopolitan strands.’⁶⁴ With this view—in conjunction with economic and commodity histories supplied by authors such as Trentmann and Mintz—I use commodities to provide a more holistic picture of early twentieth-century literature, using the commodity supply chain as a loose structure. Caribbean writers are particularly illuminated by this approach, with Emery writing that

Caribbean writers have contributed [...] by recognizing in these foundational scenes of contramodernity the ongoing presence of a circum-Atlantic past—a past in which particular interactions among land, sea, and human beings are crucial to the formation of modernity yet continually suppressed in modernity’s received history.⁶⁵

Identifying the role that regional modernities and contra-modernities play in a broader conception of early twentieth-century literature allows a more expansive field to be considered and vital parts of modernity to be explored. I contend that there are valuable comparisons and contrasts to be made between literary zones associated with the practices of production, and those associated

⁶³ Neal Alexander and James Moran, ‘Introduction: Regional Modernisms’, in *Regional Modernisms*, ed. by James Moran and Neal Alexander (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 3.

⁶⁴ Alexander and Moran, ‘Introduction: Regional Modernisms’, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Emery, ‘Caribbean Modernism’, p. 49.

predominantly with consumption. Emery notes the link ‘between planet and plantation’ that indicates a form of plantation modernity, a concept I explore and build upon in relation to texts from the Americas and the Caribbean.⁶⁶

Alexander and Moran, building on work completed by Mao and Walkowitz, note the transnational turn taken in modernist studies. Neal and Moran write that more recent transnational modernist scholars work to challenge ‘the Eurocentrism of older models of internationalism by attending to the imperial and post-colonial contexts for modernism, and also emphasises ‘a variety of affiliations within and across national spaces’ rather than regarding modernism as ‘inherently deterritorialised’.⁶⁷ Good examples of this approach can be found in Charles Pollard’s *New World Modernisms*, and Jessica Berman’s *Modernist Commitments*.⁶⁸ To properly appraise the relationship of tobacco and sugar with literature, I engage with the central tenets of transnational modernism, particularly the incorporation of postcolonial theory and the affiliations of texts across national borders.

Thesis structure and summaries

This thesis is divided into two parts, with each beginning on a broad overview of the associated commodity history. The four analysis chapters that comprise Part One cover representations of tobacco production and consumption in early twentieth-century literature, while those in Part Two

⁶⁶ Emery, ‘Caribbean Modernism’, p. 57.

⁶⁷ Alexander and Moran, ‘Introduction: Regional Modernisms’, p. 3; Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, ‘The New Modernist Studies’, *PMLA*, 123.3 (2008), p. 739.

⁶⁸ Charles W. Pollard, *New World Modernisms: T.S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite* (University of Virginia Press, 2004); Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

cover sugar and its own unique cultures of production and consumption. My approach is predominantly literary comparative but with important context provided on economic and food history where appropriate.

Chapter One ‘Cuban Counterpoints: Tobacco, Transculturation and Fernando Ortiz’ serves as an exploration of tobacco and the concept of *transculturation* in *Cuban Counterpoint* by Fernando Ortiz. Ortiz’s text provides the conceptual inspiration for the thesis, combining literature, tobacco, and sugar, and exploring them in the context of the nation and modernity. Throughout the thesis I have expanded the parameters of Ortiz’s original argument, examining the literary and cultural impact of tobacco and sugar in texts around the Atlantic. In this chapter, Ortiz is placed within the context of other modernists and in relation to the history of both Cuba and tobacco. Part of the sixteenth-century Columbian Exchange between the Old and New worlds, tobacco grew from a plant used in Indigenous spiritual ceremonies into a global commercial juggernaut consumed the world over. This all began on the island of Cuba in 1492. Following the contextualisation of Ortiz is a comparative literary analysis of *Cuban Counterpoint* (1940) in relation to global modernist output on tobacco production and consumption. Of particular note is Ortiz’s *transculturation* concept theorising cultural formation. The term describes describe the complex, two-way processes of cultural exchange and transformation that occur through colonial contact, where neither assimilation nor simple acculturation takes place, but instead new hybrid cultural forms emerge—visible through the production and consumption of tobacco and sugar in Cuba. Using *transculturation* Ortiz tells the story of the disruptive arrival of the Europeans on Cuba, with tobacco as an emissary and as an addictive tool for revenge, captivating the Old World.

Chapter Two, ‘The Political Producers: Southern Violence and Capitalist Structures’, changes focus to the rural producers of tobacco in the U.S. Southern states of Kentucky and

Tennessee. The area, known as The Black Patch, is the setting for two of Robert Penn Warren's early works: the short story 'Prime Leaf' (1931) and *Night Rider* (1940), his first novel. The analysis in Chapter Two looks at Warren's two representations of The Black Patch Tobacco War between 1905-1908, in particular representations of violence as Southern resistance in the texts. Weaving in themes of corruption, violence, and poverty, Warren shows the crucial importance tobacco plays in the culture of the American South, as well as the impact of over-mighty Trusts on rural producers. Manipulation of the tobacco industry shows that the commodity became intensely political, with Warren's texts demonstrating the bloodshed and conflict tied to the crop.

Chapter Three 'Cigarettes, Cigars and Circe: Commodity Modernism in Trieste and Dublin', the final tobacco chapter, contrasts *Confessions of Zeno* by Italo Svevo and *Ulysses* by James Joyce. The two texts present very different visions of tobacco consumption: the former concerned predominantly with addiction and the mind, the latter with British imperialism and the legacies of commodities in empire. *Confessions of Zeno* stands as a satirical portrayal of addiction, with the titular Zeno (a semi-autobiographical character from Svevo) unable to shake his steadfast addiction to cigarettes for much of the novel. The cigarette, a commodified product born of a combination of modern capitalism and war, indicates Zeno's physical, mental and philosophical distress. Addiction, an increasingly prevalent disease in the twentieth century, is examined by Svevo through the prism of psychoanalysis. Here, I make the case that Zeno's cigarette consumption represents the more regimented and regularised elements of early twentieth-century society, with addiction marked as a disease that has societal as well as physical and mental causes.

Joyce's treatment of tobacco in *Ulysses* differs from Svevo's in that psychoanalysis is omitted in favour of formal and symbolic diversity alongside an exploration of nationalism and colonial status. I have chosen to cover four episodes of the novel—'Lotus Eaters', 'Cyclops',

‘Circe’, and ‘Eumaeus’—to explore how Joyce’s use of tobacco to reveal the complexities of consumption and nationalism in relation to Irish cultural identity. Linking Joyce’s Ireland to the globalised world, commodities in *Ulysses* reveal the impact of both colonialism and trade on the country. Joyce’s smoking characters consume conspicuously, in the process revealing the conflicts that defined Irish modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century. Svevo and Joyce were firm friends with influence over each other’s work; this chapter places the two in conversation to effectively analyse representations of tobacco in two prominent texts of European literary modernism.

Part Two of this thesis steps away from tobacco to examine the commodity originally contrasted by Ortiz: sugar. An economic juggernaut that provided the impetus for the transatlantic triangular trade, the sugar narratives concerning production focus on the inequalities created by the plantations that produced the crop. In contrast, the narratives of consumption concerning sugared confection are completely removed from their history, adopting new meanings. Part Two mirrors the first, beginning with a contextual history section before three chapters of textual analysis. The broad aim here is to show, through literary analysis, the cultural, transatlantic incongruity between raw cane sugar and cooked confection.

Chapter Four, ‘Colonial Legacies: Plantations in American and Caribbean Literature’ revisits to Ortiz’s *Cuban Counterpoint* but with a renewed focus on sugar production, taking inspiration from the contrast made between the two products in the text. In this chapter, Ortiz’s work is placed into conversation with two narrative texts: José Lins Do Rêgo’s *Sugar Cane Cycle* (1932-1935) and Jean Toomer’s innovative poem *Cane* (1923). In comparing these three texts I demonstrate the complexities of a regional conception of literary modernity, with plantations and their history providing a strong basis for comparison between texts. Each text serves as a distinct

response to a history of sugar production in Cuba, northwest Brazil, and the U.S. South, with violence ingrained in the means of sugar's production. Authors from each of these places include the structure of the plantation for the transformative impact it has had on Caribbean and American cultures. The economic legacies of sugar production are inseparable from racial prejudice, with the balance of power between the powerful and the formerly enslaved explored within the context of each setting. While the process of sugar creation unites these texts, the different approaches taken by Ortiz, Rêgo, and Toomer demonstrates the diversity found in Caribbean and American modernism.

Chapter Five, 'Haiti and the Literary Impact of Sugar Production', draws attention to Haiti as a single site for sugar production. The chapter seeks to draw meaning from representations of sugar in three texts about Haiti: C. L. R. James's play *Toussaint Louverture* (1934) and *The Black Jacobins* (1938; 1963), William B. Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929), and Jacques Roumain's *Masters of the Dew* (1947). Known as the French colony of Saint Domingue before the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), Haiti's culture was dominated by sugar and other commodity crops, with the long-lasting impact reflected in the country's literature. In comparing literature written about Haiti's sugar, I show how Haiti's violent past and contested history is placed in the context of enslavement, liberation, and national self-determination. Using divergent perspectives—James's texts lionise Toussaint Louverture as a liberator, Seabrook introduces an English readership to Haitian zombies working the fields, and Roumain shows a vision of a hopeful, cooperative Haiti—each of the authors explores the economic, cultural and social legacies of sugar in Haiti.

The final chapter, Chapter Six, 'Sweet Temptations: The Role of Confectionery in Modernist Literature', focuses on modernist sweet treats, the confections into which sugar is

transformed. The chapter includes Proust's madeleine in *In Search of Lost Time*, Tommaso Marinetti's Futurist sugar sculptures in *The Futurist Cookbook*, M. F. K. Fisher's food-based nostalgia in *How to Cook a Wolf* and *Serve It Forth*, and Patrick Hamilton's Turkish Delight consumed by his characters in his London trilogy, *20,000 Streets Under the Sky*. Written with the plantations of the Caribbean and the Americas in mind, Chapter Six shows how divorced the consumption of cooked, refined sugar is from the raw cane. Instead, sugared confection comes to garner alternative meanings, such as nostalgic memory, ostentatious luxury contrasted with rationing, or sexual desire. Each text features a different example of sugared treats and the circumstances of their consumption, whether conspicuous or private. The nourishing white commodity produced and traded across the sea becomes something new with the process of modern commodification.

By exploring these texts together in the context of their treatment of commodities, I will show how commodities and modernity intersect through the medium of literature. Though distinct, cultures of production interact with cultures of consumption across both commodities, with different texts offering varying perspectives. Furthermore, functioning as a means of relating otherwise diverse texts of a global modernism, commodities make clear the distinct national and regional modernisms found around the Atlantic. Through commodities—in this case literary representations of tobacco and sugar—we can form a better understanding of global, regional, and (inter)national literatures, and the links between them.

Section Introduction: Tobacco and Modernism

Tobacco: decadent, addictive, and one of the great commodities of modernity, it reaches across the globe and transcends boundaries of class, wealth, and status. The trade networks created by tobacco reach across borders, connecting nations with a shared love of a highly addictive commodity, its influence stretching across the planet. Though not as protean as sugar, tobacco has nonetheless made an indelible mark on planetary culture. Conspicuously present in literature, art, and film, tobacco becomes a signifier of modernity. This is seemingly far from the spiritual status tobacco use had been associated with before the arrival of Europeans in the New World. Tobacco's journey across the planet and its transformation from spiritual plant into manufactured consumable makes the commodity a key signifier of modernity. Although emblematic of the mass consumerism that would come to be a defining cultural feature of twentieth-century modernity, tobacco's modern cultural significance stands in stark contrast to the plant's pre-colonial spiritual associations among indigenous peoples in the Americas.

This thesis argues that tobacco is not merely an influential commodity but a critical mediator of modern transatlantic and global exchanges, illustrating how deeply interconnected economies, societies, and cultures became through the circulation and consumption of this addictive product. Literary analysis illuminates how tobacco permeated societies around the Atlantic, reshaping them profoundly through both production and consumption.

As one of the great commodities to be commercially extracted from the New World during the Columbian Exchange, tobacco has become a permanent feature of modern life. Transformed from a spiritual herb into a globally consumed drug, tobacco holds incredible power over the minds, habits, and desires of billions of people worldwide. However, the particular aspect to tobacco that I will be examining here is the role it played in establishing modernity. How was

tobacco perceived, and how can an assessment of tobacco give us greater insight into modernity during the twentieth century? The cultivation of commodity crops—tobacco and sugar in particular—transformed the Old and the New Worlds, simultaneously creating immense wealth and inequality. With their indelible impact on modernity, I will compare approaches to them in the work of authors from commodity producing and consuming parts of the world. This will include some overlap, assessing consumption in the Caribbean as well as more traditional sites of modernity.

This section begins with a cultural history of tobacco that provides essential context and sets out some of the lines of enquiry that guide the literary analyses. With the important historical context established, I move on to analyse a range of different texts that prominently feature tobacco production or consumption. These sources, and the connections between them, show the clear influence of tobacco and smoking on modernity: how it is used, represented, and perceived. Tobacco invites multiple overlapping perspectives. Economic, spiritual, social, and psychological factors all converge on tobacco and its representation as a twentieth-century commodity.

Tobacco in Context

Tobacco stands as one of a group of addictive commodities that helped shape our modern world, alongside sugar, alcohol, and opium. These commodities are paradoxical engines of prosperity and inequality, wellbeing and harm, social mobility and oppression. This section comprises a truncated history of tobacco with a brief overview of the plant's uses—in prehistory, the Columbian era, the Industrial Revolution, and finally the early twentieth century—comparing its reputation at sites of production in the West Indies with how the product is consumed as a luxury, or even necessary, commodity in Europe. Its history is fraught with vested interests and post-colonial struggles which were beginning to flourish in the early twentieth century. Of particular interest is the Cuban struggle for independence from both Spanish and American influence. Tobacco has grown to become one of the most well-used commodities on the planet, in no small part due to its highly addictive nature and exceptionally inexpensive production cost. The ultimate consumable product, tobacco has spread across the face of the globe to be used across cultures, classes, and ages. Just as the factories of modernity exhaled smoke, so too did the people. Its popularity, spurred by innovative modern advertising techniques and claims of panacean health benefits, consumed modernity in a smoky haze. As Ortiz writes ‘Tobacco was pleasing to the senses and relieved nervous tension. Moreover, tobacco cured real or imaginary ailments. These simple natural factors suffice to explain the use of tobacco among any people, whether primitive or civilised’.⁶⁹ In an era renowned for its break-neck pace tobacco serves as a corrective, slowing the narrative of the city, calming the nerves of modern humanity. Although this project's principal focus is the

⁶⁹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 184.

representation of commodities within modernist literature this selective and focussed account of tobacco history that provides us with much needed context and allows for a more holistic analysis.

Indigenous tobacco consumption

Though tobacco's role in ancient human societies is extremely interesting—and I mention it here for necessary context to the shared history between man and plant—this project's aims are far more recent. Part of tobacco's appeal lies in its ability to connect multiple strata of society and remains pervasive in almost every society with access to it.⁷⁰ Tobacco consumption within indigenous societies points towards its later significance as a commodity in twentieth-century literature and culture. As a sacred plant used in religious rituals, its historical use as a spiritual aid is carried over into its function as a conduit for reflection. However, in contrast to this shared effect, tobacco's more addictive qualities are also used to represent individual or societal decay, signifying the consequences of over-consumption. In twentieth-century literature, representations of tobacco consumption are used to reflect the values of modernity. As Jordan Goodman notes, notwithstanding tobacco's role in spirituality, in indigenous societies 'Tobacco was widely consumed for a great many reasons. Tobacco's sacredness was there to be shared, not monopolised'.⁷¹ Tobacco's proliferation across the world was in no small part because of its attendant culture of sharing, spurring adoption across cultural and social divides. Joseph C. Winter's research covers the original methods of tobacco consumption, exploring how Indigenous

⁷⁰ This even stretches as far as the cold environs of the Arctic circle, an inhospitable environment to the tobacco plant, yet Inuit society remained fertile ground for tobacco to be sold as a commodity after the Europeans brought it north.

⁷¹ Jordan Goodman, *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence* (Routledge, 1993), p. 49.

Americans have consumed the commodity throughout their history. It should be noted that methods of tobacco use were not homogeneous across the South and North American continents. However, through Winter's work we can gain a valuable understanding of how a range of Indigenous societies viewed tobacco consumption, informing our view of smoking in twentieth-century literature.

Although *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans* was originally intended to be a furthering of Wilbert's *Tobacco and Shamanism in South America*, its scope is far wider than a simple expansion. Winter 'provides information about how and why Native Americans use tobacco, how they created the domesticated species of the plant, and how they are affected by its positive religious values and negative health consequences'.⁷² Additionally, the text includes analysis on 'the concept that tobacco is so potent and sacred that the spirits themselves are addicted to it', showing us that the addictive power of tobacco has long been recognised and is even incorporated into Indigenous American mythology.⁷³ This provides us with a better understanding of how tobacco may have been used by the hunter-gatherer societies of Ancient South America, with tobacco used as a spiritual, social, and recreational aid—and elements of this historical use inspiring twentieth-century literary output. Interestingly, Winter draws a distinction—gleaned from his study of Indigenous American cultures—between 'the Red road of positive tobacco use and the Dark road of tobacco abuse', a concept that I will return to later when examining the effects, both positive and negative, of tobacco on the societies in which my target texts were

⁷² Joseph C. Winter, *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans: Sacred Smoke and Silent Killer*, Illustrated edition (University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), p. xvi.

⁷³ Winter, *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans*, p. xvi.

written.⁷⁴ Expanding upon this Winter writes that ‘From Alaska to Panama and the Caribbean Islands, many native North Americans revere tobacco as a sacred and powerful substance that is used only in ceremonies and prayers. Unfortunately, many other American Indians and Alaskan Natives misuse tobacco in the form of cigarettes, snuff, and other commercial products’, in part as a result of its mass commodification across the world.⁷⁵ It is here that my focus parts with Winter’s. My intention is to compare the representations of tobacco production and consumption across Atlantic societies, whereas Winter’s work is far more focused on the traditional use of tobacco in a predominantly spiritual context.

The Indigenous Taino Arawak people were the first to introduce tobacco to Columbus’ seafaring Europeans on their making landfall on 12th October 1492.⁷⁶ At the time there was little indication that the plant being consumed by the Taino would grow to become a globalised commodity that would one day be sold across the world. Columbus wrote upon touching ground in San Salvador that ‘the natives brought fruit, wooden spears, and certain dried leaves [tobacco] which gave off a distinct fragrance’.⁷⁷ Just a few weeks later those same sailors caught sight of their first cigars on the island of Cuba; it did not take long for it to make its way back to Europe as an exciting new recreational drug.⁷⁸ Goodman states that once ‘its value as a commodity was understood, tobacco rapidly became the plant of early colonization and, through its commercial circuits and cultures of consumption, acted to bind disparate economic regions in common

⁷⁴ Winter, *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans*, p. xvii.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷⁷ Francis Robicsek, ‘Ritual Smoking in Central America’, in *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, edited by Sander L. Gilman and Xun Zhou (Reaktion Books, 2004), p. 30.

⁷⁸ Winter, *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans*, p. 56.

purpose’⁷⁹ in part attributing the colonial ties of empire to the twin Western desires of commodities and profits. A crucial point is made by Winter that is deserving of particular attention. Around the time of Columbus’ second voyage ‘there were about one million Taino on Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and the Bahamas. Within 30 years they had been annihilated and become all but extinct’.⁸⁰ Through domination and extermination the people who had originally shared tobacco with the Western world would not continue to be a direct influence on the modern culture of the Caribbean islands. Martin writes that ‘The conquest involved the penetration of alien territories and societies, the invasion of that cultural space and the creation of a new race of people, not by consent but by violation’.⁸¹ The islands of the Caribbean, like the other New World societies, were plundered for their wealth and almost expunged from the historical record. Those that replaced them did, however, carry on some of their traditions through the consumption of their native commodity. Though the genocide of Indigenous Caribbean peoples all but extinguished primary sources for their tobacco use, some records remain extant and show strong similarities with tobacco use and myths on the American continental mainland, despite their own numbers being severely impacted by the arrival of the Europeans. The human cost of colonisation is hard to fathom, yet reminders of Taino culture live on in tobacco-related ritual and consumption, despite their absence.

Winter’s text is particularly useful in the context of *Cuban Counterpoint* in that it provides us with vital information about the Taino people specifically—as opposed to a

⁷⁹ Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, p. 14.

⁸⁰ Winter, *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans*, p. 56.

⁸¹ Gerald Martin, ‘Myths of the Mestizo Continent’ in *Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (Verso, 1989), p. 15.

generalised view of all pre-modern Indigenous American tobacco consumers. On the cultivation of tobacco on Cuba, Winter writes ‘The Caribbean Taino grew tobacco around their houses, chewed it and smoked it, and snuffed it in both nostrils through forked, Y-shaped tubes. The tubes were also used to inhale the smoke of burning tobacco leaves, but most people smoked large cigars rolled in tree leaves and corn shucks, tied with a thread’.⁸² Most of the elements of modern tobacco use are present in the indigenous rituals: cigars, snuff, chewing tobacco. Contrasting the different uses of tobacco in Taino society, Winter writes: ‘In addition to the popular smoking of cigars for pleasure by the general Taino population, the medicine men or shamans (*behiques*, *bohutios*, and *piaies*) snuffed hallucinogenic *cahoba* powder through forked tubes’, *cahoba* likely being ‘a combination of a number of plants, including powdered tobacco prepared from unfermented tobacco leaves mixed with saltwater and lime’.⁸³ This potent mix was used by the shamans to ‘induce trances, visions, and communication with their personal spirit helpers (*zemis*), as well as to foretell the future, treat diseases, and otherwise help people’.⁸⁴ Robicsek affirms this, writing that tobacco was known to bestow ‘supernatural powers’ upon the user, and was ‘at first [...] confined to shamans, priests, and medicine men’ in Mayan society on the South American continent.⁸⁵

Wagner brings a different focus to contrast Winter’s, providing useful information on smoking habits outside of the Americas in the pre-Columbian Old World. She notes the priestesses

⁸² Winter, *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans*, p. 56.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Susan Wagner, *Cigarette Country: Tobacco in American History and Politics* (Praeger, 1971), p. 4.

at Delphi would envelop themselves ‘in a vapor of burning laurel before making their prophesies’, Herodotus heating hemp seeds ‘to produce an intoxicating smoke after dinner’, the Indian practice of ‘Inhaling the smoke of aromatic herbs’, and ‘the smoking of opium’ as a common practice ‘from an early date in the Far East’.⁸⁶ Further still, Wagner notes that Hippocrates, Pliny, and Galen all prescribed various forms of smoke for the curing of ailments. This included ‘the smoke of coltsfoot, dried cow-dung, and other substances into the lungs as a cure for asthma and other afflictions’.⁸⁷ Needless to say, these cures did not work. Smoking cow-dung had the same effect on human health then as it does today. However, it shows a pervasive logic held by spatially separated human societies that ethereal smoke holds medicinal value and even an inter-related link to the spiritual.

Tobacco and the city

The most ubiquitous form of tobacco consumed today is the cigarette; however, it was far from ubiquitous during the nineteenth century. Although the cigarette has come to be the tobacco product most emblematic of modernity, it was not always the preferred mode of consumption. Before the nineteenth century snuff was by far the most common mode of tobacco consumption and, as a processed product, relied upon modern machinery for mass production. Snuff can, in assessing the history of tobacco, be viewed as an interim form of tobacco in its development towards ever more consumable forms. As Goodman notes, ‘Both its manufacture and distribution can clearly be viewed as “modern”’. That is to say, snuff alone, of all tobacco products, can be

⁸⁶ Wagner, *Cigarette Country*, p. 4.

⁸⁷ Wagner, *Cigarette Country*, p. 4.

considered in that class of goods that historians have identified as belonging to the first stirrings of modern consumerism in the eighteenth century'.⁸⁸ In other words, snuff was one of the first consumerist expressions of tobacco consumption in Western society. The substance became central to a variety of informal social gatherings; snuff boxes were passed around during these events and shared between attendees. Often, the boxes were ornamental to reflect the tastes of the owner, forming a decorative centrepiece to a social ritual and combining artistic form with function.

Though throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries snuff's popularity was drastically curtailed. Goodman's research shows that 'Britain [...] entered the nineteenth century with more than half the tobacco market represented by snuff' making it the primary mode of tobacco consumption not only in Britain, but across the world.⁸⁹ It was through the consumption of snuff that modern tobacco consumption began to take shape. Easy to mass-produce without the need for complicated machinery, snuff's popularity can in part be attributed to its ready supply, moving the status of tobacco from inaccessible luxury to cultural staple. When taken as a powder into the nose through a pipe, snuff bridges the gap between the native consumption of tobacco and more modern forms. The use of snuff shows the interaction between the European cultures of the Old World, merging New World methods of consumption with Old World production techniques. Tobacco, in the form of snuff, was its first foray into the modern world as a widely used commodity. Moving through the nineteenth century, snuff was somewhat superseded by pipe smoking, 'Some 60 percent of British consumption near mid-century was accounted for by pipe

⁸⁸ Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, p. 90.

⁸⁹ Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, p. 93.

tobacco'; for Britain, and the rest of the world, snuff's dominance was upset by the growing popularity of pipes and cigars.⁹⁰ Snuff refined the Western taste for tobacco, but its widespread use in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century would be superseded by ever more popular modes of consumption. However, this change did not occur in a vacuum. Instead, the decline of snuff was primarily the result of warfare alongside the need for greater efficiency to satisfy the tobacco habit.

The cigar, perhaps the most luxurious form of tobacco smoking, has predominantly been held as a signifier of wealth and masculinity over its history.⁹¹ Their variety—much like that found in other luxury consumables, such as wine—allow for their consumers to consider themselves connoisseurs, fuelling a socially-acceptable addiction. Pungent and bold, cigars were a far more obvious mode of consumption for tobacco users. No longer was the visual signifier of group tobacco consumption a decorative snuff box, but the tobacco itself. As Wagner writes, 'With the nineteenth century came something new in the history of smoking: the cigar age. The pipe held its grip, as did chewing tobacco. Snuff went into eclipse. By the 1800's [sic], the cigarette would begin to make inroads'.⁹² Much like most cultural change, this was not an immediate transformation of societal habits, but a gradual shift over decades, spurred by the desire for yet more obvious signs of good taste. It was only after 1810 that Cuban cigars began to steadily become dominant across the world, but from that time were almost entirely undisputed as the best

⁹⁰ Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, p. 93.

⁹¹ Matthew Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture 1800-2000* (Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 42. Hilton notes that many Victorian authors—Conan Doyle, Dickens, and Trollope amongst them—use tobacco to convey the social status of their characters.

⁹² Wagner, *Cigarette Country*, p. 27.

of the best in producing quality tobacco products. Nonetheless, its history in the Western world began as a disruptive cultural change. According to Hilton, the cigar ‘was first introduced into Britain by [young cavalry officers] during the Peninsular Wars of 1804–13’ and came to represent an effete form of masculinity that was fashionable at the time.⁹³ It would not be the last time a mode of tobacco consumption was popularized by a war, preceding the First World War by over a century. Wagner supports Hilton’s contention relating cigars to early nineteenth century cigar smoking. He writes that those men who smoked were thought of with ‘acceptably dashing, manly traits’ for their cigar habits, whereas cigarettes were considered a more effeminate product during the period.⁹⁴ This was the period before cigars became associated with wealthy industrialists and ‘well-fed, cajoling, conniving politicians’ and used to signify callous capitalists.⁹⁵ The cigar would go on to dominate the century, only to eventually be superseded by the cigarette. However, even before the invention of James Bonsack’s transformative industrial cigarette rolling machine ‘Tobacco factories in Virginia and North Carolina multiplied from 119 in 1840 to 348 in 1860’, showing an almost 200 percent increase in production capacity over just twenty years.⁹⁶ As countries surrounding the Atlantic became more industrialized, so their appetite for tobacco grew. The burning spiritual weed from the Americas was primed to become a modern necessity.

Developments in technology are one of the crucial drivers of modernity; this is no less true in the modernisation of the tobacco industry. New production methods and innovative technologies can give industries, even whole nations, a competitive edge. As Gary Cross and

⁹³ Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture 1800-2000*, p. 42.

⁹⁴ Wagner, *Cigarette Country*, p. 27.

⁹⁵ Wagner, *Cigarette Country*, p. 27.

⁹⁶ Wagner, *Cigarette Country*, p. 29.

Robert Proctor note, ‘it was really not until the rise of mechanized processing and rolling at the end of that century that smoking was transformed from a ritual or recreational drug into a mass addiction’.⁹⁷ This is the crucial difference that transformed tobacco from a spiritual drug into the cultural juggernaut it became in Western society. Cross and Proctor go on to note that ‘The product itself was different, as was the means by which it was produced and marketed. And the scale on which it was—and is—used’⁹⁸ aided by the automatic rolling machine created by James Bonsack in 1884. Mark Seltzer has suggested the term ‘machine culture’⁹⁹ to show how modernity alienates the individual and creates addicts. Using ‘machine culture’ to describe the increasing mechanisation characteristic of modernity allows us to separate the non-modern past from the modern period, the industrial revolution setting the stage for a world centred around consumers and consumption. The ‘machine culture’¹⁰⁰ concept can be used to refer both to society’s increasing dependence upon machines and to the people who run them. With the invention of the assembly line—first popularised by Henry Ford—production became more efficient, less specialised, and crucially much cheaper. In her modern history of the cigarette, Parker-Pope writes that ‘The [automatic rolling] machine, which sliced cigarettes from an endless tube of wrapped tobacco, produced 200 cigarettes a minute, and it could make as many cigarettes in a day as 40 hand rollers. The cost savings were huge—just 30 cents for a machine-made cigarette, less than

⁹⁷ Gary S. Cross and Robert N. Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures: How Technology and Marketing Revolutionized Desire* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 62.

⁹⁸ Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, p. 62.

⁹⁹ Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, 1st edition (Routledge, 2016), p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, p. 4.

half the 80 cents it cost to make a hand-rolled cigarette'.¹⁰¹ This revolutionised the tobacco business. Cigarettes were now not only highly addictive, but widely available and entirely affordable. The Bonsack machine transformed tobacco from widespread luxury into one of the defining commodities of the twentieth century. Goodman writes that, by the beginning of the First World War, 'Cigars then began to lose favour while sales of cut tobacco remained fairly stable, [...] it was now the turn of the cigarette'.¹⁰² Providing quickly consumable hits of addictive nicotine cigarettes were popularised by the necessities of modern warfare, then returned to civilian life. This demonstrates the transformative impact that advances in technology had towards the end of the nineteenth century as well as continuing a similar path trod by the cigar a century earlier, in the Boer War. With Bonsack's machine tobacco could become not merely a luxury commodity, but a widely accepted necessity. The Bonsack machine created the means for commodified nicotine addiction in the modern world, despite the established and widespread use of snuff in the eighteenth century and other combustible forms in the nineteenth. The mechanical rolling of cigarettes created the perfect vehicle for the proliferation of tobacco smoking, forming a vital context for the ways in which tobacco appears in twentieth-century literature.

Tobacco's influence exploded in the twentieth century. Spurred by new manufacturing processes, tobacco in general—and cigarettes in particular—became a key signifier of modernity. Stubbs writes that 'By the 1930s, the technical revolution in cigarette manufacturing, coupled with the discovery of mild Virginia tobacco, had made mild cigarettes the twentieth-

¹⁰¹ Tara Parker-Pope, *Cigarettes: Anatomy of An Industry from Seed to Smoke* (New Press, 2001), p. 10.

¹⁰² Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, p. 92.

century world's mass tobacco product, undercutting all other forms of smoke and the stronger, darker tobaccos of many small tobacco-producing countries' with over-production becoming a significant problem in Cuba, losing its mass-market dominance to U.S. farmers growing milder tobaccos.¹⁰³ Tobacco ceased to be a luxury in and of itself, it had become an accepted and widely-accessible part of everyday life in every social stratum. This was part of a larger trend: the expansion of the middle class and the *nouveau riche*. Tobacco became an indicator of wealth and status, accelerating ever greater uptake of addictive consumption habits.

Rural production and the Tobacco Trust

Nan Enstad provides an analysis of international corporate exploitation during the interwar period, preceding the publication of Robert Penn Warren's texts on the Black Patch straddling Kentucky and Tennessee. In Enstad's work, cigarettes are used as a means of exemplifying a corporatised version of the tobacco industry, writing that 'we could say that the bright leaf network was a manifestation of corporate imperialism'.¹⁰⁴ The Bright Leaf Network connected the local with the global via the medium of tobacco. This intersection of the local and global occurs with the rise of the Tobacco Trust. Local tobacco farmers are exploited in the interests of globally realised profits. Warren turns his focus to the plight of these farmers, with the global sphere omitted in the narrative. The story of U.S. tobacco runs through the Southern states that produced tobacco for a global market.

Tobacco history is often tied to conflict and war. The rise in popularity of cigars can

¹⁰³ Jean Stubbs, 'Labour and Economy in Cuban Tobacco, 1860-1958', pp. 449-450.

¹⁰⁴ Nan Enstad, *Cigarettes, Inc*, p. 5.

in part be attributed to the Peninsular War of the early nineteenth century, and that of the cigarette to the ration packs of the First World War. Warren's work fictionalises a far more localised conflict: The Black Patch Tobacco Wars (1905-1908).¹⁰⁵ Warren's first literary works involve the weaving of fiction into historical fact that would later become a hallmark of his writing. In historical terms, the conflict was between James Buchanan Duke's American Tobacco Company (ATC) and the Dark Tobacco District Planters' Protective Association of Kentucky and Tennessee (PPA), the latter formed to counter the monopolistic price gouging of the former. As Milov writes, 'At the turn of the twentieth century, tobacco farmers were weak and angry. Their sweat had made men like James B. Duke wildly rich. But growers were not sharing in the spoils of the profitable tobacco industry'.¹⁰⁶ This inequality within the tobacco industry quickly led to resentment and the formation of the PPA as a means to develop a stronger position from which to negotiate. Milov illustrates the monopolistic, but largely overlooked, power of the Tobacco trust which led to the conflict:

In popular memory, the Tobacco Trust has taken a backseat to John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Trust, J. P. Morgan's U.S. Steel [...] But between its founding in 1890 and its dissolution in 1911, the Tobacco Trust controlled between 75 and 90 percent of all cigarette sales in the United States.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Robert W. Witt, 'Robert Penn Warren and the "Black Patch War"'. *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, vol. 67, no. 4, 1969, pp. 301.

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Milov, 'Tobacco in Industrializing America', in *The Cigarette, A Political History* (Harvard University Press, 2019), p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ Milov, 'Tobacco in Industrializing America', p. 14.

With an iron-grip on a guaranteed market, the tobacco trust could dictate the prices paid to Southern farmers. It is this central inequity that forms the dramatic impetus in both ‘Prime Leaf’ and *Night Rider*.

James Buchanan Duke took over the family tobacco company from his father, Washington Duke, in the 1880s.¹⁰⁸ By October 1889 James Buchanan Duke consolidated the ‘Big Five’ tobacco companies—W. Duke and Sons, Kinney Tobacco Company, Allen and Ginter, William S. Kimball, and Goodwin and Company—into one, the American Tobacco Company.¹⁰⁹ The merging of the largest companies into a monopolistic Trust proved ruinous to tobacco farmers in the rural South. As Campbell writes, ‘The ATC’s dominance soon extended well beyond the bounds of Wall Street and exerted a direct influence on the economic and social life of hundreds of Kentucky and Tennessee farm communities’.¹¹⁰ The over-dominance of the city over rural producers led inexorably towards ‘lower prices and increasing flight into landless tenantry’.¹¹¹ With immense downward pressure on the price of tobacco through the monopolistic trust, tobacco farmers struggled to make an acceptable living. Reynolds notes the impact of the Trust’s monopoly on rural producers:

The farmer ceased to be a self-sustaining individual, one who grew and produced practically everything he and his family needed or wanted, and turned to the method of raising a money crop, selling it and supplying his needs and wants from the cash obtained.

¹⁰⁸ Tracy Campbell, *The Politics of Despair: Power and Resistance in the Tobacco Wars* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ Campbell, *The Politics of Despair*, pp. 22-23.

¹¹⁰ Campbell, *The Politics of Despair*, p. 21.

¹¹¹ Campbell, *The Politics of Despair*, p. 21.

This development was brought about by increased demands for the farmer's products both in this country and in Europe, and it was aided by new farming techniques and increased mechanization by the farmer.¹¹²

Intermediary buyers served as the Trust's only contact with the Tobacco farmers. A contemporary of Warren's, Saloutos writes that 'Trust agents travelled from farm to farm seeking to convince the farmers of the benefits of selling direct to the company'.¹¹³ By undermining the self-sustaining pride of the Southern tobacco farmers, the Tobacco Trust precipitated the emergence of the PPA.

To counter the unchecked power of the ATC, the PPA was created following a meeting held on the evening of 24th September 1904 in Guthrie. According to Campbell,

The farmers' announced intention was to organize formally to combat the low price of tobacco, which they perceived directly resulted from the monopolization of the nation's tobacco industry by the American Tobacco Company. Speakers exhorted the growers to unite for self-protection, and by afternoon's end, the Clarksville District Planters' Protective Association (PPA) had been formed.¹¹⁴

With limited power as individuals, the tobacco farmers had little recourse but to unite in an effort to resist the market forces that had pervaded their livelihood. However, membership remained below the level necessary to significantly raise prices. Saloutos writes that 'One of the most

¹¹² Albin Lee Reynolds, 'War in the Black Patch'. *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, vol. 56, no. 1, 1958, p. 1.

¹¹³ Theodore Saloutos, 'The American Society of Equity in Kentucky: A Recent Attempt in Agrarian Reform', *The Journal of Southern History*, 5.3 (1939), p. 355.

¹¹⁴ Campbell, *The Politics of Despair*, p. 30.

discouraging obstacles was the independent farmer who asserted his independence by refusing to join the association' with justifications including scepticism, individualism, and previous failure.¹¹⁵ As a result, the PPA could not hope to effectively challenge the ATC with voluntary membership alone; coercion would be deemed a necessary evil to spur unsure or resistant farmers to action. Violent opposition to the Tobacco Trust—and the events explored in Warren's 'Prime Leaf' and *Night Rider*—emerged in 1905, stemming from the need to control the supply of tobacco sold to the ATC. As Campbell writes,

Beginning in 1905 a new element began to insinuate itself into the tobacco movement, one that grew as the times became more desperate: bands of armed, hooded men on horseback appeared, determined to enforce cooperation by coercion. They primarily targeted farmers who failed to take part in the crop-withholding program and the warehouses and agents of the tobacco trust.¹¹⁶

Undermined by Southern individualism, coercion and destruction both became more widespread. The reaction of the Night Riders against the tobacco companies and buyers is a direct reaction against hostile monopolistic forces. The anti-trust Sherman Act (1890) proved to be of little use to the farmers in the face of the power of the American Tobacco Company without a government to enforce the law. It was a situation that was only ended by the ascension of Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) to the presidency and his administration's subsequent enforcement of the Sherman

¹¹⁵ Saloutos, 'The American Society of Equity in Kentucky: A Recent Attempt in Agrarian Reform', p. 355.

¹¹⁶ Campbell, *The Politics of Despair*, p. 76.

Act, beginning in 1907.¹¹⁷ On 29th May 1911 the ATC was finally split into sixteen successor companies, formally ending the tobacco trust.¹¹⁸ According to Duke and Jordan the breakup of the ATC was ‘a task so complicated that, ironically, it had to be supervised by Buck Duke himself’, demonstrating the extent of the power and influence the Trust held over the producers.¹¹⁹

Warren uses this history as the basis for *Night Rider*—explored in Chapter Two of this thesis—which centres on the events of the Black Patch Tobacco Wars. In the novel, the PPA is transcribed into the Association for Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco. The novel charts the Association of Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco’s mutation into the terrorist Free Farmers’ Brotherhood for Protection and Control, the titular Night Riders. By setting his 1940 novel in the period 1906-1908 Warren draws attention to the inherently violent nature of producer and consumer within the twentieth-century U.S.. The history of producer resistance in the tobacco industry of the U.S. South reveals how deeply entangled commodity production was with questions of identity, agency, and violence in the early twentieth century. The PPA’s struggle—caught between the need for solidarity and the pull of Southern individualism—highlights the contested economic, social, and cultural space that commodity production creates. The notion that producers are largely excluded from the profits created in the sale of commodities is the central tension in Warren’s *Night Rider*. As I explore in Chapter Two, the novel brings to the fore questions concerning inequality and the escalation of violence in opposition.

As I now turn to the Caribbean, and to the work of Fernando Ortiz, I broaden this lens

¹¹⁷ Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, p. 43.

¹¹⁸ Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, p. 43.

¹¹⁹ Maurice Duke and Daniel P. Jordan, *Tobacco Merchant: The Story of Universal Leaf Tobacco Company* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p. 13.

to consider how the cultural meanings of tobacco shift across different national, economic, and postcolonial contexts. Opening my literary analysis with *Cuban Counterpoint* allows for an exploration of tobacco's role as an object of consumption and a marker of cultural identity. In tracing these dynamics, I begin to establish Commodity Modernism: a critical framework that locates commodities—particularly those entangled with coercion, labour, and addiction—at the heart of select modernist texts.

1 Cuban Counterpoints: Tobacco, Transculturation and Fernando Ortiz

Of the multiplicity of commodities that have come to dominate modern life, perhaps none are so conspicuous—and controversial—as tobacco. This chapter seeks to place Ortiz’s work into dialogue with other texts from the period, linked across the Atlantic by their representations of tobacco and sugar and the systems underpinning their cultivation and consumption. Ortiz positions tobacco and sugar as central not only to Cuba’s economic and cultural history but also as critical lenses through which the interconnected global modernity can be understood. While modernism often prioritises urban, metropolitan spaces as primary sites of modernity, Ortiz disrupts this Eurocentric focus by shifting attention to sites of commodity production—specifically plantations and rural economies. I will begin with an introduction to Ortiz, outlining his place in the context of Cuban history and politics. This leads to an explanation of modern Cuban history, before a comparative literary analysis of *Cuban Counterpoint* (1940) in relation to global modernist output on tobacco production and consumption.

Divided into two sections, *Cuban Counterpoint* shows clear creative, stylistic and anthropological merit. The first section, eponymously titled ‘Cuban Counterpoint’, draws a contrast between tobacco and sugar whereas the second, ‘The Ethnography and Transculturation of Havana Tobacco and the Beginnings of Sugar in America’, shows how tobacco and sugar and their production profoundly changed the world. Ortiz writes that ‘Tobacco smoke wafted the breath of a new spirit through the Old World, analytic, critical, and rebellious. In the end the smoke of the Indian tobacco proved itself more powerful by arousing the minds of men than that of the

Inquisition's pyres hounding them mercilessly'.¹²⁰ Having been disrupted and traumatically changed by the arrival of the Europeans, the New World retaliated with its own subversive, beguiling and highly addictive counter. Mixing with the consumerist culture of the Old World, tobacco would transform into a fixation for the citizens of Europe.

Fernando Ortiz and modernism

Through my analysis of Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint*, I argue here that Ortiz significantly enriches our understanding of global modernism by introducing the concept of transculturation, foregrounding commodities as central to Cuban cultural identity, and challenging Eurocentric perspectives on modernity, thereby repositioning Latin American modernist literature within a broader, interconnected global narrative. It is crucial that alternative conceptions of modernity are included within literary modernism if we are to have a holistic view of early twentieth-century literature. Ortiz has long been recognised within the Latin American literary sphere but has yet to be properly placed in relation to modernism. A pivotal point in the study of Ortiz's extensive body of work came in the form of the "Fernando Ortiz Symposium on Cuban Culture and History" (2000) in New York.¹²¹ Both before and since, Ortiz's legacy as a cultural theorist, anthropologist, and author has continued to grow. The profile of Ortiz as a writer therefore demands more attention in relation to other writers of his contemporary era. Building on the work of those in attendance at the Fernando Ortiz Symposium—brought together in *Cuban Counterpoints: The Legacy of Fernando Ortiz* (2004)—I hope to offer a small contribution to the growing recognition of Ortiz

¹²⁰ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 18.

¹²¹ Carmen Almodóvar Muñoz, *Cuban Counterpoints: The Legacy of Fernando Ortiz*, ed. by Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz (Lexington Books, 2004), p. xi.

as a major literary contributor towards a global modernism.¹²²

Cuban Counterpoint serves as the conceptual core of this thesis, comparing significance of tobacco and sugar on culture and literature. Ortiz uses these two commodities to explore Cuba from an anthropological perspective, using their combined history to explore the nature of Cuban identity. This is largely done with the term *transculturation*, one of Ortiz's major contributions and the basis of cultural formation. However, Ortiz's work resists straightforward attempts to categorise and define. Through a methodological approach that borrows features from different disciplines—sociology, anthropology, ethnography, economics, history, and literature—Ortiz crafts *Cuban Counterpoint* into a work that rewards multiple perspectives. The multidisciplinary approach taken points to Ortiz as a writer whose work deserves to be included with other complex literary works of the period. Just as Joyce uses a variety of literary styles and techniques in *Ulysses*, or Faulkner's use of varying and diverse perspectives within *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*, so too does Ortiz take an unconventional path.

Cuban Counterpoint is defined by its contradictions as it seeks to place the two commodities in the context of modernity whilst acknowledging their role in Cuba's history. Ortiz contends that 'a study of the history of Cuba, both internal and external, is fundamentally a study of the history of sugar and tobacco as the essential bases of its economy', making sugar and tobacco an essential element of both Cuba's past and contemporary present.¹²³ The two commodities intersect with questions concerning capital, labour, and imperialism. Crucially, the modernity found in Cuba is distinct from the modernity of Europe and North America. Characterised less by

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 6.

the presence of large metropolitan cities and more by the role that Cuban production plays in the global economy, Cuba is thus defined by external influences and trade. Conversely, representations of modern metropolises often contain instances of commodity consumption but neglect production of those same goods occurring outside of the metropolis. This is particularly true of tobacco, an omnipresent commodity, and yet one with modes of production that are largely hidden from its consumption. The modern metropolis was defined by commodities brought from far-off sites of production, but this is missed by analyses that focus too much on the metropolis as the only site of modernity—David H. Walker’s *Consumer Chronicles*, for example.

By placing Ortiz in relation to other modernists from around the Atlantic—Joyce, Faulkner, Svevo, and Toomer, to name a few—we can better understand the role that both production and consumption played in modernist conceptions of modernity. This has a strong theoretical basis following work on alternative modernities across the globe, which I will explore in more depth further on. In this section—dealing with representations of tobacco—I want to investigate how tobacco was perceived on the different sides of the Atlantic in modernist literature, including Fernando Ortiz’s original concept of *transculturation* in my analysis. Here, I will also examine representations of tobacco in Ortiz’s work, relating his representations of commodities to the construction of Cuban society.

Ortiz looms large over Cuba’s history as a nation, not only through his writing but also through the Cuban institutions he created—Sociedad del Folklore Cubano (1923) and the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos (1937)—and the periodicals he established, *Revista de Administración Teórica y Práctica del Estado, la Provincia y el Municipio* (1912), *Archivos del*

Folklore (1924), *Surco* (1930), and *Ultra* (1936).¹²⁴ Rhayn Garrick Jooste emphasises Ortiz's polymathic range—'a Cuban musicologist, lawyer, ethnologist, philosopher, and writer'—and notes that he is 'considered the third discoverer of Cuba, due to his research into Cuba's African heritage, and the disseminator of a transcultural Cuban identity'.¹²⁵ As one of Ortiz's most significant contributions to Cuban society and post-colonial modernist literature, I will analyse *transculturation*. I intend to establish both how it is defined, and how it is a key justification for Fernando Ortiz as a modernist on the global stage.

The idea that lies at the core of Ortiz's work, *transculturation*, has so far only been tangentially applied to modernist literary studies. The concept is multifaceted and can help us to understand, in the words of Laura Lomas, 'the interaction of politically asymmetrical languages and cultural forms in a zone of contact.'¹²⁶ In the context of this thesis, *transculturation* gives us an insight into Cuban culture in the 1940s, just as they were moving into a new stage of independence—with the new constitution of 1940—after years under the Spanish Empire, and then economic domination from the U.S.¹²⁷ The concept is also necessarily inter-disciplinary. Whilst my principal focus here is on literature, it is necessary to discuss aspects of anthropology, history, economics, and sociology in order to properly understand the significance of commodity production and consumption in literature. This is particularly true in relation to *Cuban*

¹²⁴ Rhayn Garrick Jooste, 'Ortiz, Fernando (1881–1969)', in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2009), p. 1.

¹²⁵ Jooste, 'Ortiz, Fernando (1881–1969)', p. 1.

¹²⁶ Laura Lomas, 'Translation and Transculturation in the New York–Hispanic Caribbean Borderlands', *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 20.3 (51) (2016), p. 148.

¹²⁷ 'Platt Amendment | History, Purpose, Significance, & Facts', *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Platt-Amendment>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

Counterpoint. In his text Ortiz mixes forms, blurring the lines between fiction and non-fiction in creative and boundary-challenging ways. It is because of this that Ortiz's work fits well in comparison to the literary modernist texts from North America and Europe in his contemporary period.

Ortiz's transculturation concept

Gregory defines *transculturation* as 'a process of cultural loss as well as gain, that produces new, original forms' which, at its most basic, is a good starting point for the concept.¹²⁸ To clarify further, beyond a simple cultural mixing, *transculturation* captures the nuance that is experienced by peoples in post-colonial contact zones. The term avoids the more problematic aspects of the term *hybridity* — a term that, according to Ashcroft, 'usually implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references'.¹²⁹ *Transculturation*, therefore, serves as the less problematic term by acknowledging this power-imbalance, and accounting for it. Additionally, 'By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic and political impacts on both the colonized and the colonizer, [hybridity] has been regarded as replicating assimilationist policies by masking or "whitewashing" cultural differences'.¹³⁰ In contrast, *transculturation* refers to cultural mixing and creation that is far more equitable, more readily allowing for the contributions of non-dominant populations within the newly-created contact zone. Transculturation refers to the collision of the Old and New Worlds and the cultural change that

¹²⁸ Derek Gregory, Ron Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, Michael Watts, and Sarah Whatmore, *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p. 769.

¹²⁹ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies* p. 97.

¹³⁰ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies* p. 97.

resulted on both sides of the Atlantic, with commodity production and consumption as one of the major drivers of cultural change. It is this perspective that I hope to explore further moving forward, with the influence of tobacco and sugar shaping the Cuban perception of national identity as well as the nation's place in the world economically, culturally, and politically.

The true extent of Cuba's intermeshed transculturations are also described by chronologically by Ortiz. First 'the transculturation of the paleolithic Indian to the neolithic', then 'the transculturation of an unbroken stream of white immigrants' who were 'Spaniards, but representatives of different cultures and themselves torn loose [...] from the Iberian Peninsula groups and transplanted to a New World [...] where they had to readjust themselves to a new syncretism of cultures'.¹³¹ Then simultaneously, as a direct result of the European desire for mass-produced commodities, 'the transculturation of a steady human stream of African Negroes coming from all the coastal regions of Africa along the Atlantic, from Senegal, Guinea, the Congo, and Angola and as far away as Mozambique'.¹³² Ortiz notes that they were all 'snatched from their original social groups, their own cultures destroyed and crushed under the weight of the cultures in existence here, like sugar cane ground in the rollers of the mill'.¹³³ More than hybridity, this created an entirely new culture from many different sources across the globe, a unique event with consequences that permeate our conceptions of global modernity. In response to *Cuban Counterpoint*, Lomas shows the importance of acknowledging transculturation with a view to decolonising our perspectives:

¹³¹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 98.

¹³² Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 98.

¹³³ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 98.

Fernando Ortiz's magisterial intervention [...] suggests that upon two cultures or civilizations entering into violent contact through colonization, influence moves in two directions. Caribbean cultures do not merely receive and cleave to the models and cultural forms of their colonizers; they also transform the European-dominant cultures of both the New and Old Worlds. Ortiz interrogates the rhetoric of discovery and undermines the European claim to proprietary knowledge of products designed by the original inhabitants of the New World¹³⁴

Miguel Ardeno corroborates Lomas's analysis, writing that 'Cubanness is presented, consequently, not only as a tangible entity but, rather, as complex processes of interaction between a variety of different elements, all equally national.'¹³⁵ Both scholars correctly note that Cuban culture, from Ortiz's perspective, was formed by the weaving of a tapestry of different cultures. This is the very essence of Cuban modernity, a direct result of transculturation in a postcolonial contact zone.

Through the lens of post-colonial modernity, Ortiz utilises the conventions of European modernists and adapts them to provide a uniquely Latin American expression of identity. Pratt writes that 'If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are texts the others construct in response

¹³⁴ Lomas, 'Translation and Transculturation in the New York–Hispanic Caribbean Borderlands', p. 150.

¹³⁵ Miguel Ardeno, 'Arte Blanco Con Motivos Negros: Fernando Ortiz's Concept of Cuban National Culture and Identity', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 20.1 (2001), p. 89.

to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations'.¹³⁶ Translated into English by Hariet de Onis, the intended readership for *Cuban Counterpoint* is highly heterogeneous. Consider this point made by Pratt: 'Autoethnographic texts are typically heterogeneous on the reception end as well. That is, they are usually addressed both to metropolitan readers and to literate sectors of the speaker's own social group. They are bound to be received very differently by these different readerships. Often such texts constitute a group's point of entry into metropolitan lettered culture'.¹³⁷ Indeed, *Cuban Counterpoint* serves not only to create a Cuban identity, but also to differentiate the modernity found in Cuba with that in Europe and the U.S. Ortiz's work presents Cuba as a modern nation with a distinctive and independent literary, cultural, economic and intellectual output.

Positioning Ortiz within the history of Cuba

Monumental change occurred in the Caribbean on the cusp of the twentieth century, with the U.S. in ascendancy and the Spanish Empire succumbing to independence movements that would ultimately prove fatal to its continued existence. To understand the history of Caribbean commodities at the beginning of the twentieth century we must look to the geopolitical landscape of the era, particularly the events surrounding Cuban independence from Spain. Cuba's final and successful attempt at independence begins in 1894 with the Second War of Cuban Independence and ends with the signing—by the U.S. and Spain only—of the Treaty of Paris in 1898.¹³⁸ By this

¹³⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2008), p. 9.

¹³⁷ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 9.

¹³⁸ Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire: A Chronological History* (Monthly Review Press, 2016), pp. 7-9.

time Spain's dominance in the region had become untenable, with increasing demands for independence from Caribbean territories and the rising power of the U.S. over its immediate neighbours. Just three years later, 1901 would see the Platt Amendment added to the Army Appropriations bill. It would go on to form the basis for Cuba's 1901 Constitution. The amendment codified Cuba as a U.S. protectorate, with the governance of the new nation transferred from Spain to the U.S. under a thin veneer of democracy.¹³⁹ Cubans succeeded in throwing off the yoke of Spanish imperialism, only to be subsumed into the growing U.S. sphere of influence. Under the Platt Amendment Cuba had very little independent control its own foreign and debt policy, the U.S. retained the right to intervene militarily at any time, and the Isle of Pines was effectively annexed (only to be relinquished over two decades later in 1925).¹⁴⁰ Finally, to ensure compliance by Cuba, the military occupation of Cuba would not end until the amendment was formally signed into Cuban law.¹⁴¹ In March of 1903 a treaty on 'commercial reciprocity' was signed by both the U.S. and Cuban governments to give the U.S. full control over Cuban markets, sealing the future of Cuban trade for the next half-century.¹⁴²

The following decades marked continued U.S. dominance over Cuba. Born in 1881, Ortiz's early life was profoundly affected by the move from Spanish to U.S. dominance over the island. Due to extreme instability in the country of his birth at the close of the nineteenth century, Ortiz spent most of his youth and education in Minorca, then Barcelona, eventually receiving his

¹³⁹ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, p. 9; 12.

¹⁴¹ Franklin, *Cuba and the U.S. Empire*, p. 9.

¹⁴² María Fernanda Ortiz Herrera, 'Fernando Ortiz, My Father', in *Cuban Counterpoints: The Legacy of Fernando Ortiz*, ed. by Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz (Lexington Books, 2004), p. 4.

doctorate from the University of Madrid in 1901.¹⁴³ Following his return to Cuba he was ‘completely shaken by the configuration of the new Cuban nation and the reform of his Creole class’.¹⁴⁴ However, Ortiz’s concern for Cuba’s new social and political structure outside of the Spanish Empire did not translate into direct political action. Despite being a representative of the Cuban Liberal Party in the 1920s, Ortiz ‘discovered that he would be unable to aid his young country if he was in politics, and after that never participated in party politics’, in part due to the corruption seeded within his country’s institutions, and to remain free of party political dogma.¹⁴⁵

Ortiz’s stance on non-participation precedes and then coincides with the violent and oppressive Machado regime (1925-1933), a period which saw widespread destabilisation across the island. Argote-Freyre writes that ‘The political history of Cuba in the early 1930s was written in blood. The struggle between President Gerardo Machado and his political opponents escalated into a daily war of bombings and murder. It reached its climax with the Revolution of 1933 and the toppling of two governments’.¹⁴⁶ The 1933 Revolution proved to be the culmination of decades of opposition against pro-U.S. policy and political suppression. With Machado gone, Fulgencio Batista would ultimately fill the vacuum left behind. Batista, particularly in the period leading up to the writing of the 1940 constitution, was a complex figure in the Cuban political sphere. Despite autocratic tendencies—which would result in extreme corruption later in his political career—in this period Batista is partially responsible for curbing the violent excesses of the Machado regime,

¹⁴³ María Fernanda Ortiz Herrera, ‘Fernando Ortiz, My Father’, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ María Fernanda Ortiz Herrera, ‘Fernando Ortiz, My Father’, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ María Fernanda Ortiz Herrera, ‘Fernando Ortiz, My Father’, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ Frank Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista: From Revolutionary to Strongman*, 2 vols (Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 35.

and in promoting progressive economic and social reform. It was during this period, a moment in which Cuba's identity was being re-figured, that Ortiz wrote and published *Cuban Counterpoint*.

Ortiz uses *Cuban Counterpoint* to explore the gamut of Cuban identity: national, historical, cultural, social and economic factors all play a part. Significantly, it is published in the same year as the new Cuban constitution, considered remarkably liberal and ambitious for its time. Henderson writes that the 1940 Constitution conferred

universal suffrage, free elections, freedom to organize political parties, and freedom of the press, it criminalized racial discrimination, prohibited discriminatory hiring practices, and gave rights to children born out of wedlock, who were disproportionately black. The constitution also guaranteed the representation of minorities at all levels of government but maintained the prohibition against race or gender-based parties.¹⁴⁷

It also served as a symbolic break away from the 1901 Constitution, marking a crucial moment in Cuba's attempts to move away from hegemonic U.S. control. When viewed in conjunction with Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint*, it suggests that Ortiz was inspired by questions of national autonomy, as well as important social and civic questions concerning the rights and responsibilities of Cuban citizens. *Cuban Counterpoint* therefore seeks to answer these questions from an academic, rather than political, perspective.

Academically, Ortiz was eclectic in his influences; just as *Cuban Counterpoint* straddles disciplines, so too did its author. Associated initially with Criminology and Sociology,

¹⁴⁷ Kaitlyn Henderson, 'Race, Discrimination, and the Cuban Constitution of 1940', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 100.2 (2020), p. 259.

‘By 1920, Ortiz can be viewed as a fully formed intellectual who expressed a Cuban national sentiment based on a study of psychological and social factors’ with the consideration of social factors an important part of his methodology for the study of history.¹⁴⁸ Against the Spanish expansionism (also known as Pan-Hispanism) of the 1920s, ‘Ortiz defended arguments against the term *race* and in favor of culture and science’, instead favouring ‘a rapprochement between Spain and Cuba on the bases of culture and civilisation’.¹⁴⁹ This proposed rapprochement would exclude race, language, and religion as bases for harmonious relations. Ortiz further suggested that ‘the study of a common history as a means of approaching the traditions of Spain and thereby understanding those of Cuba’, but without resorting to racial essentialist arguments.¹⁵⁰ Fundamentally, Ortiz’s work was based on dismantling notions of intellectual, cultural and social domination within and outside of Cuba. In maintaining strong ties with academics in both Spain and the Americas, Ortiz fostered a progressive intellectual movement in Cuba dedicated to transcultural work.

Nationalism and Fernando Ortiz’s Commodity Modernism

In *Cuban Counterpoint* Ortiz not only identifies the impact of commodities on Cuba society, but also on Cuba’s experience of a global modernity. Ortiz’s work helped to establish a Cuban identity in the twentieth century, allowing the country’s transcultural heritage to flourish, born of the

¹⁴⁸ Consuelo Naranjo Orovio and Miguel Angel Puig-Samper Mulero, ‘Spanish Intellectuals and Fernando Ortiz (1900-1941)’, in *Cuban Counterpoints: The Legacy of Fernando Ortiz*, ed. by Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz (Lexington Books, 2004), p. 22.

¹⁴⁹ Naranjo Orovio and Angel Puig-Samper Mulero, ‘Spanish Intellectuals and Fernando Ortiz (1900-1941)’, p. 23.

¹⁵⁰ Orovio and Mulero, ‘Spanish Intellectuals and Fernando Ortiz (1900-1941)’, p. 23.

transatlantic slave trade and the production of commodities. Without sugar or tobacco, there would be no modern Cuba. Ortiz's anthropology bears some comparison to the national literatures of other countries, such as the influence of *The Kalevala* (1835) on Finnish literature, or of Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* (1945) on Canadian literature. *Cuban Counterpoint* is an attempt at defining the character of Cuba as a nation. The text points towards an understanding of modernity as a transient state of development. Much like tobacco smoke, the specific form taken by any one modernity in a given place is often hard to define, shifting and ethereal.

Cuban Counterpoint features many of the hallmarks of both a post-colonial and modernist text, with Cuba's place in an interconnected global modernity leading to a version of Caribbean modernity distinct from the modernity in Europe and the United States. Ortiz also seeks to create a sense of nationhood in his work, building a new culture out of the otherwise disparate culture elements that form Cuba. Crucially, *Cuban Counterpoint* continues to attract attention today; a new print run was issued by Duke University Press in 1995, including a new introduction from anthropologist and historian Fernando Coronil. As a seminal work of Cuban literature and anthropology, *Cuban Counterpoint* stands out as one of the major historic Caribbean texts of the twentieth century. This can also be seen in the praise garnered from C.L.R. James in *The Black Jacobins* calling it 'in essence ... the first and only comprehensive study of the West Indian people'¹⁵¹ and asserting that 'Ortiz ushered the Caribbean into the thought of the twentieth century and kept it there'.¹⁵² C.L.R. James' praise here is indicative of the importance Ortiz holds in the

¹⁵¹ James, C. L. R., *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Penguin, 2001), p. 308.

¹⁵² James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 308.

canon of Caribbean modernity. Through *Cuban Counterpoint* and his previous work as an anthropologist and author, Ortiz managed to articulate the modern Cuban identity in the context of a globalised world. By focusing on Cuba's role in producing commodities, its key importance as a modern nation is revealed.

Tobacco as a commodity was instrumental in the creation of modern Cuba. Enrico Mario Santí defines Ortiz's work as 'Essentially a study of economic nationalism and its social reflections'¹⁵³, showing the central argument of *Cuban Counterpoint* that tobacco production was a key driver of Cuban modernity. Santí also notes that Ortiz 'wanted to improve general welfare, not simply dissect economic structures'¹⁵⁴ by revealing the exploitative capitalist practices of European landowners in Cuba. However, Ortiz's work is at the same time one of hope. As Santí contends,

[Ortiz's] nationalism, the book's ideological backbone, kept him from conceiving of capitalist economy as being inevitably global. He perceived such global character as having been artificially imposed, caused by weaknesses in the local economy, as well as by historical mistakes that were entirely avoidable. And yet, Ortiz did derive one general premise from basic economic theory: economic causes have social effects.¹⁵⁵

For this to be useful we first need to define what we mean by *nationalism*. Ernest Gellner begins *Nations and Nationalism* with the notion that 'Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which

¹⁵³ Enrico Mario Santí, 'Towards a Reading of Fernando Ortiz's Cuban Counterpoint', *Literature and Arts of the Americas*, 37.1 (2004), p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ Santí, 'Towards a Reading of Fernando Ortiz's Cuban Counterpoint', p. 13.

¹⁵⁵ Santí, 'Towards a Reading of Fernando Ortiz's Cuban Counterpoint', p. 13.

holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent'.¹⁵⁶ Where this definition depends upon culture, Gellner asserts that 'Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations of behaving and communicating'.¹⁵⁷ Nationalism is then further predicated on the idea that 'Two men are of the same nation if and only if they *recognize* each other as belonging to the same nation'.¹⁵⁸ Gellner expands upon the first part of this definition of nationalism later in his analysis of the concept:

Nationalism usually conquers in the name of a putative folk culture. Its symbolism is drawn from the healthy, pristine, vigorous life of the peasants, of the Volk, the *narod*. There is a certain element of truth in the nationalist self-presentation when the *narod* or Volk is ruled by officials of another, an alien high culture, whose oppression must be resisted first by a cultural revival and reaffirmation, and eventually by a war of national liberation. If the nationalism prospers it eliminates the alien high culture, but it does not then replace it by the old local low culture; it revives, or invents, a local high (literate, specialist-transmitted) culture of its own, though admittedly one which will have some links with the earlier local folk styles and dialects.¹⁵⁹

This definition, based on the cultural aspects of nationalism, provides a route to better understand Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint* as a nation-building text. By both neologising *transculturation* and in tying the idea of a Cuban national identity to tobacco, Ortiz is defining the Cuban nation as a

¹⁵⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed (Blackwell, 2006), p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁵⁸ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁵⁹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 56.

structure that is influenced by, but independent from, its Spanish colonial past.

With Gellner's definition in mind, it is worth acknowledging the pitfalls inherent in defining nationalism as a coherent notion. Benedict Anderson acknowledges that 'Nation, nationality, nationalism—all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse' whilst stating that 'nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time'.¹⁶⁰ Identifying three major paradoxes associated with defining nationalism, Anderson writes that the concept defies easy definitions because:

(1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists. (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept—in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality [...] (3) The 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. In other words, unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes, or Webers.¹⁶¹

In other words, nationalism, despite intellectual deficiencies, remains a pervasive, popular, and *modern* idea. However, there is clearly a conflict here between an insular, narrow-minded version of nationalism and the role that the nation state plays in gaining independence from colonial structures. Anderson serves as a useful guide to nationalism, but it is worth noting the nuance in Ortiz's work. *Cuban Counterpoint* is not a work of nationalism *per se*, but it is a nation-building work. Ortiz is focusing on forging a modern, hybrid society with a well-defined place in a global

¹⁶⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 13.

¹⁶¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 14.

economic and cultural web. With this in mind, *Cuban Counterpoint* is not merely a chronicle of Cuba's domination, but an exploration of Cuban identity and pride in relation to how Cubans saw the chronicling of their new nation. This merges well with the work of Anderson and his ultimate definition of a nation as an 'imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'.¹⁶² Expanding upon this he writes that 'It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.'¹⁶³ Cultural material can come in a range of forms. In the case of *Cuban Counterpoint* national identity is constructed around tobacco and sugar, which are then used to create the imagined links that bind Cubans together. It is the creation of a national story through the imagination of identity.

Despite the globalising influence of a capitalist economic system, nationalism necessitates some autonomy from the wider world; in the case of early twentieth-century Cuba it was a response to domineering external forces that sought to subjugate the emerging nation. Shaped by tobacco and sugar production and unable, due to pressure and domination by other nations, to diversify away from them, Cuba's identity formed around these two commodities. In *Cuban Counterpoint*'s prologue, Hermano Portell Vilá explains the importance of the tobacco industry to developing 'Cuban nationalism'.¹⁶⁴ Portell Vilá writes that the tobacco workers were 'progressive, informed, alert, and well organized to protect their rights'¹⁶⁵ and 'operated in the

¹⁶² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 14.

¹⁶³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁴ Herminio Portell Vilá, 'By Way of Prologue', in *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, by Fernando Ortiz, trans. by Harriet de Onís (Duke University Press, 1995), p. lxviii.

¹⁶⁵ Portell Vilá, 'By Way of Prologue', p. lxviii.

movements for independence and were the most capable spearhead of the Cuban proletariat'.¹⁶⁶ This suggests that the movements for Cuban independence from Spain and the United States were nascent in the equitable working practices of the native Cuban tobacco industry. Throughout *Cuban Counterpoint* the native tobacco industry is upheld as being far better for the island of Cuba than the imperialistic sugar. Ortiz writes that the battle between tobacco and sugar is synonymous with 'men versus machines'.¹⁶⁷ Tobacco represents the independence of the Cuban people, whereas sugar signifies foreign exploitation.

Throughout *Cuban Counterpoint* the two crucial commodities are expressed in direct opposition, with Ortiz writing that

The cultivation of tobacco gave rise to the small holding; that of sugar brought about the great land grants. In their industrial aspects tobacco belongs to the city, sugar to the country. Commercially the whole world is the market for our tobacco, while our sugar has only a single market [...] The native versus the foreigner. National sovereignty as against colonial status. The proud cigar against the lowly sack'.¹⁶⁸

Tobacco is therefore viewed as an inherently Cuban commodity that works for the betterment of the nation, sugar as an invasive crop serving the interests of foreign imperial capitalists extracting wealth from the island. Portell Vilá also notes this, stating 'The invasion of overseas capitalism and the growing mechanization of the tobacco industry have wrought a profound change in its

¹⁶⁶ Portell Vilá, 'By Way of Prologue', p. lxviii.

¹⁶⁷ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, pp. 6-7.

composition and workings and have occasioned a crisis, familiar to us but not irreparable like that of sugar, which affects plantings, prices, and sales'.¹⁶⁹ This further suggests that the imposition of western capitalist modes of production directly affect the producer, product, and consumer in profound ways.

Tobacco is taken as a commodity that represents national pride, sugar as a signifier of domination. This shows the post-colonial elements of Ortiz's work with Cuban culture serving as a counterculture to the imperialist attitudes of first Spain, then the U.S. This therefore presents a merging of modernist and post-colonial tropes. Pollard states that the Caribbean authors Braithwaite and Walcott are 'more like second cousins whose distinctly individual responses to modernity bear a common family resemblance [to U.S./European modernists]'¹⁷⁰, so too with Ortiz. As has become widely accepted in modernist literary studies—by recent scholars such as Susan Stanford Friedman, Mary Lou Emery, and Maria Cristina Fumagalli—exploring the modernist writers of alternative sites of modernity provides a far more holistic understanding of the twentieth century literary modernism. By placing Ortiz into conversation with the other authors included in this thesis, his work enriches our modernist literary canon by foregrounding a national Cuban response to modernity, complementing and complicating the perspectives offered either by other authors with a national or regional perspective.

Central to Ortiz's contribution is his concept of transculturation, which explores the dynamics of cultural formation and synthesis. However, it is worth noting that transculturation

¹⁶⁹ Portell Vilá, 'By Way of Prologue', p. lxviii.

¹⁷⁰ Charles W. Pollard, *New World Modernisms: T.S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite* (University of Virginia Press, 2004), p. 22.

does not support the homogenisation of culture any more than the cross-pollination of different types of tobacco plant means total homogeneity of product. In contrast with sugar, Ortiz emphasises the individuality of different tobacco varieties and modes of consumption, firmly linking both tobacco production and literature to a sense of place.

There is irony in Ortiz—as a post-colonial writer of the early twentieth century—reformulating modernism for his own ends. Pollard notes the ‘rich irony of [the] reshaping of modernism by post-colonial writers’¹⁷¹ referring to the euro-centric modernist habit of using traditional sources as inspiration for their works. The work of writers such as Ortiz represents the dialogue within modernism between former colonies and their former metropolises. Pollard expands on the irony of post-colonial writers engaging in the modernist tradition, asking us to consider

how many of the distinctive innovations of European modernism—Eliot’s structural use of fertility myths, Matisse’s shockingly brilliant colors, Picasso’s cubist dislocations, and Stravinsky’s dissonance and asymmetrical rhythms, to name a few—were deeply influenced by non-European cultural forms being brought back to Paris and London by colonial anthropologists, ethnographers, missionaries, and administrators.¹⁷²

Ortiz clearly straddles the gap between modernist and post-colonial writing by employing a post-colonial perspective in the writing of *Cuban Counterpoint* to articulate a cohesive identity for the emerging Cuban nation. Fernando Coronil, in his introduction to Ortiz’s text, writes that ‘If the self-fashioning of sovereign centres entails the making of dependent peripheries, Ortiz celebrates

¹⁷¹ Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 25.

¹⁷² Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 25.

the self-fashioning of these peripheries, the counterpoint through which people turn margins into centres and make fluidly coherent identities into fragmented histories'.¹⁷³ Through his work, Ortiz challenges a Eurocentric conception of modernity, instead advancing the view that Cuba experienced a modernity of its own. Rather than a peripheral colony that supplies a distant metropole, Ortiz convincingly makes the case for Cuba's inherent modernity during his contemporary period. As commodities, tobacco and sugar are central to this idea, deeply intertwining with Cuban history and culture.

What Ortiz describes in *Cuban Counterpoint* is far more an expression of an alternative modernity, rather than an anti-modernity. It is necessary to state precisely how the modernity found in Latin America (the form of modernity exhibited by Ortiz) differs from contemporary European literary output. For example, Martin writes that

The most cursory glance at Latin America's typical cultural expressions in the twentieth century would suggest that within each Latin American two mythical beings are always at war, an original Spaniard (or Portuguese, or Frenchman) and an original Indian (or Negro, especially in Brazil, Cuba and Haiti); and beyond this inner conflict, he and she are permanently crucified between their own, already dual America and the external world of Europe (and later North America).¹⁷⁴

This cultural formation, forged by the profit motives created by the transatlantic slave trade, creates

¹⁷³ Fernando Coronil, 'Introduction', in *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, by Fernando Ortiz, trans. by Harriet de Onís (Duke University Press, 1995), p..

¹⁷⁴ Martin, 'Myths of the Mestizo Continent', p. 28.

the need for myth-building in the construction of a national identity. Myths and stories are essential to this formation, bringing together disparate elements in a colonial contact zone. Although Pollard's analysis is broadly correct, *New World Modernisms* lacks an incorporation of transculturation. Pollard writes that 'Braithwaite's creolization reshapes modernism's ambivalence to recognize and express the historical inequalities that emerge from the contradictory forces of acculturation and interculturalization in the region'.¹⁷⁵ In a similar way, Ortiz uses the creolization of Cuba to nail not only historical inequalities, but also inequalities experienced by Cuba in contemporary time. Referring again to Braithwaite and Walcott, Pollard notes that 'These writers recognize difference and fragmentation, but they seek to shape these differences and fragments into larger patterns of cultural meaning'.¹⁷⁶ He could just as easily have included Ortiz in this analysis. Ortiz recognises the dissembling of culture in the forging of new national identities and the important ways in which cultures interact when migrated into the same space—by will, or by force.

Despite the value of myth making to the creation of national identity, the approach taken by Ortiz leaves space for an explicitly factual counterbalance. Cosner's seminal work *The Golden Leaf* provides important information on the history of tobacco through the lens of the wider Atlantic. With this in mind, Cosner's work is invaluable in providing context to tobacco literature, particularly relating to Cuba. Although of literary and cultural merit, Cosner finds fault with Ortiz's historical claims in Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint*. In blurring the lines between fact and fiction, Ortiz limits the viability of the text as an historical document. The assumptions made in

¹⁷⁵ Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁶ Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 39.

Cuban Counterpoint about the history of tobacco on the island are a good example of how myth replaces history. Ortiz writes that the veguros [tobacco planters] were ‘predominantly poor, white Canary Islanders’.¹⁷⁷ This claim is challenged by Cosner: though Ortiz’s claims referring to the relative poverty of the veguros are repeated by many historians, they are not confirmed by historical data. Referring to this pervasive assumption, Cosner writes that the historiography shows that poor tobacco farmers ‘were barely able to sustain their families, much less afford to buy slaves to work in the fields’ though tobacco farming was enjoyed across all income levels within Cuban society during the period.¹⁷⁸ Cosner goes on to note that ‘Spanish and Cuban archives [...] hold documents that present a different picture of the veguros, and reveal that tobacco cultivation was not just a “pursuit of the lower orders”’.¹⁷⁹ Cosner’s exemplary archival work comes to the fore here, revealing errors in the received wisdom of tobacco history. Referring again to Cuban and Spanish archives, ‘clues to the national or regional origins of these farmers are provided through period descriptions such as el isleño (the Canary Islander), el español (the Spaniard), el portugués (the Portuguese), el gallego (the Galician), and even el inglés (the Englishman)’.¹⁸⁰ This provides us with crucial information on the demographic makeup of the veguros. Tobacco was not the preserve of the predominantly white Canary Islanders, but a shared enterprise that was fairly consistently pursued across multiple strata of Cuban society. However, my interest in Ortiz in this thesis is as a maker of myths, rather than as a historian. While Cosner provides important context

¹⁷⁷ Charlotte A. Cosner, *The Golden Leaf: How Tobacco Shaped Cuba and the Atlantic World* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), p. 39.

¹⁷⁸ Cosner, *The Golden Leaf*, p. 39.

¹⁷⁹ Cosner, *The Golden Leaf*, p. 39.

¹⁸⁰ Cosner, *The Golden Leaf*, p. 40.

to *Cuban Counterpoint* and to Cuba more generally, there is vast cultural value in the myths surrounding the use of tobacco, and what it meant for the producers and consumers on the island.

Culture and cultivation

Brodie and Redfield note the shared linguistic root of ‘culture’ and ‘cultivation’ writing that, ‘the term “culture,” [...] derives from the Latin root *colere* (“inhabit, cultivate, protect, honor with worship”) via *cultura* (“cultivation, tending”)’.¹⁸¹ The relationship between culture and cultivation is made explicit in *Cuban Counterpoint*. Cultivation is not merely for physical nourishment, but also forms the economic basis for the country’s existence. Furthermore, cultivation relates directly to the creative, ritual, and expressive elements of ‘culture’—particularly in a society so closely related to the harvesting of tobacco and sugar. Through Capitalist and Imperialist trade networks—originally created within the imperial apparatus of the Spanish Empire, followed by U.S. domination—Cuban culture is founded on the cultivation of tobacco and sugar.

Ortiz goes into extensive detail about the impact of tobacco on different cultures, providing insight into the combination of myth and commodity in Cuban culture. Reflecting on the original spiritual qualities of tobacco, Ortiz writes that

Even if we did not possess abundant and reliable information regarding the sacred nature of tobacco among the Taino Indians, due, no doubt, to its stimulant and toxic qualities, as with wine, opium, and other narcotic agents employed in the different religions, this myth would give us an understanding of the supernatural importance ascribed to the powders of

¹⁸¹ Farrell Brodie and Redfield, *High Anxieties*, p. 1.

cohoba.¹⁸²

Myths are of central importance to the perception of tobacco as a key commodity in Taino society, more than merely a commercial product or a means of intoxication. But what myths are associated with tobacco? Ortiz offers two examples. Section 5 of his essay on transculturation, ‘On How Tobacco was Discovered in Cuba by the Europeans’, identifies myths from the Old World apparently associated with tobacco use. Ortiz writes,

Certain folkloric allusions to tobacco in connection with the Biblical tradition that have been collected in Abyssinia were undoubtedly grafted on the old trunk only a few centuries ago by a process of simple cultural syncretism in an attempt to Christianize the use of heathenish tobacco and make it suitable for adoption by certain ecclesiastical fanaticisms of the Old World.¹⁸³

The word ‘heathenish’ here shows the antipathy felt towards tobacco by some religious institutions. However, the acceptance of tobacco in Christianity by Ortiz here is a key indicator of cultural hybridisation and transculturation.

Referencing the rituals of Catholicism in conjunction with tobacco Ortiz writes that

The devil has caused more wax to be employed in the tiny vestas burned in the rites of tobacco than the gods in the votive candles before their shrines. In this machine age the century-old liturgical traditions are dying out, and automatic lighters are being introduced

¹⁸² Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 113.

¹⁸³ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 105.

for the smoker and electric bulbs for the churches. But in both cases the flickering flame of fire that ignites, illuminates, and burns like the spirit still persists.¹⁸⁴

There is a clear association made between tobacco and spirituality, specifically the notion of sin. As a physiologically pleasurable commodity, tobacco is regarded as a decadent or even sinister substance by European religious institutions; however, it serves as a means to access spirituality in native American religious practices. In this sense tobacco is shown by Ortiz to reflect the values and culture of the society in which it is being used. Whilst Ortiz notes the opposition of the Church to tobacco, there remains the notion that tobacco smoke is connected to spirituality. The passage is lightly humorous, yet the underlying belief that unites the culture of the Taino with the modernity of the West is the consumption of tobacco to carve out moments of spiritual calm. Tobacco is used as an entheogen, serving as a conduit for spiritual belief across different theological systems.

The Old and New worlds

There is another way in which Ortiz uses the fusion of myth and commodities to explore greater concepts: Ortiz sets up an oppositional relationship between tobacco and sugar in a way that mirrors the oppositional relationship between the European and American continents. This can be seen in his identification of immigration (forced or voluntary) from the ‘Old World’ to the ‘New World’. On this point Martin writes that ‘The key dualism in Latin American culture, however, is unmistakable and has a specific point of departure which happens to be a moment of cultural confrontation: between an already existing, known world of “Europe”, and a new, recently

¹⁸⁴ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, pp. 19-20.

“discovered” world named “America”.¹⁸⁵ Martin also notes that ‘The myth we are tracing can exist wherever a “civilisation” vanquishes a “barbarism”’¹⁸⁶ which Martin notes as purely ideological with civilisation referring to “European” values of enlightenment, reason and sobriety, whereas “barbarism” involved the violence, spontaneity and improvisation of nature’.¹⁸⁷ The interplay of history and myth are highly important in post-colonial discourses relating to modernity. By mythologising Cuba’s two main exports, Ortiz is taking control of a narrative that had been forced upon his nation, first by Spain, then by the U.S. In neologising ‘transculturation’ Ortiz gives voice to a heterogeneous contemporary Cuban identity.

In section six of *Cuban Counterpoint*, ‘On Tobacco Among the Indians of the Antilles’, Ortiz turns his attention to the indigenous myths featured in pre-Columbian Taino culture. Specifically, Ortiz provides us with the Taino creation myth that follows similar tropes to other creation myths from across the world:

‘Yaya was a man whose son Yayael wanted to kill him [...] but the father, suspecting his designs, killed him first and put his bones into a gourd full of water, where they turned into fish’. Thus transformed, the gourd is disturbed by ‘four brothers’ who may represent ‘the four points of the compass’, allowing ‘the sea filled with fish’ to be created. Fleeing to ‘the house of the patriarch Basamanaco’ in search of bread it is here that Dimivan Caracaracol, one of the brothers, has ‘[blown] against the [his] back a gobbet of mucus full of cohoba, which [Basamanaco] had ordered prepared that day’. This ‘cohoba’ is used to ‘to physic

¹⁸⁵ Martin, ‘Myths of the Mestizo Continent’, p. 12.

¹⁸⁶ Martin, ‘Myths of the Mestizo Continent’, p. 13.

¹⁸⁷ Martin, ‘Myths of the Mestizo Continent’, p. 17.

themselves’ and clearly suggests a form of snuff tobacco.¹⁸⁸ The Taino ‘take it through a reed, half an arm’s span in length’ with ‘one end in the nose, and the other in this powder, and breathe it in through the nose’.¹⁸⁹

Having failed to get bread:

Caracaracol went back to his brothers and told them what had happened to him with Basamanaco, and how he had blown a gobbet of mucus against his back, which hurt him very much. Then his brothers looked at his back and saw that it was badly swollen. The swelling grew until he was on the verge of death, and for that reason they tried to cut it off, but they were unable to; taking a stone ax, they split it open and out came a living female turtle.¹⁹⁰

In this creation myth the rite of tobacco is intertwined with the origins of humanity and the food that sustains them. The turtle born of the application of tobacco represents a major source of food for the Taino, as well as a representation of life. Tobacco is of central spiritual importance to the Taino, linking them not only with their ancestors, but also their origins and spirituality. In traditional Cuban culture, before the arrival of the Europeans, tobacco did not represent decadence or dependence, rather it represented a crucial element in their conception of life. Although addiction is of central importance to representations of tobacco in more modern texts, pre-modern native representations of tobacco did not have the same conception of addiction as modern

¹⁸⁸ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 111.

¹⁸⁹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 111.

¹⁹⁰ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 111.

consumerist Western societies. Underpinning this is the notion that it is tobacco's mode of production that changes its nature. Mass production changes the nature of tobacco as a consumable product rather than rarefied sacred substance. Transforming from spiritual aid into a recreational commodity transculturates tobacco, merging with the new society in which it is used. Old and new perceptions of tobacco are synthesised in the process of transculturation, leading to 'heathenish' tobacco being reviled as sinful in some ways, yet rapaciously consumed in others, spurred on by modern manufacturing techniques. However, tobacco does not entirely lose its spiritual associations. As I noted earlier, Ortiz mentions the use of tobacco in some Christian rituals in a prime example of how cultural practices are exchanged even into supposedly ancient rituals.

Tobacco and transculturation across the Atlantic

Travelling across the Atlantic, tobacco undergoes a transcultural transformation, bringing with it echoes of the Indigenous societies in the Americas and Caribbean into which it was originally incorporated. The collision of the Old and New Worlds produced cultural change on both sides of the Atlantic with commodity production and consumption as one of the major drivers of transculturation.

Ashcroft writes that *transculturation*—Ortiz's neologism which has been his lasting contribution to postcolonial studies—'refers to the reciprocal influences of modes of representation and cultural practices of various kinds in colonies and metropolises'.¹⁹¹ In *Cuban Counterpoint*, Ortiz begins by defining transculturation in contrast to acculturation, noting that

¹⁹¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Routledge Key Guides, Third edition. (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), p. 191.

‘Acculturation is used to describe the process of transition from one culture to another, and its manifold social repercussions. But transculturation is a more fitting term’.¹⁹² In his ‘Introduction’ to *Cuban Counterpoint*, Bronislaw Malinowski notes that

the word transculturation, stemming from Latin roots, provides us with a term that does not contain the implication of one certain culture toward which the other must tend, but an exchange between two cultures, both of them active, both contributing their share, and both co-operating to bring about a new reality of civilization¹⁹³

This concept of transculturation works for both the Cuban cultural identity and for the use of tobacco across the world. Tobacco, discovered in the Americas and promptly exported to the Old World, was itself subject to transculturation. Acculturation suggests the wholesale replacing of a culture by a dominant interloper. In contrast, transculturation requires the merging of different cultures, forming a new set of cultural codes that result from the sustained interaction of otherwise disparate peoples. Alan West-Durán writes that

Ortiz analyzed transculturation as occurring in a culture that is subjugated under colonialism and slavery and that is able to incorporate, transform, and subtly subvert elements of the dominant culture to fashion meanings that ensure not only the survival of

¹⁹² Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 98.

¹⁹³ Bronislaw Malinowski, ‘Introduction’, in *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, by Fernando Ortiz, trans. by Harriet de Onís (Duke University Press, 1995), p. lix. As one of the foremost anthropologists of his generation, Bronislaw Malinowski is well-placed to write one of *Cuban Counterpoint*’s two introductions.

a culture and its people but also their ability to thrive and create a new culture.¹⁹⁴

Therefore, transculturation becomes a term that acknowledges the survival of minority cultural practices within new societies created by colonisation. The new culture necessarily uses not only the cultural practices of the dominant group but also those of the numerous subjugated groups, for example those with African or Indigenous Caribbean heritage. However, it is worthwhile to emphasise the creation of a new culture within the concept.

Through the process of transculturation although one culture may dominate, no one culture can claim to be entirely supreme in a situation that requires the interaction of disparate social groups from formerly separate backgrounds. Transculturation is the process of merging many cultures to form a new and distinct identity through a process of cultural exchange. Referring to this idea of cultural exchange, Peter Burke writes that ‘The consequences of cultural globalization are debatable and debated. One possibility [...] is cultural homogenization, while some scholars suggest the opposite, heterogenization’.¹⁹⁵ Moving away from this binary conception of cultural exchange, Burke refers to ‘some kind of mix, a process of hybridization that assists economic globalization as well as being assisted by it’.¹⁹⁶ Much like Ortiz, Burke refers to cultural adaptation as ‘a double movement of de-contextualization and re-contextualization, lifting an item out of its original setting and modifying it to fit its new environment’.¹⁹⁷ Burke’s assessment here effectively describes the process of transculturation but with the benefit of the

¹⁹⁴ Alan West-Durán, ‘Nancy Morejón: Transculturation, Translation, and the Poetics of the Caribbean’, *Callaloo*, 28.4 (2005), p. 968.

¹⁹⁵ Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, 1st edition (Polity, 2013) p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, pp. 93-94.

decades of scholarship between himself and Ortiz. He is also clearly influenced by Ortiz's work, referring to Ortiz coming 'closer to the contemporary idea of reciprocity when he suggested replacing the notion of one-way "acculturation" by two-way "transculturation"'.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, in *Cuban Counterpoint* Ortiz's new conception of cultural change begins a new conception of two-way exchange between disparate cultures localised in the same space. Ortiz clarifies his new terminology, writing:

I am of the opinion that the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation.¹⁹⁹

Transculturation therefore improves upon and replaces *acculturation* by approaching culture as a formation of many separate influences. Tobacco, discovered in Cuba as a spiritual and ritualistic drug, is transculturated just as European and African migrants were uprooted and settled in Cuba. Rather than acquiring the cultures of Europe, tobacco brings with it some of the practices of the Indigenous culture in which it was originally consumed. Yes, tobacco is changed by capitalist production methods and the burgeoning mass-consumerist cultures of the Old World. However, tobacco still carries with it the spiritual associations it held before the Columbian Exchange.

¹⁹⁸ Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, p. 41.

¹⁹⁹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, pp. 102-103.

Therefore, the change undergone by tobacco mirrors the change that occurs with the development of Cuban modernity specifically, and the development of the Americas more generally. The scale of the change that occurred in Cuba should not be understated. As Ortiz writes, ‘The whole gamut of culture run by Europe in a span of more than four millenniums took place in Cuba in less than four centuries’.²⁰⁰ Cuban modernity is a result of a pressure-cooker of different elements, forced together to form a multifaceted culture independent of its original parts. The crucial role that transculturation plays is in the merging of these different elements to form a new cohesive culture.

In addition to commentary on Ortiz’s transculturation term, Malinowski uses tobacco in his own research, writing in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* that

In fact, as they [the natives] knew that I would thrust my nose into everything, even where a well-mannered native would not dream of intruding, they finished by regarding me as part and parcel of their life, a necessary evil or nuisance, mitigated by donations of tobacco.²⁰¹

Tobacco, as in the work of Ortiz, is also used as a cultural bridge: an exotic gift and a means of establishing trust between otherwise disparate cultures. In the introduction to *Cuban Counterpoint* Ortiz’s concept of transculturation receives a key endorsement from Malinowski, writing ‘Dr. Ortiz told me at the time that in his next book he was planning to introduce a new technical word, the term transculturation, to replace various expressions in use such as “cultural exchange,”

²⁰⁰ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 99.

²⁰¹ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Kindle Edition (Routledge & Sons, 1922), p. 6.

“acculturation,” “diffusion,” “migration or osmosis of culture,” and similar ones that he considered inadequate’.²⁰² Santí notes that Malinowski was consulted extensively by Ortiz over the writing of *Cuban Counterpoint*, writing that Ortiz ‘altered the original structure to incorporate [Malinowski’s] suggestions’.²⁰³ Ortiz’s work had Malinowski’s approval, along with a strong working relationship that ended with Malinowski’s sudden death in 1942 shortly after the publication of *Cuban Counterpoint*.

Transculturation is therefore a term which clarifies change in a culture and the process of forming new cultural behaviours directly resulting from mass migration, with a major endorsement from a preeminent anthropologist. Besides Malinowski’s criticism that *acculturation* ‘sounds like a cross between a hiccup and a belch’ there are other reasons he finds the preexisting term problematic and worth replacing in anthropological discourse with *transculturation*.²⁰⁴ As Malinowski writes

the word acculturation contains a number of definite and undesirable etymological implications. It is an ethnocentric word with a moral connotation. The immigrant has to acculturate himself; so do the natives, pagan or heathen, barbarian or savage, who enjoy the benefits of being under the sway of our great Western culture. The word acculturation implies, because of the preposition *ad* with which it starts, the idea of a *terminus ad quem*.

The “uncultured” is to receive the benefits of “our culture”; it is he who must change and

²⁰² Malinowski, ‘Introduction’, in *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. lvii.

²⁰³ Enrico Mario Santí, ‘Towards a Reading of Fernando Ortiz’s *Cuban Counterpoint*’, *Literature and Arts of the Americas*, 37.1 (2004), p. 9.

²⁰⁴ Malinowski, ‘Introduction’, in *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. lviii.

become converted into “one of us.”²⁰⁵

Here Malinowski, through Ortiz’s concept, directly criticises the concept behind colonial rule: that othered cultures are inferior to modern Western culture. The accepted common wisdom that Western culture is synonymous with ‘civilisation’ is questioned, showing that the predominant attitude towards indigenous cultures in Malinowski’s contemporary period is one that accepts acculturation as the price of modernisation. However, transculturation incorporates the notion that cultural change occurs in both directions. By ‘civilising’ natives with Western culture their original culture remains present, although largely subsumed. In the process of transculturation rather than total domination there is dialogue and compromise. Through the process of migration—both forced and unforced—Cuba became a nation with a very different culture to that of either the Indigenous Taino or the original Spanish conquerors. In modernity it relied upon the commercial flora that had precipitated immigration to the island in the first place to bring the inhabitants together with a new collective identity.

Culture, Class and the Columbian Exchange in *Cuban Counterpoint*

In the ‘How Havana Tobacco Embarked upon Its Conquest of the World’ section of *Cuban Counterpoint* Ortiz explores not only cultural change, but also how a new commodity interacts with class, for example:

as often happens in these periods of transcultural transition, tobacco was eagerly adopted not only by people of rank, but by those who without having social rank, or being able to

²⁰⁵ Malinowski, ‘Introduction’, in *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. lviii.

pay for such luxuries, were novelty-seekers and vain, and wanted to seem more than they were. Tobacco was fashionable, but the excesses in which people indulged made it ridiculous and in poor taste. In the London of those days there were smoking masters, just as there were dancing masters, and masters of any other “liberal art.”²⁰⁶

Embraced by the upper and middle class, tobacco’s original uses as a folk remedy or spiritual aide were transposed onto the excess and posturing of Old World class systems. A key feature of modernity, the mass adoption of luxury commodities by a burgeoning middle class was achieved by emulation of the wealthy. This is important in that the addictive qualities latent in tobacco combined with the wealth and social hierarchy of European societies to create a cultural phenomenon. This formed a gateway for tobacco to be transformed into a product that would be used by every stratum of society. No longer solely the preserve of the spiritual or the wealthy, tobacco would become a modern commodity.

John Xiros Cooper, relating modernism to a posthuman system, analyses the alienation central to modernity, writing that

The posthuman does not arrive with the information technology revolution of the late twentieth century, but with the advent of industrial production and the industrial factory, the ur-form, the practical paradigm, of modernity. Modernity flows from this largely anonymous revolution in the procedures for the reproduction and expansion of material

²⁰⁶ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 294.

life.²⁰⁷

Though exceptionally pessimistic, Xiros Cooper does accurately show the mechanised and alienating aspects of modernity that were fuelled by globalisation and globalised commodity production and consumption. According to Xiros Cooper, one of the key conditions of modernity is that ‘the worker/employee is subordinated to the machine; the human subject to the production process; and humanity absorbed *in toto* by capital’.²⁰⁸ This relates directly to Ortiz’s work in his attempt to communicate the economically dominated position of Cuba at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Modernity as a concept typically refers to the development of urbanisation, globalisation, and the proliferation of luxury goods amongst a larger segment of the population. Phones, cars, and automated factories are all included in the concept, along with consumables such as coffee, tea, chocolate, sugar, and tobacco. The last two remain of fundamental importance to the Cuban sense of identity, society, and their economy. The massive technological, social, and economic change that occurred in the Americas around the Columbian Exchange points to the moment that the Americas became integrated into the world system as a site of commodity production. From the moment that the American territories were incorporated into the empires of the Old World, they began to share a history. It therefore follows that, through social and economic change, they should share in modernity too. On the conception of global modernisms, Sanja Bahun contends that we must ‘rethink the assumption that the definition of modernism requires a

²⁰⁷ John Xiros Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 41.

²⁰⁸ Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society*, p. 41.

developmentalist model of historical progression, from tradition (the period of “other” aesthetic movements) to modernity, whenever and however that modernity may occur (the realm of modernism)²⁰⁹. With this in mind, it seems right that Cuba be within the boundaries of modernist literary production, it being a place where luxury products are produced, its modernity being seeded in the sudden arrival of colonising Europeans and enslaved Africans. The concept of modernity is transient and far from immutable, but it has value in signifying a break from the past. Cuba’s initial cultural change occurred suddenly and through domination from European powers over the Columbian Exchange. The sheer magnitude of the change brought by the Columbian Exchange is emphasised by Ortiz, writing

Then came a hurricane of culture: Europe. There arrived together, and in mass, iron, gunpowder, the horse, the wheel, the sail, the compass, money, wages, writing, the printing-press, books, the master, the King, the Church, the banker... A revolutionary upheaval shook the Indian peoples of Cuba, tearing up their institutions by the roots and destroying their lives. At one bound the bridge between the drowsing stone ages and the wide-awake Renaissance was spanned. In a single day various of the intervening ages were crossed in Cuba; one might say thousands of “culture-years,” if such measurement were admissible in the chronology of peoples. If the Indies of America were a New World for the Europeans, Europe was a far newer world for the people of America.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Sanja Bahun, ‘The Balkans Uncovered: Toward Historie Croisée of Modernism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* edited by Mark A. Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 42.

²¹⁰ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 99.

This passage highlights the suddenness of cultural change in Cuba around the arrival of the Europeans, their culture, and economic ideals. Just as with the First World War, the Columbian Exchange catalysed change. The change in the West Indies was extreme and dramatic, yet was also mirrored by a different change in the Old World. Alfred W. Crosby describes the consequences of the cultural and agricultural exchange which occurred following Columbus's landing in Cuba in 1492. Although Columbus and his men were searching for gold, New World agriculture would prove to be far more consequential and profitable. Crosby writes that 'Mining produced the most spectacular profits in the colonial New World, but the plantations employed more people and, in the end, produced greater wealth'.²¹¹ Furthermore, mining had a far lesser relative impact on the people of the Old World. Referring to the difficulty Europeans had in digesting indigenous crops in the Americas, mostly due to a lack of appropriate preparation methods, Crosby notes that 'Tobacco, which has killed many more than syphilis, is the true Montezuma's Revenge'.²¹² Tobacco, with its addictive properties and association with deleterious health impacts, acts as the decimated South American peoples' counterattack against the Europeans. In adopting tobacco, the Old World invited a Trojan Horse across the Atlantic and into their societies. The Columbian Exchange affected the Old and New Worlds in profound ways, sowing the seeds of capitalist commodity production and consumption many centuries later. It would forever alter human social, cultural and economic relationships across the world.

In his article "Fernando Ortiz and Cubanness" Antonio Benítez-Rojo notes that *Cuban*

²¹¹ Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, 30th anniversary edition (Praeger, 2003), p. 68.

²¹² Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, p. xx.

Counterpoint should not be ‘read exclusively as a socioeconomic study of tobacco and sugar, but rather as a text dealing with Cubanness’.²¹³ Additionally, Benítez-Rojo contends that *Cuban Counterpoint* ‘does not seek its legitimacy in the discourse of the social sciences, but rather in that of literature, of poetry, to be exact’ in its personification of ‘*Don Tabaco y Doña Azúcar*’.²¹⁴ This observation is crucial as it enables a literary perspective on what could be perceived as a sociological or economic work. As a seminal work of Cuban writing, *Cuban Counterpoint* creates a unifying myth around ‘Cubanness’ providing a sense of shared history and culture. Transculturation—a concept created by Ortiz as we have seen—focuses on the transfer of culture, agriculture, and technology between otherwise disparate places. This is particularly applicable to the Caribbean, a region defined by the influence of a multitude of cultures, primarily resulting from the influence of colonisation and the transatlantic slave trade. Sugar and tobacco form the basis of this cultural transfer, sugar originating in the Far East, tobacco originating in Cuba and South America. European colonisation brought not only sugar cane, but also the concept of a plantation. Monocultures of sugar and tobacco would quickly come to dominate almost any fertile area, transforming the land into a modern zone of production. The goal: to create immense wealth through the production of highly addictive commodities.

Presenting a commodity-focused conception of modernity, Ortiz’s *Cuban Counterpoint* makes a strong case for a Caribbean modernity very different from the modernity of Europe and the United States. In terms of the ‘modernist’ label it is the internationalism of Ortiz’s

²¹³ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, ‘Fernando Ortiz and Cubanness: A Postmodern Perspective’, *Cuban Studies*, 18 (1988), p. 127.

²¹⁴ Benítez-Rojo, ‘Fernando Ortiz and Cubanness’, p. 129; Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 3.

work that justifies grouping *Cuban Counterpoint* with the work of American authors such as Faulkner and Dos Passos, and European authors such as James Joyce and Italo Svevo. Ortiz writes that

[a] poet might be able to give us in robust verses a *Pelea de Don Tabaco y Doña Azúcar*—a “Controversy between Don Tobacco and Doña Sugar.” This type of dialogued composition which carries the dramatic dialectic of life into the realm of art has always been a favourite of the ingenuous folk muses in poetry, music, dance, song, and drama.²¹⁵

Here, Ortiz links his work with a history of artistic expression from people outside of the Western literary sphere, taking inspiration from culture perceived as primitive. Whilst this was not uncommon in modernist circles—Picasso’s influences include masks created by tribal African artists, for example—Ortiz differs in the central importance he places on folk modes of expression. Just as Eurocentric literary modernists take inspiration from Ancient Greek sources, seeking to imitate the style of antiquity, so too does Ortiz by incorporating the rhythms and themes of folklore into his writing. Etherington notes that

primitivism was *more* likely to have been pursued by those in the peripheral zones of the capitalist world-system [...] the areas, that is, where the discontent of those dispossessed by colonialism was the most acutely felt and where the remnants and mental habits of destroyed political economies and structures of feeling seemed more present and alive.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, pp. 3-4.

²¹⁶ Ben Etherington, *Literary Primitivism* (Stanford University Press, 2018), pp. 37-38.

Etherington highlights the idea that primitivism is not simply a racist projection of European modernists onto colonised subjects, but also a distinctive literary and artistic project shared by many writers from areas that were considered peripheral. Cuban modernity in *Cuban Counterpoint* fuses the idea of a modern Cuban nation with folk rituals surrounding tobacco. In this way, tobacco is used as a bridge between the indigenous past and the industrialising contemporary present.

Industrialism and its relationship with trade is a reliable indicator of Cuba's modernity, being an entirely new culture born of transculturation and trade. Ortiz supports this idea, noting that

Out of the agricultural and industrial development of these amazing plants were to come those economic interests which foreign traders would twist and weave for centuries to form the web of the country's history, the motives of its leaders, and, at one and the same time, the shackles and the support of its people. Tobacco and sugar are two of the most important figures in the history of Cuba.²¹⁷

Together tobacco and sugar form the basis for Cuban economic development, as well as the means with which the Cuban citizens can be oppressed: first by the Spanish, then by the Americans. The Cuban conception of modernity is therefore formed from a complex relationship of domestic and international influences, all of which are tied to the production and consumption of tobacco and sugar.

Following Ortiz's distinctly Cuban conception of tobacco culture, I now turn to the

²¹⁷ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 5.

Agrarian vision of the U.S. South in the writing of Robert Penn Warren. Warren's representations of tobacco in his fictional texts invite close reading to uncover their significance. While Ortiz focussed on issues of national independence and cultural formation in Cuba, Warren draws the conversation towards questions regarding regional identity and individualism. Where Ortiz writes from non-fictional and anthropological standpoint, Warren reveals the violence of tobacco production when dominated by a monopoly. Removed from its Cuban context, tobacco adopts new meanings when produced in the rural U.S. South.

2 The Political Producers: Southern Violence and Capitalist Structures

From the island of Cuba to the fields of the U.S. South, I now move to Robert Penn Warren's literary representations of tobacco production. In two early fictional texts, Warren reveals the twentieth-century struggles of rural Southern tobacco producers against the American Tobacco Company. By including Warren's work, I will place representations of Southern tobacco production into dialogue with the representations of Caribbean production and consumption that I have explored so far. The rural Southern setting of Warren's work provides an alternative perspective on production in conjunction with Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint*. Warren's tales of tobacco cultivation, and the struggle to maintain the communities that depend on the plant, reveal the violence from which urban consumers are distanced.

A modernist writer from the U.S. South, Warren concerns himself predominantly with the perspective of those states found below the Mason-Dixon line. Two of his works—'Prime Leaf' (1931) and *Night Rider* (1940)—provide an insight into how the exploitative practices of the twentieth-century tobacco trust were resisted by rural tobacco farmers in Kentucky and Tennessee. As a site of commodity production, the South is enveloped into the contested territory of modernity. Holding a distinct regional identity within the U.S., the South offers a strong cultural contrast with modern urban identities of the early twentieth century. The tobacco producing South experienced contemporary technological and social change in vastly different ways to the citizens living in the quickly expanding cities. The economic boom felt in the urban areas was not felt in the rural: progress was far less even. Technological advancements, particularly in the mass production of commodities, meant greater profits for capitalists. It also led to the potential for more inequality.

Highlighting the problems associated with the influence of powerful companies based in the U.S. North, Warren attempts to blend older aspects of Southern culture with more modern values. This provokes questions concerning the nature of commodity culture in relation to more Agrarian communities. How was modernity experienced in the areas where commodities were produced? How did Warren, through the lens of Agrarianism, seek to challenge urban modernity? Millichap notes that ‘the great metropolis of New York and its suburbs, where Warren spent most of his later career, figures little in his creative work’ with regional identity and rural settings instead taking precedence.²¹⁸ Set in the rural Black Patch of Kentucky and Tennessee, Warren’s short story ‘Prime Leaf’ serves as a precursor to *Night Rider*, with the theme of tobacco-fuelled violence running through to its tragic conclusion. I use these two texts to reflect upon the production side of the commodity coin. The moral dilemma at the heart of the two texts revolves around economic inequality and the effect of monopolistic trusts on modern rural communities. Labour is pitted against capital, with the impacts driving the events of Warren’s work.

The Fugitives and the Agrarian movement: *I’ll Take My Stand*

Concerned with questions of moral philosophy and human ambition, Warren presents the struggle of the individual against wider societal forces. Quinlan contends that Warren can be considered ‘part of the modern literary movement of the twentieth century that includes T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, and a host of other writers’.²¹⁹ Yet, despite

²¹⁸ Joseph R. Millichap, ‘Robert Penn Warren and Regionalism’, *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 48.1 (1994), pp. 37-38.

²¹⁹ Kieran Quinlan, ‘Tracking the Fugitive Poets’, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Poetry*, edited by Walter Kalaidjian (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 116.

contributing to the canon of modernist literature, Warren should be considered ‘slightly apart from that mainstream generally associated with the more cosmopolitan modernisms of London, Paris, and New York’.²²⁰ Warren’s status as a modernist outsider in part stems from his rural and agrarian focus of his work. This is also evident in Warren’s admiration for William Faulkner and the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, and with the incorporation of a strident Southern regionalism in his work. The Fugitives reacted against both the literary traditions of the South as well as the new cultural and social problems associated with modernity, though criticism of modernity should not be confused with anti-modernism.²²¹

I’ll Take My Stand, written by ‘Twelve Southerners’, seeks to defend the Southern way of life in contemporary America, with attempts from each of the twelve Southern writers to place the culture of the American South in the context of modernity. However, despite their regionalism, ‘the Fugitives had diverse national and international connections that partly belied their provincial roots’.²²² Their international perspective is reflected in their work, with Warren’s protagonists in both ‘Prime Leaf’ and *Night Rider* struggling with forces far beyond the borders of Kentucky and Tennessee. This transnational aspect of Southern literature is effectively articulated by Martyn Bone, who stresses that ‘any transnational turn in the South—be it socioeconomic, demographic, and/or disciplinary—should not be seen simply as a radical (much less liberating) break from regional tradition but rather as revealing discomfiting historical-geographical

²²⁰ Quinlan, ‘Tracking the Fugitive Poets’, p. 116.

²²¹ For more information see Westendorp, *Robert Penn Warren and the Modernist Temper*, pp. 7-29.

²²² Quinlan, ‘Tracking the Fugitive Poets’, p. 116.

continuities with what went before'.²²³ This assertion underscores the South's historical role within broader transnational slave-trading networks. Consequently, the Fugitive writers position themselves simultaneously as critics of modernity and advocates of a distinctly Southern international, rather than global, perspective.

It was out of the stirrings of twentieth-century modernism in the American South that the Southern Agrarian Movement emerged. A committed member of the Agrarians, following from his work as a member of The Fugitive Poets, Warren sought early in his career to present the culture found in the American South. Rubin writes the introduction to *I'll Take My Stand*, writing that the collection seeks to represent

The image of a society that perhaps never existed [but] it was a society that *should* have existed—one in which men could live as individuals and not as automatons, aware of their finiteness and their dependence upon God and nature, and spiritual dimensions, possessed of a sense of the deep inscrutability of the natural world.²²⁴

The relationship between consumer and labourer is at the forefront of Agrarian thinking in *I'll Take My Stand*. Ransom writes that the advertising and salesmanship at the heart of the modern capitalist economy 'consults the happiness of the consumer no more than it consulted the happiness of the laborer'.²²⁵ The focus, instead, is therefore the accumulation of wealth and power by the

²²³ Martyn Bone, *Where the New World Is: Literature About the U.S. South at Global Scales*, New Southern Studies, (The University of Georgia Press, 2018), p. 2.

²²⁴ Louis D. Rubin, 'Introduction' in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Peter Smith, 1976), p. xiv.

²²⁵ John Crowe Ransom, 'Introduction: A Statement of Principles' in *I'll Take My Stand*, p. xxviii.

early twentieth-century robber barons exemplified by James Buchanan Duke. As Milov writes, ‘In the late nineteenth century, machines transformed where and how Americans worked, relaxed, consumed, and even conceived of themselves’.²²⁶ This point is bolstered by Rubin, writing that ‘Through their vision of an agrarian community, the authors of *I’ll Take My Stand* presented a critique of the modern world’.²²⁷ Applied to ‘Prime Leaf’ and *Night Rider*, it is through this lens that Warren demonstrates the corruption wrought by over-mighty international trusts. The perspective of Warren and the other Agrarians is fundamentally one that seeks to represent and empathise with the white working class of the U.S. South. Victims of capitalism, the Southern tobacco farmers found in the Agrarians an intellectual defence to their way of life while highlighting the inequalities created by modern methods of both production and commerce.

Rubin asserts that ‘The modern man has lost his sense of vocation’ and further notes that the Agrarians stood for ‘A rebuke of materialism, a corrective to the worship of Progress, and a reaffirmation of man’s aesthetic and spiritual needs’.²²⁸ This revision of modernity, blending the challenges of the twentieth century with the values of the South, forms a central pillar of Warren’s fiction. For Rubin and the Agrarians, consumption becomes ‘the grand end which justifies the evil of modern labor’.²²⁹ Expanding upon this assertion, Rubin writes that ‘We have more time in which to consume, and many more products to be consumed. But the tempo of our labors communicates itself to our satisfactions, and these also become brutal and hurried’.²³⁰ The speed

²²⁶ Sarah Milov, ‘Tobacco in Industrializing America’, p. 17.

²²⁷ Rubin, ‘Introduction’ in *I’ll Take My Stand*, p. xiv.

²²⁸ Ransom, ‘Introduction: A Statement of Principles’ in *I’ll Take My Stand*, p. xxiv; Rubin, ‘Introduction’ in *I’ll Take My Stand*, p. xiv.

²²⁹ Ransom, ‘Introduction: A Statement of Principles’ in *I’ll Take My Stand*, p. xxiv.

²³⁰ Ransom, ‘Introduction: A Statement of Principles’ in *I’ll Take My Stand*, p. xxiv.

of the modern world, perhaps as much as the brutality of the tobacco monopoly operated by Duke, represents a perceived threat to Southern culture. This is also tied to a reversal in the exploitative impetus; white sharecroppers were subsumed under the threat of domination. Critiquing modernity in contrast with Southern values, Rubin writes that man cannot ‘shorten his labor-time and enlarge his consuming-time indefinitely. He has to pay the penalty in satiety and aimlessness’.²³¹ Commodity production, and the wealth it creates for those who control the supply chain, also relies on consumption and the resulting demand. Without the time to consume, the model fails. Rubin’s suggestion that the speed of modern technological and cultural change is fatally undermining society reflects Warren’s concerns—expressed through his essays and his literature—that an overbearing cosmopolitanism is the source of cultural decay.

A more regional experience of modernity demands a more regional outlook. Millichap writes of regionalism that ‘Regionalism is here understood as that complex of geographic-historical, socio-economic, and literary-artistic factors which support the identification of disparate sections within a larger culture’.²³² This working definition for regionalism defines Warren against the prevailing perspective of the urban modernists. Just as Faulkner presents an avowedly modernist outlook, so too does Warren. Millichap examines this further, writing that ‘Robert Penn Warren becomes a writer who, while rooted in his region, moves beyond it to his own regionalism constructed from universal literary themes and artistic meanings’.²³³ The regional setting of ‘Prime Leaf’ and *Night Rider* in Kentucky and Tennessee enables Warren to better examine those who

²³¹ Ransom, ‘Introduction: A Statement of Principles’ in *I’ll Take My Stand*, p. xxiv.

²³² Millichap, ‘Robert Penn Warren and Regionalism’, p. 29.

²³³ Millichap, ‘Robert Penn Warren and Regionalism’, p. 30.

were alienated by capitalism in the early twentieth century. However, despite dealing in the more exploitative aspects of twentieth-century society, wholesale rejection of modernity is not found in violently opposing the tobacco monopolies. For example, various characters in *Night Rider* instead advocate for a society that supports their community, as opposed to a capitalist system geared towards wealth extraction. The practices of the tobacco companies prove to be exploitative and damaging to the Southern way of life in part because they are extractive. Tobacco, having become fundamentally intertwined with the Southern economy and culture, reveals the way in which producing areas are excluded from the modern world that they supply.

Nicolaisen draws parallels between the Agrarian movement of the American South and the growing backlash against the established order in Europe, specifically Germany, during the 1920s and 1930s:

The general perspective of *I'll Take My Stand* is directed toward the past; with few exceptions the contributors emphasize the separateness of the South and its traditional way of life rather than its ties with the rest of the nation or the modern world in general.²³⁴

Focusing on the Southern past and the distinction between Southern and American identity, *I'll Take My Stand* is an important aspect of Warren's original literary and ideological standpoint. Westendorp explores 'Warren's problem of having to reconcile his Southern heritage with both the attraction and the ugliness of the modernist experience', further stating that 'Warren's

²³⁴ Peter Nicolaisen, 'The Southern Agrarians and European Agrarianism', *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 49.4 (1996), p. 687.

Southernness is in conflict with the modernist temper'.²³⁵ It is this anti-modernist conflict that sets Warren apart whilst presenting an alternative viewpoint in relation to the established literary canon, honed by Warren in his later contributions to New Criticism.²³⁶ The emphasis on regionalism is examined by Millichap, writing that 'the juxtaposition in his creative and critical works of his Southern home with other regions demonstrates how Warren extended his own regional means to more universal ends'.²³⁷ This use of the regional to reflect on the global reflects the tobacco at the centre of 'Prime Leaf' and *Night Rider*. Warren emphasises the South's role in supplying tobacco alongside the crop's poor profitability.

Westendorp assesses the value in the Agrarians' antithetical position against an encroaching metropolitan society. This creates an interesting contradiction in that the Agrarians were both critical and defensive of their Southern culture: 'Though they remained critical of their own culture, they were forced into defending it. They began to recognize that there were values in its culture that could protect it from the economic, cultural, and moral crisis of modern, commercialized America'.²³⁸ Commercialisation in Warren's fiction reflects the cultural distance between Southern producers and global consumers. However, there is a contradiction in Warren's work worth exploring: the individual versus the collective. As Westendorp writes, 'Individual integrity is threatened by industrial capitalism, by wage-slavery, urbanization, massification, in

²³⁵ Westendorp, *Robert Penn Warren and the Modernist Temper*, pp. 4-5.

²³⁶ More information on Warren's New Criticism can be found in Mark Jancovich, 'Robert Penn Warren as New Critic: Against Propaganda and Irresponsibility', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 24.1 (1991), pp. 53-65.

²³⁷ Millichap, 'Robert Penn Warren and Regionalism', pp. 38.

²³⁸ Tjebbe Antonius Westendorp, *Robert Penn Warren and the Modernist Temper: A Study of His Social and Literary Criticism in Relation to His Fiction* (Eburon, 1987), p. 2.

short, by the Americanization of the South'.²³⁹ Despite the threat to individualistic Southern culture, the only means of fighting the tobacco trust is to form a collective. In this sense the Agrarians take a similar approach to Ortiz in *Cuban Counterpoint*. Rural Southern culture, defined in part by the cultivation of tobacco, requires an intellectual defence from the forces of industrial capitalism.

Warren's historical fiction provides greater understanding of the conflict in the Black Patch, particularly as a means of identifying the tumultuous underlying ideological and cultural undercurrents of his own contemporary era. Regarding *Night Rider*, Witt contends that 'even though the story of Percy Munn is woven into the story of the Tobacco War in Kentucky, Munn belongs to Warren's own time, and thus the novel is taken out of the realm of the purely historical'.²⁴⁰ The Black Patch Tobacco War of the 1900s provides an analogue to the explosion of international violence leading up to 1940. At the same time, reaching into the contemporary past, Clark contends that 'the power politics [*Night Rider*] explores are indigenously American, and reminiscent of the War for Independence. The agrarian revolt Warren chronicles is spearheaded by a propertied class'.²⁴¹ Tobacco is therefore presented by Warren as a fundamentally American crop that has inherent ties to violence. Insurgency, as well as the influence of powerful ideologies, is exemplified in Munn's struggle against a powerful system geared against Southern tobacco producers. As representatives of an individualistic rural working

²³⁹ Westendorp, *Robert Penn Warren and the Modernist Temper*, p. 3.

²⁴⁰ Robert W. Witt, 'Robert Penn Warren and the "Black Patch War"', *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, vol. 67, no. 4, 1969, p. 316.

²⁴¹ William Bedford Clark, *The American Vision of Robert Penn Warren* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p. 72.

class, the tobacco farmers are shown to have power when they act as part of a single institution.

Although Warren's fiction differs from Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint* in form, perspective, and even the original language in which it was written, there are some enduring comparisons that can be made. Fundamentally, both Warren and Ortiz are wrestling with problems associated with identity, independence, and the threat posed by monopolisation. For both authors tobacco as a commodity is shown to represent Southern and Cuban identities, respectively, sharing representations of tobacco as a boon for the humble producer. Tobacco becomes a focal point for expression and the assertion of an independent identity, distinct from monopolising and homogenising forces. The imposition of capitalist modes of production directly affects the producer, creating the impetus for cultural resistance. The contrast between Warren and Ortiz comes with differences between the U.S. and Cuban tobacco industries. While Ortiz states that 'Commercially the whole world is the market for our tobacco' the Southern producers represented in Warren's work struggle against the Tobacco Trust.²⁴² As I will now explore, Warren's Southern tobacco producers show the consequences of commodities restricted by monopolistic conglomerates.

The narrative structure of 'Prime Leaf'

One of Warren's first published works, the story serves as an early prototype to *Night Rider*. Shepherd writes that 'In "Prime Leaf" one can see Warren exploring and developing the history, locale, traditions, values, characters and themes that nine years later became the substance of *Night*

²⁴² Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 7.

Rider', although the plots to both are not identical.²⁴³ The rise and precipitous fall of Percy 'Perce' Munn is prefigured in Thomas Hardin's murder at the hands of the Tobacco Growers' Association. Warren's 'Prime Leaf', a short story, details the experience of the tobacco-growing Hardin family and their conflict with their local Tobacco Growers' Association. The action revolves around Old Joe Hardin, Big Thomas Hardin, and Little Thomas Hardin, each representing a different generation within the same family. The story begins with the German buyer Wiedenmeyer approaching Big Thomas to sell directly to the tobacco trust, a request that is denied in favour of solidarity with the rest of the association, of which Old Joe Hardin is a board member. However, in a separate meeting Joe Hardin promptly rejects Bill Hopkins's uncompromising proposal to turn the association towards night riding in an effort to coerce further support:

“They go that way if they have to go that way to win. I’d see every leaf in two states burned up in a bonfire before I’d see one hand of tobacco sold half a cent under the association price. We’ll fix a fair price and we’ll have it. It ain’t just the money—it’s our rights in that and everything else.”²⁴⁴

Joe Hardin's more conservative outlook causes him to reject the proposal, quitting the association board. In a compromise with Big Thomas, they agree to split 'J. C. Hardin & Son—Tobacco Growers and Stock Breeders' between each other. Joe Hardin states that ““We’ll divide the crop up right now, and we can divide the land up for this year’s crop before it’s set out. We’ll let people

²⁴³ Allen Shepherd, 'Robert Penn Warren's "Prime Leaf" as Prototype of "Night Rider"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 7.3 (1970), p. 471.

²⁴⁴ Robert Penn Warren, 'Prime Leaf' in *The Circus in the Attic and Other Stories* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952), p. 237.

know right away too.”²⁴⁵ Big Thomas, in dialogue with his father, espouses greater pro-association sympathies: “I feel about it like Jones, I reckon.” “You feel that the association’s got to win, no matter how?” “I reckon so.”²⁴⁶ Despite this, Big Thomas remains uneasy about the prospect of night riding. Finally, in the story’s climax, the association burns the Hardin’s tobacco-curing barn to the ground, killing Bess the dog in the act. Big Thomas Hardin leaves in pursuit of the nightriders, successfully shooting Bill Hopkins in the dark of night. Joe Hardin instructs Big Thomas to turn himself in to the sheriff:

“There ain’t but one thing to do, that I can see. Call up the sheriff and tell him you shot somebody when they burned your barn and you’re coming in to him. I’ll call him. I know Jack Burton. He’ll take my word and he won’t come get you, son. It’ll be all right, son.”²⁴⁷

Hopkins is seriously wounded—but not fatally. Despite this, the association takes immediate revenge, killing Big Thomas on his way to turn himself in to the sheriff.

Tobacco as the impetus to violence in ‘Prime Leaf’

‘Prime Leaf’ serves as Warren’s initial meditation on violence and its legitimacy in the face of escalating conflict. The essence of the Black Patch Tobacco War is examined, with the fatal disagreement between the buyers, the Tobacco Growers’ Association, and the farmers leading to the text’s tragic conclusion. Published almost a decade before *Night Rider*, ‘Prime Leaf’ forms the foundation of Warren’s later novel. Like *Night Rider*, representations of the American Tobacco

²⁴⁵ Warren, ‘Prime Leaf’ in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 254.

²⁴⁶ Warren, ‘Prime Leaf’ in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 252.

²⁴⁷ Warren, ‘Prime Leaf’ in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 272.

Company representatives remain conspicuously absent; the action unfolds with the company as an economic force, rather than flesh-and-blood individuals. The invisibility of the tobacco companies is noted by Bedford, writing that ‘In *Night Rider*, Warren purposely confers upon the big tobacco conglomerates a measure of invisibility, even as he shows how their influence is ubiquitous and palpable’.²⁴⁸ The power of tobacco as a commodity is therefore shown through its influence on character behaviours. Reynolds covers the development of monopolistic practices within the tobacco industry, writing that

The cause of these drops in tobacco prices was the development of the “Tobacco Trust”. Foreign governments monopolized the market in Europe and, establishing agencies in [the U.S.], managed to corner the American market. The independent buyer was forced to sell his tobacco to these foreign agencies and at the price they set. The tobacco farmer could no longer go from buyer to buyer, selling his crop to the highest bidder, but was forced to sell it at the low prices set by the trust.²⁴⁹

During this period—as with J.D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company and J.P. Morgan’s consolidation of U.S. railroads under the Northern Securities Company—the Tobacco Trust destroyed the competition. Anti-free market practices within a capitalist system, and an as-yet dormant Sherman Act (1890), meant that commodities were increasingly affordable, largely at the expense of the producers. Reynolds further notes the importance of tobacco to the Southern

²⁴⁸ William Bedford Clark, *The American Vision of Robert Penn Warren* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p. 81.

²⁴⁹ Albin Lee Reynolds. ‘War in the Black Patch’, p. 2.

economy, writing that ‘Western Kentucky, the setting for Penn’s *Night Rider*, relied almost entirely on the tobacco crop to support its local agrarian economy—just as cotton dominated the economies of the states of the Deep South’.²⁵⁰ By depressing tobacco prices, the American Tobacco Company sowed the seeds of conflict in the South, providing the ideal setting for Warren’s work. The Black Patch Tobacco War allows Warren to explore themes of rising nationalistic fervour and violence combined with regionalism that reflecting the increasing tensions throughout the 1930s.

Monopolisation, resistance and conflict in ‘Prime Leaf’

The buyer in ‘Prime Leaf’, the German Wiedenmeyer, features as Warren’s only representation of one of the tobacco companies’ intermediaries. Visiting the Hardins to judge their loyalty to The Tobacco Growers’ Association, Wiedenmeyer shows an important facet of the system. Big Thomas, addresses Wiedenmeyer on the price of tobacco, showing Warren’s conception of the source of the conflict:

All I wonder is if 1907 is going to be just like 1906. Eleven, maybe twelve cents, you said, and when you came around after and we did business with you it was prime leaf, eight cents, lugs, three cents. And we had a lot of good prime leaf. It was a fine crop.²⁵¹

Big Thomas Hardin displays his conviction that collective action is the tobacco growers’ last recourse to obtain a fair price for their crop. The passage demonstrates Warren’s criticism of

²⁵⁰ Albin Lee Reynolds. ‘War in the Black Patch’, p. 2.

²⁵¹ Warren, ‘Prime Leaf’ in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 213.

powerful global forces that impinge upon local or regional cultures. This is supported by Bone's analysis of Southern culture, writing that 'The intersection of the regional and global both erases and expands familiar "southern" forms of historical-geographical uneven development'.²⁵² This intersection described by Bone is explored by Warren in 'Prime Leaf'. Wiedenmeyer, representative of the American Tobacco Company and wider market forces, displays the extent of external domination over the tobacco producers; fundamentally, the tobacco companies' actions lead to greater radicalisation amongst the producers. Even the independently-minded Joe Hardin follows the logic of collective action to secure leverage over the buyers, stating that

"If you've got any more right offers to make, it might be a pretty good idea, I guess, for you to make them a little later when the association starts fixing prices. And then you might just make them direct to the association. Don't you think it might be a good idea, Mr. Wiedenmeyer?"²⁵³

Characteristically independent, Joe Hardin nonetheless places faith in the non-violent methods of the tobacco growers' association. However, the anxiety surrounding the reliability of crop prices is later articulated by the reactionary Hopkins from the other side of the conflict, "People always see too late. A hell of a lot of good it'll do next year when prime leaf is six cents and dropping for people to say that maybe, maybe, the association was a good thing".²⁵⁴ Hopkins serves as a foil to Wiedenmeyer, who asserts that the association will 'cost everybody money and do nobody gud'.²⁵⁵

²⁵² Martyn Bone, *Where the New World Is*, p. 11.

²⁵³ Warren, 'Prime Leaf' in *The Circus in the Attic*, pp. 223-224.

²⁵⁴ Warren, 'Prime Leaf' in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 233.

²⁵⁵ Warren, 'Prime Leaf' in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 217.

This assertion from the buyer Wiedenmeyer—representing cosmopolitan and globally-reaching American Tobacco Company—ring hollow as the association members are led to ever more desperate measures. The two extreme positions illustrate the inequalities in commodity production. On the one hand, faceless Trusts making obscene profits selling affordable consumables; on the other, increasingly desperate commodity producers wanting a fair price for their produce.

The position articulated by Joe Hardin reflects the strident individualism characteristic of Agrarian philosophy, and the tension created between standing as an individual versus the need for collective action against monopolistic exploitation. Joe Hardin states to Wiedenmeyer that ‘I’m not generally a man to join up with societies and associations and things. I think most of the time you have to stand on your own, and I like to pick and choose my friends some other way, too’.²⁵⁶ However, the logic of supply-side collective action to drive up the price—by withholding crop—proves to be convincing enough to suspend social and cultural reticence on Joe Hardin’s part. Disillusionment quickly occurs with the escalation of violence driven by the Tobacco Association, foreshadowed through dialogue throughout the short story. The escalation of tension is showcased by Joe Hardin’s conversation with Hopkins following the Tobacco Association’s meeting:

When one of them picked up a glass or pipe, the ends of his fingernails showed white where they had been scraped carefully and deep with the point of a heavy knifeblade. The blue tobacco smoke rose slowly through the thick air and puddled against the painted ceiling.²⁵⁷

Tobacco consumption here is linked, through the tobacco growers’ hands, to the means by which

²⁵⁶ Warren, ‘Prime Leaf’ in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 219.

²⁵⁷ Warren, ‘Prime Leaf’ in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 229.

it is produced. The tobacco growers reflect the violence of their circumstances, emphasised by Warren with the description of workers' hands in this passage alongside knives and tobacco smoke.

The lines between livelihood and life are blurred in 'Prime Leaf', with tobacco farming shown as the centre of the farmers' existence. Tobacco even dominates the domestic sphere; a conversation between Big Thomas and Edith highlights the danger of opposing the night riders:

"My Lord, Honey, they burned up two barns full of tobacco, and then when old Mr. Salem's barn didn't burn proper, they used dynamite. People saw them, too, plain as day, riding down the pike this side of Hubertsville. There wasn't much secret about it."²⁵⁸

This passage shows the opposing forces to the seemingly invincible tobacco trust. Warren reflects the extreme ends to which Southern tobacco farmers would go, with the use of dynamite indicating levels of violence approaching civil war. Big Thomas's conversation demonstrates the collateral damage resulting from night riding, spreading terror amongst the community yet failing to effectively defy the trust.

The final section of 'Prime Leaf' confronts the brutal reality of the Black Patch Tobacco War, showing the impact of the conflict beyond the lives of the tobacco farmers with 'Little Thomas' an example of the Southern families affected by the War:

"Dey done shot yore pappy, son. Dey done kilt him down on de pike tow'd town."

The boy hid his face against the Negro's rough coat, which smelt of sweat and tobacco,

²⁵⁸ Warren, 'Prime Leaf' in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 246.

and wept, weeping silently, as they rode along though the clear, premonitory sunlight of early spring'.²⁵⁹

'Little Thomas' Hardin, his father's namesake, is devastated by the news. Tobacco forms a part of the scene, both from the smell of Sam's jacket, and as the cause of tragedy. Big Thomas's death mirrors that of Benton Todd in *Night Rider*, with the economic dispute surrounding tobacco descending into a quasi-civil war. Like a war, the conflict surrounding commercial tobacco creates generational trauma. A product that serves as one of the driving forces of the local economy, with the status of a global commodity, instead destroys the community. Despite the economic causes of the conflict, it is the Southern community that pays the price.

Taken as a whole, 'Prime Leaf' highlights the complexities and ideological contradictions associated with the Black Patch Tobacco War. Warren's short story provides a narrative that incorporates the philosophies and aims of the Agrarian movement whilst also showing the undercurrent of anger and violence that had permeated the U.S. South by the beginning of the twentieth century. The tension between a monopolised global market and a localised community results in a breaking point, with devastating consequences. These same themes were developed at greater length by Warren in *Night Rider*, which we turn to now.

Percy Munn and the crisis of the individual

Night Rider shares similarities with 'Prime Leaf' in terms of setting, tone and historical backdrop. However, Percy Munn proves to be a very different protagonist to Thomas Hardin, with

²⁵⁹ Warren, 'Prime Leaf' in *The Circus in the Attic*, p. 276.

Westendorp describing Munn as ‘a helpless drifter whose social and private selves are not integrated’.²⁶⁰ The fundamental duality of Percy Munn is something I will explore here, particularly in relation to the violent actions of the Southerners in the novel against the encroaching power of the American Tobacco Company. Clark notes the key questions that emerge from *Night Rider* as an exploration of American identity:

In a sense, Warren is addressing himself in *Night Rider* to moral issues that a pietistic historiography traditionally ignores. The American nation had a violent, disorderly, and bloody birthing. What are the implications of this fact? How has it left its mark on our past and present? What future can be built on such awareness?²⁶¹

What follows from Bedford’s questions here are broader questions surrounding the corruption of the individual and the relationship of the individual to both friendly and hostile collectives. Ultimately this conflict between the individual and the collective is an extension of the contradiction at the heart of Agrarian thought. As Westendorp writes, ‘In short stories and in the novels *Night Rider* (1939) and *At Heaven’s Gate* (1942) Warren tried to dramatize the traditional, “organic” society that he had advocated in his role as one of the Nashville Agrarians’.²⁶² This organic society is shown to be distinct, yet also inseparable from, American society as a whole. The plight of the tobacco farmers is highlighted in *Night Rider*, becoming unwitting challenges to the might of American capitalism in the early twentieth century.

²⁶⁰ Westendorp, *Robert Penn Warren and the Modernist Temper*, p. 6.

²⁶¹ Clark, *The American Vision of Robert Penn Warren*, p. 79.

²⁶² Westendorp, *Robert Penn Warren and the Modernist Temper*, p. 5.

Percy Munn stands as Warren's representative of the individual within a rural modernity, largely buffeted by events as an unwilling participant. Clark explores the philosophical and political positions taken by Warren in *Night Rider*, noting Percy Munn's role as a 'tragic liberal' in the context of revolutionary leftist fiction of the time of publication.²⁶³ However, strictures of modernity make necessary Munn's binding to the association and, later, the Protective Brotherhood. Exploring the significance of the protagonist in *Night Rider*, Ryan attempts to assess the nihilism expressed by Munn, noting that 'From the outset Mr. Percy Munn is set apart from the other characters; he is always an isolated man'.²⁶⁴ However Ryan also writes that 'a careful reading of *Night Rider* shows that while the protagonist's nihilistic attitude is of central importance, this attitude is not at all to be equated with the novelist's vision'.²⁶⁵ Rather than serving as an expression of anti-modern sentiment, as a character Percy Munn reveals the pitfalls of pursuing anti-modernity at any cost. Shepherd notes that 'Munn is the incomplete man who must draw his strength from others; yet we have only the assumption, rather than a demonstration of why he is as he is, spectral and divided', standing as a representative for the confused and dangerous times which he inhabits.²⁶⁶ Munn's commitment to the association—and, by extension, tobacco as a commodity—leads to him sowing the seeds of his own destruction; unable to maintain or even realise his true desire. As Ryan writes, 'The community or solidarity he wants is one that respects the individual human person and the imperatives of his sole self, not one that swallows up the

²⁶³ Clark, *The American Vision of Robert Penn Warren*, p. 72.

²⁶⁴ Alvan S. Ryan, 'Robert Penn Warren's "Night Rider": The Nihilism of the Isolated Temperament', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 7.4 (1961), p. 339.

²⁶⁵ Ryan, 'Robert Penn Warren's "Night Rider"', p. 338.

²⁶⁶ Allen Shepherd, 'Robert Penn Warren's "Prime Leaf" as Prototype of "Night Rider"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 7.3 (1970), p. 471.

individual in some absolute.²⁶⁷ In a similar vein to Big Thomas Hardin—the archetype to Munn—Munn’s absolute commitment to the cause leads to his death.

Percy Munn’s tragic fall from grace and resulting loss of identity is a poignant use of modernist tropes to show the impacts of modernity on Southerners. The association’s battle against the tobacco buyers, and Munn’s personal struggle for status and relevance, is proved to be ultimately futile. Munn is driven by a desire for acceptance and status, despite vacillating between admitting this to himself and denying the idea outright. Before the Bardsville meeting Munn muses that ‘Politicians were slaves, he had sometimes told himself, dispelling the casual speculations in the past; and if he desired anything of life, that thing was to be free, and himself’.²⁶⁸ However, throughout the novel he also maintains getting into politics as a ‘possibility for the future’, often before immediately backtracking.²⁶⁹ The irony lies in that, as the novel progresses Munn increasingly becomes inseparable from the institutions he leads. The association, and later The Brotherhood, consumes Munn. Politics, regardless of any intentions expressed by Munn, finds him. A desire for status and purpose leads directly to corruption and, eventually, murder.

Munn’s crisis of self is tied to the fortunes of the tobacco growing community. As the situation worsens, Munn steadily loses more of his own identity. His move towards ever more extreme action is ironically spurred less by a sense of direction than a lack of it. As Ryan notes, ‘*Night Rider* is a powerful dramatization of the efforts of a man deficient in self-knowledge to emerge from isolation into solidarity’.²⁷⁰ Munn is fundamentally unable to control his unwilling

²⁶⁷ Ryan, ‘Robert Penn Warren’s “Night Rider”’, pp. 339-340.

²⁶⁸ Robert Penn Warren, *Night Rider* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1940), p. 21.

²⁶⁹ Warren, *Night Rider*, p. 21.

²⁷⁰ Ryan, ‘Robert Penn Warren’s “Night Rider”’, p. 346.

participation in this solidarity. Instead, the interests of the collective and the commodity completely engulf Munn's sense of self, spurred by a need to defend the Southern way of life against the tobacco companies.

Providing a foil to Munn is the corrupted Senator Tolliver, a successful politician with a silver tongue who encourages, cajoles and manipulates Munn to his first steps into the association. As Ryan notes,

Tolliver is the opportunist, the compromiser. His flattery probes and finds Munn's weakness, which is his inability to decide between his desire "to be free and himself" and his desire for public acclaim and for a political career like Tolliver's, even at the cost of compromise.²⁷¹

It is Tolliver's betrayal—selling his tobacco against the association's wishes before suing—that exacerbates Munn's turn to the more extreme end of the conflict. The crux of the two sides is aptly noted by Witt, writing that 'each member of the board was forced into choosing sides—the one side wanting only justice and the other side wanting blood'.²⁷² The moment of the vote to continue withholding tobacco from the buyers is symbolised by Tolliver 'holding an unlit cigar in his hand, rolling it delicately between his fingers'.²⁷³ This is returned to after the vote has concluded,

He stopped rolling the long, pale cigar between his fingers and laid it on the green baize before him. His motion was very deliberate. The covering leaf of the cigar was frayed and

²⁷¹ Ryan, 'Robert Penn Warren's "Night Rider"', p. 342.

²⁷² Robert W. Witt, 'Robert Penn Warren and the "Black Patch War"'. *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, vol. 67, no. 4, 1969, p. 305.

²⁷³ Warren, *Night Rider*, p. 121.

cracked now. It wouldn't be any good.²⁷⁴

The symbolism here is clear: the vote represents more extreme action against the Tobacco Trust beyond the control of the Senator. Justice takes an abrupt descent into vengeance and vigilantism, far beyond the mainstream political process. Further, the association ceases to serve Tolliver, who is 'Broke, and owes money' to the banks.²⁷⁵ Unable to sell, Tolliver shows how financial need destroys the best of intentions, forcing his hand in turning against the association and resulting in yet more extreme action.

Violence and the Night Riders

Warren proves violence to be intimately related to tobacco culture in the South. An eerie parallel is included with Willie Proudfit and his experience exterminating buffalo on the American plains. The short story seems slightly incongruous with the rest of the novel; however, its inclusion highlights the theme of American exploitation of the environment and the violence used in imposing the western mode of civilisation. Proudfit's ecological epiphany is reflected in his observations of an Indigenous American dance:

The Indians was dance-en then, when I come back through, tryen to dance the buffalo back. They'd been gone a long time then, and the bones. Them Indians was a-tryen to dance 'em back. And Indians ever whar, I beared tell, up in Dakota and west. The ghost-dance, they

²⁷⁴ Warren, *Night Rider*, p. 123.

²⁷⁵ Warren, *Night Rider*, p. 136.

named hit.²⁷⁶

This places an emphasis on the results of ecological disequilibrium, as well as a possible route to redemption for Percy. Proudfit lives without ego, scratching out a subsistence living, in stark contrast to his persona as a buffalo hunter in his youth. He also serves as a foil against the status-obsessed and guilt-ridden Munn. Millichap offers that Munn ‘is destroyed in the dark and bloody landscape of the Black Patch, but one of his foils, the poor-white farmer Willie Proudfit, can offer him respite and example as a proud man who, by living through the last days of the Western frontier, discovered how to fit into his world’.²⁷⁷ Munn ultimately represents a fall from grace, and an abject failure to thrive in a community. Willie Proudfit offers a route to something resembling peace, free from the violence that comes to define Munn.

The Proudfit chapter towards the end of *Night Rider* expands the novel westward, beyond the borders of Kentucky and Tennessee. Millichap’s analysis puts this into the context of Warren’s regionalism, writing that ‘In a sense, the West can better symbolize the archetypal tensions in American culture: New World and Old, frontier and civilization, wilderness and garden’.²⁷⁸ To this I would like to add another: rural and urban, existing together under the umbrella of modernity. The commodities that define urban modernity are only available with rural production, yet modernist texts that feature commodity production express a perspective distinct from their more urban-focussed counterparts. They nonetheless remain an integral part of the modern experience. This is articulated with Warren’s examination of the violent underpinnings of

²⁷⁶ Warren, *Night Rider*, p. 413.

²⁷⁷ Millichap, ‘Robert Penn Warren and Regionalism’, p. 36.

²⁷⁸ Millichap, ‘Robert Penn Warren and Regionalism’, p. 36.

modern commodity production. Muller writes that ‘Without forcing the obvious social implications in the struggle between the tobacco-growers and the soulless corporations, [Warren] does not minimize its fierceness. His main theme is what this fierceness does to a naturally sensitive, civilized man’.²⁷⁹ Violent conflict frustrates the possibility of a modern peace. Tobacco, rather than bringing prosperity, brings instability when combined with the profiteering practices of the Tobacco Trust.

While racialised violence is not the focus of the novel—though it is inseparable from the history of the South—it does form a vital fulcrum upon which Munn’s fate rests. With Munn’s direct influence, Bunk Trevelyan’s trial results in the condemnation and execution of an innocent, and unnamed, black farm labourer. After being accused of murder himself, the guilt of the episode comes to haunt Munn: ‘Munn tried hard to remember his name. He would lie there, staring at the dazzling depth of the sky, and try to remember the name. It became almost an obsession with him [...] But he could not remember the name’.²⁸⁰ Munn’s determination to support a fellow tobacco planter leads to his first corrupt acts as a leader of the association, turning him from a young idealist into a desperate criminal. In returning to the fate of the unnamed labourer, Warren also brings attention to the way in which the period, and the commercial tobacco industry, causes harm.

Racial prejudice plays a major role in Munn’s illegal search for the murder weapon and his acceptance of the supposed outcome. Williams’s exemplary work on the lingering effects of the American Civil War sheds light on how Night Riders terrorised Black Americans and their communities. Night Riding, in the context of Black Americans in the postwar period, ‘involved

²⁷⁹ Herbert J. Muller, ‘Violence upon the Roads’, *The Kenyon Review*, 1.3 (1939), p. 324.

²⁸⁰ Warren, *Night Rider*, p. 390.

gangs of armed white men who rejected the Republican goal of black and white southerners coexisting peacefully under the auspices of the federal government'.²⁸¹ Whilst Munn's raid of the Black Americans' houses is not primarily motivated by racial hatred, his actions rest on a long history of terror and violence. Not only do Munn and his men force entry into the man's home, they also swiftly lead him away for condemnation and execution. Munn's actions can be dubbed as 'Night Riding' even before the official formation of the Free Farmers' Brotherhood for Protection and Control, with Munn pursuing a warped idealism in his capacity as a lawyer.

Warren foreshadows the guilt later felt by Munn with his devilish appearance immediately after Trevelyan's trial: 'He glanced quickly at the mirror back of the bar, and saw there his face grinning, a long, swarthy face, with dark eyes, and with the grinning lips drawn back over the long teeth'.²⁸² The Dorian Grey-esque change in Munn results in him lashing out after being accused of evidence tampering and jury rigging with 'all them Association men on the jury'.²⁸³ The scene shows that Munn is indeed in possession of a conscience. The idea that his client is not truly innocent weighs on him heavily and is expressed through further violence. Munn's guilt can be related to a passage just before his night ride to the black neighbourhood. Smoking outside the courthouse

He leaned against a tree on one side of the courthouse yard, lighting his pipe and staring down at the faded grass of the late season. The pleasure of the first flavor of the tobacco

²⁸¹ Kidada E. Williams, 'The Wounds That Cried Out: Reckoning with African Americans' Testimonies of Trauma and Suffering from Night Riding', in *The World the Civil War Made*, ed. by Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p. 162.

²⁸² Warren, *Night Rider*, p. 87.

²⁸³ Warren, *Night Rider*, p. 87.

after the abstinence of the afternoon filled him, and then was forgotten.²⁸⁴

Here, the pleasure of tobacco fades quickly and is swiftly forgotten. Tobacco as a commodity brings some relief for Munn but, much like his experience with the association, the hit is fleeting. He craves approval as smokers crave nicotine, with each action performed only increasing his addiction. However, these actions prove fatal, consuming everything he was before the association. Munn is unable to escape the consequences of his actions. The pleasure has long since gone, but the guilt remains.

As his nihilistic protagonist, Munn represents the jaded beating heart of Warren's novel. It is significant that, by the novel's close, Munn has lost. He has lost his wife, home, and any hope of a future. Ostracised from his community, he falls in a hail of gunfire. Muller writes that

Above all, he grows a stranger to himself, cut off from his past, and with the final collapse of the association cut off from a future. At the end he is in the sere and yellow, an outlaw hunted by society and haunted by ghosts. It is a powerful drama. It is also a parable, if one likes, for an age of violence in which appeasement does not seem to work, either.²⁸⁵

Though Munn is not irredeemable, he is trapped by the life he went to all lengths to defend. The tobacco industry is captured by the Tobacco Trust which prevents any hope of Southern tobacco planters from eking out a living; economic hardship leading to heinous acts of communal harm. The Black Patch Tobacco War appears as a civil war in miniature with tobacco planters fighting

²⁸⁴ Herbert J. Muller, 'Violence upon the Roads', *The Kenyon Review*, 1.3 (1939), p. 64.

²⁸⁵ Muller, 'Violence upon the Roads', p. 324.

for the right to exist within a modern world that they supply with commodities. Munn, trapped between appeasement and violence, is swept from a position of moderation into extremism.

Returning to the Sherman Act and James Buchanan Duke's American Tobacco Company leads us to the central subject of *Night Rider*. The text allows us to see the plight of the members of Southern communities, and their struggle against predatory economic forces. The tobacco production of Kentucky and Tennessee is no less modern than its consumption in the urban capitals. Although Percy Munn and the association are attempting to preserve an Agrarian way of life in the South, they are nonetheless participating in modernity. As an international commodity, the farmers' very existence is predicated upon modern supply chains. In providing the structure for withdrawing labour—coercive or otherwise—the association is taking part in a conversation within modernity on the relationship between capital and labour. Bedford writes that 'Warren drives the point home by focusing upon the individual, not the collectivity, at the end: political commitment alone is an inadequate surrogate for a holistic sense of one's interpenetration with the world'.²⁸⁶ The politics of tobacco ultimately precipitate a narrow ideological vision of the world which Warren seeks to expose. As both 'Prime Leaf' and *Night Rider* show, exploitation to meet the demands of the consumer for an addictive commodity leads to violence. Warren's work reveals that tobacco production fosters dependency as much as its mass consumption.

²⁸⁶ Clark, *The American Vision of Robert Penn Warren*, p. 80.

3 Cigarettes, Cigars and Circe: Commodity Modernism in Trieste and Dublin

Having analysed the production and consumption habits found in the works of Ortiz and Warren, I now turn to the opposite side of the Atlantic. Far from the original context of its cultivation, tobacco is embraced in both Italy and Ireland. The crop, transculturated away from the New World into the Old, is represented in diverse ways in the work of Italo Svevo and James Joyce. With a focus on tobacco consumption in urban environments, both authors complicate the representation of the commodity through its associations with empire and nationhood.

In the twentieth century, modernity ushered in a new era of consumer choice, with consumable products becoming ever more prominent in everyday life. Consumerism swept across the globe throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, through the development of mechanical manufacturing processes, made addictive commodities far more accessible to the masses. The ability to mass-produce addictive commodities would prove to be a defining feature of modernity; citizens in modern societies were transformed from customers into consumers at a moment when nation states were emerging from the old order of empire. It was a transformation that would impact every member of modern society, crossing oceans and borders. On the other side of the commodity coin, tobacco was being grown in more places, including fields in Italy and Ireland. Here, I will seek to examine Italo Svevo's *Confessions of Zeno* (1924, trans. 1948) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) in relation to tobacco production and consumption in their

representations of Trieste and Dublin, respectively.²⁸⁷ As I wrote in Chapter One, I seek to explore how production and consumption relate to nationhood, as well as to problematise the idea that national modernist literatures can be easily separated into areas of production and consumption.

Cigarettes, nationhood and psychoanalysis in *Confessions of Zeno*

Ettore Schmitz—pen name ‘Italo Svevo’, referred to as such from this point onwards—stands as an important writer in Italian literary modernism. A friend of Joyce, the two authors offered support and inspiration to each other’s literary endeavours, and both extensively explored commodities in the context of modernity. Svevo’s *Confessions of Zeno*—one of the most prominent texts on European smoking in the twentieth century—shows us a modernism within Europe, but outside of the New York—London—Paris trifecta. Ipsen notes how, in his view, tobacco has been merged with Italian society more than any other in Europe, writing that ‘No part of the world is untouched by smoking, but each part has interacted with tobacco in its own way.’²⁸⁸ Ipsen’s *Fumo* is predominantly a history of the cigarette in Italy, though he does include *Confessions of Zeno* as one of his objects of analysis. This provides important historical context to Svevo’s novel. Ipsen contends that ‘for a century or so cigarette smoking carried with it a series of positive connotations: glamour, maturity, self-assuredness, sophistication, independence, rebellion, toughness’ and as well as providing ‘an accoutrement of modernity and wealth’.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ I have opted to use Beryl de Zoete’s translation *Confessions of Zeno* (1948) over William Weaver’s *Zeno’s Conscience* (2002) due to its closer alignment with Svevo’s style, humour, and introspective voice.

²⁸⁸ Carl Ipsen, *Fumo: Italy’s Love Affair with the Cigarette* (Stanford University Press, 2016), p.

1.

²⁸⁹ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 1.

Tobacco is smoked differently depending upon where it is smoked and in what contexts, particularly in relation to individual or national identity. Though the history of tobacco production the act of smoking is implicitly tied to the action of imperialism and capitalist supply chains. As a product that spurred transatlantic trade, tobacco—and other commodities grown in the New World—bound together some of the largest empires ever seen. This preceded the move towards industrialisation, a feature of modernity that would transform tobacco into an addictive commodity.

Empires and nation states adopted valuable and addictive products from the New World and developed brand new commodities sold across the globe, giving rise to powerful industries both within and outside of their borders. In the modern era, tobacco continues to link nation states together, beyond the scope of what might traditionally be defined as an empire.²⁹⁰ Ipsen identifies nation states as ‘discrete units’, each with their own character and personal relationship with tobacco.²⁹¹ This is particularly true for Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, following from the formal creation of Italy as a single national entity between 1861-1871.²⁹² It is unlikely to be a coincidence that ‘[smoking] probably became a significant habit in Italy only in the late nineteenth century’ which coincides with Italian unification and the establishment of a strong national identity.²⁹³ Nations and the cigarette, the most easily consumable form of tobacco, came to prominence over concurrent time-periods. Ipsen writes of

²⁹⁰ In my chapter on Ortiz’s *Cuban Counterpoint*, I discuss U.S. neoimperialism and what that meant for the Cuban sense of identity.

²⁹¹ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 1.

²⁹² More on the Italian Risorgimento movement can be found in Martin Collier’s *Italian Unification, 1820–71*. Heinemann, 2003.

²⁹³ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 3.

the profound impact that the cigarette has had upon Italian society from its inception: ‘In Italy, perhaps more than in many other places, smoking has interacted with the national culture—social, economic, political, and artistic—in profound and telling ways’.²⁹⁴ Italy was forging its identity at the very moment that tobacco was becoming commercialised in the form of the cigarette. Its deep history with Italy supports Ipsen’s further contention that ‘The cigarette [...] provides a lens on Italian society over time that has few peers among other consumables’.²⁹⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that *Confessions of Zeno*—perhaps the most significant work of Italian literary modernism—should feature addiction to cigarettes so prominently. It is through the lens of nicotine addiction that Zeno views his life, and the framing device for the novel.

Critical accounts of Svevo’s novel have tended to underline its relationship to psychoanalysis. Esman provides us with one of the most significant critical anglophonic voices on Svevo’s work, asking ‘Who was Italo Svevo? What were his connections with the Italian and European literary worlds of the time? And what was his place in the history of psychoanalysis?’.²⁹⁶ This approach provides a holistic view of Svevo’s life as an author, as well as providing insight into the character of Zeno. As a semi-autobiographical novel, Svevo uses significant aspects of his own personal experience and character in his work. Esman notes that Svevo’s rise to celebrated Italian modernist is, in part, due to his connection to James Joyce, whom he met in 1907 whilst Joyce was tutoring in Trieste.²⁹⁷ The two men would go on to become firm friends, with Joyce encouraging Svevo to publish more of his material, despite the unenthusiastic public reception of

²⁹⁴ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 1.

²⁹⁵ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 1.

²⁹⁶ Esman, ‘Italo Svevo and the First Psychoanalytic Novel’, p. 1225.

²⁹⁷ Esman, ‘Italo Svevo and the First Psychoanalytic Novel’, p. 1226.

his earlier work. Esman writes that ‘Joyce pumped Schmitz, who despite his adult atheism had had a traditional Jewish education, for information about Judaism that he used in developing the character of Leopold Bloom, the un-jewish Jewish protagonist of *Ulysses* who appears to have been at least in part modelled on Schmitz’.²⁹⁸ This strong link between the two writers cements Svevo’s position in the pantheon of European modernists, and his fingerprints can therefore be found on two modernist protagonists, Zeno Cosini and Leopold Bloom. Corroborating this, Ellmann writes that ‘This prototype [for Bloom] was almost certainly Ettore Schmitz, whose grandfather came from Hungary, and who wore the moustache that Joyce gave to Bloom, and like Bloom had a wife and daughter’.²⁹⁹ Additionally, ‘The difference in age between Schmitz and Joyce was [...] roughly the same as that between Bloom and Stephen’ and Svevo ‘had married a Gentile, he had changed his name (though only for literary purposes), he knew something of Jewish customs, and he shared Bloom’s amiably ironic view of life’.³⁰⁰ This provides a solid basis for comparing the work of Svevo and Joyce, the latter including major characteristic elements inspired by the former in *Ulysses*. However, it is worth noting that, despite sharing the same blueprint (Svevo himself) Bloom and Zeno are presented as very different characters.

Svevo’s semi-autobiographical protagonist, Zeno, is an old man looking back on his life as part of a psychoanalytic therapy to ‘cure’ him of his many neuroses. His life mirrors that of the author, providing an additional layer of irony to a novel that satirises modernity in Italy. A journalistic therapy, the creation of the novel, is posited as a cure for his fraught mental state and

²⁹⁸ Esman, ‘Italo Svevo and the First Psychoanalytic Novel’, p. 1226.

²⁹⁹ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, New and Revised Edition (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 374.

³⁰⁰ Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 374.

physical addiction to tobacco. Zeno, through his diary writing therapy, details the many failed therapies that he has tried throughout his life. This creates an interplay between a character constantly seeking new treatments for his perceived chronic illness, and a society that fails to wean him off his nicotine addiction. According to Esman, '[Svevo] was introduced to Freud's writings as early as 1908' and 'by 1918 he was venturing to translate Freud's essay "On Dreams" (1901) into Italian, with the hope of introducing Freud's writings to the Italian Public'.³⁰¹ Svevo's use of psychoanalytical theory in *Confessions of Zeno* therefore shows the conflict between the conscious and unconscious mind in relation to addiction. Ellmann records Joyce's animosity (or ambivalence) towards psychoanalysis, writing that Joyce shocked Svevo 'by dismissing Schmitz's interest in psychoanalysis with the comment, "Well, if we need it, let us keep to confession"'.³⁰² This rather flippant dismissal suggests that, although there have been many psychoanalytical readings of Joyce's texts, Joyce was personally uninfluenced directly by Freud's work. This opens an interesting opposition between Svevo and Joyce, the former's interest in the unconscious mind versus the latter's interest in the conscious. Joyce famously quipped 'Why all this fuss and bother about the mystery of the unconscious? [...] What about the mystery of the conscious?', again showing his somewhat surprising antipathy towards the tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis.³⁰³ More interested in the expression of conscious thoughts and desires, this demonstrates the clear difference in approach between the two authors. In contrast, Svevo was a pioneer in the introspective gaze that predominates modernist works, bringing psychoanalytical therapy into

³⁰¹ Esman, 'Italo Svevo and the First Psychoanalytic Novel', p. 1228.

³⁰² Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 472.

³⁰³ Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 436.

contact not only with the treatment of illness, but also the treatment of addiction. The basis for the novel is Zeno's attempted exploration of his unconscious desires in an attempt to cure his supposed illness. The joke is, after all, that there is very little actually wrong with Zeno. The cure for his addiction is hard for him to find, as it is created through his own critical self-reflection.

Despite Joyce's derision, psychoanalysis provides a basis for understanding the inner workings of the mind. It is through fiction that Svevo is able to combine Freud's psychoanalysis with the commercial modernity that had developed throughout his life. Svevo's treatment of tobacco in *Confessions of Zeno* examines its addictive properties and resultant impacts on human behaviour in the context of modern Italy. As noted by Esman, 'In psychoanalysis Svevo found a rationale, a "scientific" way of accounting for the internal conflicts with which he constantly struggled' transforming the inner life of the protagonist into the focus of the novel.³⁰⁴ Through this psychological approach we are shown the place held by tobacco in modern society in relation to the health of the individual, particularly how it is perceived as a necessity as well as a dangerous addiction. This forms the locus for Zeno's neurotic anxieties and paints addiction as a defining issue for the modern world. The pathologizing of nicotine addiction in a modern setting serves as an important aspect to Zeno's use of cigarettes. Although the true adverse health effects of tobacco use were not yet known—particularly regarding cancer and heart disease—there is nonetheless an explicit association between smoking and health, both physical and mental, the individual and the community. Zeno's addiction indicates sickness in both mind and body, but not for his stated claims. His hypochondriac paranoia is in itself an illness that consumes his life. Much as the need

³⁰⁴ Esman, 'Italo Svevo and the First Psychoanalytic Novel', p. 1232.

to consume tobacco occupies all available thought of the smoker until the proverbial itch is scratched, so too does health totally occupy Zeno's thoughts on his own purpose, goals, and relationships in his life. Treitel contends that Zeno is, in fact, suffering from a philosophical sickness related to his distinct genius: 'Zeno's predicament—mainly his state of alienation as a result of his philosophical sickness—reflects Schopenhauer's ideas on genius, madness, and the alienation of genius'.³⁰⁵ In other words, Zeno's sickness is related to his critical mind, unable to therefore cope with a mundane reality. Svevo shows, through Zeno, that addiction is an illness of both the mind and the body. By extension, the modern consumer is trapped by commodities within an internal prison. Zeno's narrative suggests that modern commodities lead to a mind consumed by addiction to them.

Zeno's reflections on life are distinctly Freudian, deeply rooted in his childhood experiences and relationship with his mother and father. For Zeno, the urge to smoke is a compulsion that he feels the need to satisfy from a young age. The addiction is directly related to Zeno's feelings of intense jealousy and his need to steal; claiming that his childhood friend Giuseppe 'gave my brother more [cigarettes] than me, and that I was therefore obliged to try and get hold of some for myself. And that was how I came to steal'.³⁰⁶ Here, tobacco is posited by Zeno as a corrupting influence, responsible for his descent into minor criminality. By stealing his father's cigar ends, Zeno exhibits his immaturity and susceptibility to addiction, smoking not for enjoyment but for competition and the satisfaction of compulsion. Part of Svevo's exploration of

³⁰⁵ Renata Minerbi Treitel, 'Schopenhauer's Philosophy in Italo Svevo's "La Coscienza Di Zeno"', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 18.1 (1972), p. 60.

³⁰⁶ Italo Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, Trans. by Beryl de Zoete (London, Putnam & Co. Ltd., 1948), p. 11.

addiction is that Zeno is a willing prisoner to his cigarettes. In another attempt to give up the habit, this time though a bet with Olivi, Zeno reflects on the restrictions on his freedom caused by tobacco smoking; ‘That bet proved excessively damaging to me. I was no longer alternately master and slave, but only a slave, and to Olivi, whom I hated’.³⁰⁷ Zeno’s condition is linked early in the novel to his childhood and the unconscious memories that stem from early life. Zeno reflects upon this, addressing both his infant self and his sister-in-law’s baby:

Meanwhile, poor innocent, you continue to explore your tiny body in search of pleasure; and the exquisite discoveries you make will bring you in the end disease and suffering, to which those who least wish it will contribute What can one do? It is impossible to watch over your cradle. Mysterious forces are at work within you, child, strange elements combine. Each passing moment contributes its re-agent.³⁰⁸

Here, the search for pleasure is related directly to ill-health. There is a suggestion that the unconscious drive for pleasurable sensations overpowers the conscious mind meaning that, despite knowledge of its negative health impacts, the drive to smoke is far greater than the conscious desire to quit. This is all the more powerful when it is considered that the habits gained by Zeno in his childhood followed him throughout his life. Ipsen writes that ‘[Zeno] starts smoking not because he likes it—no new smoker ever does—but because the fact of its being forbidden sparks his desire’, which highlights not only an existing taboo surrounding smoking, but also how available

³⁰⁷ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 326.

³⁰⁸ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 135.

cigarettes had already become.³⁰⁹ If cigarettes were concurrent with the burgeoning Italian modernity, Zeno's discovery of them in near-infancy shows a corrupting influence in modern life. Zeno's addiction therefore mirrors the fate of his fellow citizens as they became more educated, modernised, and addicted to cigarettes.

Svevo's work shows the importance of translation, internationalism, and the vestiges of empire to the modernist movement. Just as Zeno begins to explore the recesses of his mind, he makes an internal discovery: 'I had quite forgotten that the first cigarettes I ever smoked are no longer on the market. They were made first in 1870 in Austria and were sold in little cardboard boxes stamped with the double-headed eagle'.³¹⁰ Regarding the cigarettes bearing the Habsburg family crest, Clapp notes that

Such cigarettes will never again be on the market because the political entity for which the two-headed eagle stands has ceased to exist; the Habsburg political order is the one that is permanently disrupted on the last pages of the book. Thus the book gestures, at the beginning, at what is made explicit in the conclusion: the way of life it depicts is doomed.³¹¹

This important context shows that Zeno associates the birth of his smoking habit with the wider context of empire. If the nation state is concurrent with modernity, then the text is chronicling Italy's development through Zeno's life and his growing prosperity. Just as the Habsburgs faced a

³⁰⁹ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 19.

³¹⁰ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 143.

³¹¹ Jeffrey Clapp, 'Nicotine Cosmopolitanism: From Italo Svevo's Trieste to Art Spiegelman's New York', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 13.2 (2015), pp. 322-323.

doom wrought by the First World War, so too did an old way of life. *Confessions of Zeno* is set at a time of transition for Trieste, moving away from the established Habsburg order and towards an Italy that had become an order of nation states. According to Ipsen, following the unification of Italy in 1861 under King Victor Emanuel II, ‘One of the first acts of the new kingdom was to establish a tobacco monopoly, and tobacco would provide an important source of income to the often cash-strapped Italian state’.³¹² The nationalisation of tobacco cultivation, trade, and sale, shows the prized position the commodity took in Italy. In reference to *Confessions of Zeno*, Ipsen writes that

In the thirty years leading up to World War I, and more or less the chronological setting of *La coscienza di Zeno*, the tobacco situation in Italy showed signs of both change and stability. Production of tobacco products by the Monopolio had increased by about 50 percent (to a bit under 30 million kilograms), but over 70 percent of that tobacco continued to be imported, mostly from the United States.³¹³

Tobacco consumption rose along with the development of the Italian nation. Just as Ortiz showed the inseparable relationship between the Cuban nation and tobacco, Svevo reveals Italy’s own distinct relationship with the plant. In *Confessions of Zeno*, Zeno’s obsession with tobacco reflects a corresponding national obsession with smoking. The cigarette, more than any other form of tobacco, exemplifies Italy’s status as a modern nation state. The means to produce tobacco, co-opted by the state, links Italian consumption habits to their national identity. Further, the Italian

³¹² Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 15.

³¹³ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 20.

cigarette proves to be a good example of transculturation, successfully voyaging across the Atlantic to symbolise not Cuban cultural identity, but Italian.

Conflict and the commercialisation of tobacco

Cigarette consumption exploded in the early twentieth century, the period in which Zeno lives. Goodman writes of Britain that ‘The consumption of the cigarette increased sixtyfold in the space of thirty years between 1900 and 1930’ and that, in Italy, ‘Around 1930 the majority of Italians were cigarette smokers, and the figure continued to rise thereafter: by 1950, for example, almost 80 percent of the [Italian] state monopoly’s sales was accounted for by cigarettes’ and cigarettes in the U.S. ‘finally reaching a 50 percent market share in 1941’.³¹⁴ Additionally, Ipsen notes that ‘The cigarette, a briefer smoke, better accompanied movement and the accelerating pace of modern urban life. As a cultural symbol, it is thus more revealing of contemporary thinking’.³¹⁵ Although not the only cause, the First World War gave impetus to the cigarette, being easier to transport to and consume in the trenches; modern warfare precipitated a change in consumption habits. Zeno’s final diary entry, dated to March 1916, brings the reader into the midst of a war that would come to define modernity. It was the First World War that cemented cigarettes as the primary mode of tobacco consumption, superseding pipes, cigars and snuff. It is therefore no coincidence that Zeno finally finds a measure of peace and acceptance in the midst of a brutal modern war. Zeno’s cigarette addiction would, through the impetus of warfare, become shared by many millions of others.

³¹⁴ Goodman, *Tobacco in History*, pp. 92-93.

³¹⁵ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 21.

In pondering the advent of the First World War, Zeno's anxieties come to fruition. His perspective at this point in the novel is one where the malaise caused by modernity is broken by war, forming a new paradigm in Europe and a possible route to his own personal health. Svevo writes 'Up to the end of August in last year I watched the convulsions of the world in a state of horrified inaction. Then I suddenly began to buy'.³¹⁶ Although here Zeno is involving himself in the purchase of war commodities, there remain clear parallels between this and his lifetime spent purchasing cigarettes. Zeno is liberated and becomes 'ready to become a buyer of any goods that offered themselves'.³¹⁷ In this way modernity fully asserts itself with a modernised form of warfare. The sickness that Zeno has observed throughout his life is vindicated; with a confirmation of society's problems, his anxieties surrounding his own health are cured. Assessing the state of the world, Zeno observes that 'Our life today is poisoned to the root. Man has ousted the beasts and trees, has poisoned the air and filled up the open spaces. Worse things may happen' and asks the question, 'Who will be able then to cure us of the lack of air and space? The mere thought of it suffocates me'.³¹⁸ Svevo's use of the word 'suffocation' further links Zeno's individuality to the wider problems at work in modern Italy. The air, now choked with the gases and fumes of the first modern war, is as toxic as the smoke from Zeno's many 'last cigarettes'. Zeno's revelation is that modernity is the cause of his sickness, and with this awareness that he can almost be free of it.

Just as the Bonsack machine creates the cigarettes that Zeno is compelled to consume, so too do machines create the means for modern total war. Svevo writes that

³¹⁶ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6580.

³¹⁷ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6580.

³¹⁸ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6958.

a machine creates disease because it denies what has been the law of creation throughout the ages. The law of the strongest disappeared, and we have abandoned natural selection. We need something more than psychoanalysis to help us. Under the law of the greatest number of machines, disease will prosper and the diseased will grow ever more numerous.³¹⁹

After reaching an advanced age, Zeno has developed a pessimistic perspective on modernity, one that appears justified amongst the horrors of war. The novel's conclusion is ultimately fatalistic, with modernity leading to an obvious terminal conclusion. Machines that were ostensibly intended to help humanity instead serve only to cause sickness and death. Again, Zeno's addiction runs parallel to the advancements of the modern world. Svevo writes that 'spectacled man invents implements outside his body, and if there was any health or nobility in the inventor there is none in the user'.³²⁰ Rather than creating true progress, in this context modernity creates dependence and prolonged sickness. The societal conditions that created the cigarette also create the means for human dissolution. Just as cigarettes are quickly consumed until there remains only detritus, so too is humanity consuming itself, poisoning the very air it breathes. This is as a result of both the practicalities and social conditions of modernity.

In addition to the pressures of global conflict, the cigarette's inexorable rise can be partly attributed to another modern innovation: marketing. As I note earlier, this mirrors a broader global trend driven largely by American Tobacco's expansion, facilitated by industrial mass

³¹⁹ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6616.

³²⁰ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6958.

production and aggressive marketing techniques. In *Packaged Pleasures*, Cross and Proctor examine how commodities became closely entwined with twentieth-century modernity. Alongside the nicotine of the tobacco leaf and a dramatically increasing supply, marketing was vital to the early adoption of the cigarette. Cross and Proctor write that ‘Marketing had begun prior even to the invention of rolling machines, notably with the introduction of colorful cigarette labels printed by the novel method of color lithography’.³²¹ They expand on this point, further noting that ‘mechanization increased the *supply* of cigarettes, while marketing helped dispose of that surplus. Marketers produced the “itch” that manufacturers could then step in to scratch.’³²² In this way a feedback loop was created in which supply spurred more demand, which in turn fuelled further supply. Addicts, reliant on the supply of a commodity, would become the perfect consumers.

Addiction was created by a super-abundance, which in turn led to the creation of commodity markets. Additionally, thanks to the highly addictive nature of their product, tobacco companies were gifted with an ever-expanding pool of reliable consumers. With scarcity tobacco was treated with reverence, but with its mass-production tobacco could be accessed with little trouble, further fuelling high rates of consumption. Cross and Proctor go on to observe that ‘Few regular cigarette smokers ever take a day off’, noting that the compulsive desire to smoke is only possible in the context of modernity.³²³ They continue, writing that ‘we can hardly imagine such an intense, routinized, and compulsive use prior to the invention of the modern cigarette’.³²⁴ Modernity makes routine and addictive habits possible by the ability to cheaply produce large

³²¹ Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, p. 70.

³²² Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, p. 70.

³²³ Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, p. 62.

³²⁴ Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, p. 62.

amounts of high-quality product at a far lower price than could ever have been conceived without mechanisation. Furthermore, Indigenous American use ‘seems to have had more of a ritualistic than a routine or compulsive character’, with supply proving to be an extremely limiting factor.³²⁵ Through mechanised processes and the entrenchment of international supply chains tobacco became increasingly popular, despite its deleterious effects on human health. It is this trend that Svevo sought to address in his novel with Zeno fighting against widespread acceptance of smoking as a habit.

Zeno’s identity and the psychology of ‘The Last Cigarette’

The human psyche and its relationship to consumption lies at the forefront of *Confessions of Zeno*. The first chapter of the novel, titled ‘The Last Cigarette’, is centred on Zeno’s Sisyphean efforts to give up his smoking habit, often arbitrarily on important dates or significant moments of his life. Indicative of his compulsive character and his fraught mental state, Svevo presents tobacco as a central motif in Zeno’s reflections, providing a crutch to his fraught psychological state. The process of writing a psychological journal brings long-forgotten memories to the fore of Zeno’s mind. Svevo writes ‘All this was lying dormant in my mind and so close at hand. It had never come to life before, because it is only now that I realize its possible significance. So now I traced my bad habits back to the very beginning and (who knows?) I may be cured already. I will light one last cigarette, just to try, and probably I shall throw it away in disgust’.³²⁶ The humour here stems from the satirical lie that Zeno is telling himself: this will not be the last cigarette. It is merely

³²⁵ Cross and Proctor, *Packaged Pleasures*, p. 62.

³²⁶ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 152.

a way to illogically justify the addiction. With a knowledge of the negative health impacts wrought by tobacco smoke, the path to health appears to be clear. Only by giving up his habit does Zeno believe he can finally achieve a state of health. However, it seems that Zeno's belief in the curative nature of abstinence is misplaced. Cigarettes, though harmful, are merely an expression of Zeno's tortured condition, rather than the cause of a specific illness within him. Although Zeno's aim is to cure his addiction to cigarettes, the self-analysis of his mind instead acts as a mode of reflection for the underlying personal and cultural causes of his addiction.

Zeno's life is marked by a succession of 'last cigarettes', each one accompanied by an important or aesthetically pleasing date. The very nature of the 'last cigarette' is indicative of the luxuries of modernity that have come to exemplify the modern human. There is an implicit irony that there never need be a last cigarette. Thanks to the mass production of addictive commodities the committed smoker can smoke until what we may call their 'terminal' cigarette, imposed by their demise. It is impossible for Zeno to quit smoking: he both loves and loathes it. The consumption of tobacco is shown in sharp relief with the ineffective modern treatments shown in the novel. Electrotherapy, imprisonment, psychoanalysis, all fail to transform the addict into a non-consumer. Zeno's addiction becomes a part of his identity, a way to relate to his own mind and body. Zeno's identity is as ephemeral as the smoke that he craves. However, Zeno's addiction extends beyond an example of modern vice and medical attempts to cure it. Svevo uses tobacco as a way of assessing the human psyche with Svevo connecting the act of smoking with Zeno's own personal history. The cigarettes smoked by Zeno provide a bridge to his past, enabling reflection on his addiction and the ill health it causes. Svevo shows this through Zeno's psychoanalytic assessment of himself in conjunction with his smoking: 'I think I can write about smoking here at my table without sitting down to dream in that arm-chair. I don't know how to begin. I must invoke

the aid of all those many cigarettes I have smoked, identical with the one I have in my hand now'.³²⁷ Every cigarette is identical to every other cigarette, temporally linking the moments they are associated with and forming the structure of the novel. They are also omnipresent, as much a part of Zeno's character as his neuroses. As John Freccero writes, 'one cigarette is exactly like another. Together all those cigarettes go to make up his life, measured out in discontinuous parcels which disappear as they are lived, leaving behind an ash which mingles with all the ashes of history'.³²⁸ The action of smoking over time—of being a smoker—is shown by Svevo to capture the ethos of a Commodity Modernism, a conception of the modern world that is in part driven by the consumption of addictive consumables. Momentary, nebulous, and provoking thought, the act of smoking cigarettes forms the basis for the modernist novel's fragmentary narrative, intertwining with the act of introspection.

Tobacco, addiction, and modernity in Svevo's Italy

Modern Italy and tobacco are intertwined, with Ipsen writing that 'Cigarettes signalled Italy's modernity at the start of the twentieth century', in part due to its presence as a nation state in a system of international trade.³²⁹ Regarding modernity and tobacco, Klein writes that 'The introduction of tobacco into Europe in the sixteenth century corresponded with the arrival of the Age of Anxiety, the beginning of modern consciousness that accompanied the invention and universalization of printed books, the discovery of the New World, the development of rational,

³²⁷ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, p. 11.

³²⁸ John Freccero, 'Zeno's Last Cigarette', *MLN*, 77.1 (1962) p. 13.

³²⁹ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 12.

scientific methods, and the concurrent loss of medieval theological assurances'.³³⁰ These inventions and discoveries helped to create the conditions for what we now consider to be 'modern'. It is therefore fitting that Svevo's Zeno should be obsessed, even tortured, by addiction to tobacco. Zeno's neuroses are expressed through his last cigarettes, all of which fail to be the last. This adds credence to the idea posited by Farrell Brodie and Redfield that 'addiction, like culture, belongs as a concept to the social and technical regimes of the modern era'.³³¹ It is only through the developments that define modernity that the addict can exist, stemming from a culture of addiction that demands stimulation. Tobacco addiction, like many others, combines a compulsion of the mind with illness in the body. However, Klein's dubbing of modernity as an 'Age of Anxiety' suggests a social malaise accompanying the condition of the individual. Addictions seen through this lens therefore appear to be logical responses to stressful environments wrought by the speed of modern life.

On the relationship between culture and addiction, Farrell Brodie and Redfield write 'the humanist myth of culture contains within it something like what Freud called the "death drive"—a dependence on repetitive process, a need for a certain alterity or intoxication' which can effectively be labelled as the 'cultural notion of addiction'.³³² Addiction is a product of modernity, implicitly tied to societies with a consumer culture. Pre-modern societies did not have the same conception of addiction that became prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though the active components of these addictive products have changed little—nicotine in tobacco and

³³⁰ Klein, Richard, *Cigarettes Are Sublime* (Picador, 1995), p. 27.

³³¹ Farrell Brodie and Redfield, *High Anxieties*, p. 4.

³³² Farrell Brodie and Redfield, *High Anxieties*, p. 5.

morphine in opium, for example—scarcity prevented the kind of society-wide addiction that became endemic with the advent of modernity. Addiction is characterised by Farrell Brodie and Redfield as ‘culture’s own proper disease’³³³ and they expand upon this to say that ‘Over the past century, both the ruin and the superabundance of culture have been symbolized by the addict, who has proved capable of evoking by turns an urban, racialized underclass, the glitter of jet-set consumption, or the hothouse bloom of Wildean aestheticism’.³³⁴ In this way addiction and culture are inseparably linked in *Confessions of Zeno*. Zeno’s dependence is created by the abundance and use of tobacco from an early age. This is linked in the first section of the novel to Zeno’s parents, particularly his father. Tobacco culture is passed on unintentionally from father to son, evolving as it does so. Zeno’s first experience with cigarettes is with his father’s unattended, but not wholly discarded, cigar butts. Zeno tells us that ‘My father used to leave half-smoked Virginia cigars lying about on the edge of a table or a chest of drawers’ which he takes and smokes from an early age.³³⁵ This shows a clear line of inherited addiction from father to son, an act that is supported by the culture in which they live. Zeno even states that ‘I knew how sick they would make me’ but continues to smoke nonetheless.³³⁶ This effectively means that Zeno does not remember a time from before he was a smoker. Just as commodities become an accepted and seemingly permanent aspect of modernity, so too does the young Zeno accept tobacco from an early age. Zeno’s addiction is impossible for him to break in part because it has been a part of his identity for as long as he can remember.

³³³ Farrell Brodie and Redfield, *High Anxieties*, p. 4.

³³⁴ Farrell Brodie and Redfield, *High Anxieties*, p. 4.

³³⁵ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 156.

³³⁶ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 156.

Just as Jay Gatsby reflects the excesses of modernity in the U.S., Zeno reflects the beguiling pervasiveness of tobacco in modern Italy. The excess of 1920s America is not mirrored in Italy of the same era, but Svevo is nonetheless capturing a moment of modern innovation that formed an integral part of modernist literatures. Tobacco ‘whether grown in the New World or the Old, played an important role not only in the growth of European trade, but also in the establishment of a consumer culture’.³³⁷ It is a consumer culture that cuts through society to influence even its very youngest members. Zeno acts as a proxy to show the insight cigarettes can provide into the wider mental and material state of wider society, their use revealing a state of neurosis and repetition of modernity.

Smoking is directly related to the inner world, whether spiritual or psychological. Svevo makes this connection early in *Confessions of Zeno*, writing in the first line of ‘The Last Cigarette’ “[w]hen I spoke to the doctor about my weakness for smoking, he told me to begin my analysis by tracing the growth of that habit from the beginning. “Write away!” he said, “and you will see how soon you begin to get a clear picture of yourself”’.³³⁸ Zeno’s illness is directly related to tobacco, yet it is impossible for him to conceive of a life without smoking. John Freccero draws attention to Zeno’s addiction and its symbolism relating to literature; writing that ‘Zeno attempts to construct for himself a place to stand in his effort to find the cause of his disease, chain-smoking, and his attempt results in the creation of a lie—literature’.³³⁹ Expanding upon this, Zeno uses literature and smoking in tandem to explore his own psyche. His cigarettes serve as an aide

³³⁷ Ipsen, *Fumo*, p. 3.

³³⁸ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 148.

³³⁹ Freccero, ‘Zeno’s Last Cigarette’, *MLN*, 77.1 (1962) p. 13.

memoir, whilst his writing is at once self-interrogative and outwardly expressive. Svevo's representation of modernity is inextricably intertwined with the consumption of tobacco as a commodity. Tobacco smoking, and more specifically his addiction to it, is the lens through which Zeno views his own life and his relationship with others. Literature is supposedly a cure for his illness, but arguably becomes just as addictive and counterproductive as his last cigarettes.

Clapp, writing chiefly on cosmopolitanism in the works of Svevo and Spiegelman, links Zeno's smoking habit to his sense of self and who he is likely to become in the future. Whilst providing continuity, Zeno's smoking habit also gives him a locus for his future self. If he is—in the present—a smoker, then there is the potential in the future for him to quit, and become what he views as a healthier version of himself. Clapp writes that 'For Zeno, smoking a (last) cigarette forms a narrative in which one's relationship to oneself is played out as a relationship with one's future selves—if Zeno is a "chain smoker," so is the story of Zeno's life a chain'.³⁴⁰ To further this point, smoking in modernity can show the repetitive, cyclical nature of modern life. Commodities are consumed constantly by consumer-citizens who are reliant upon them. The commodity becomes a factor in the identity of the consumer: those that maintain the habit do not merely smoke but become smokers. As Marzoni writes, 'Smoking is not an issue of individual liberty [...] so much as a human condition, a signifier for what we have accomplished in agriculture, economics, government, science, labor, organization, thought, and expression across the modern era and the toll it has taken on our collective well-being'.³⁴¹ To take this further, Zeno is unable to quit

³⁴⁰ Jeffrey Clapp, 'Nicotine Cosmopolitanism: From Italo Svevo's Trieste to Art Spiegelman's New York', p. 324.

³⁴¹ Andrew Marzoni, 'Commodity of Doom: Elegies for the Cigarette', *The Baffler*, 53, 2020, p. 128.

smoking not because of a psychological factor within himself, but because of external permissiveness. At least in the time in which the novel is set there are few external stigmas that affect Zeno's habit; the desire to quit comes almost entirely from within his own mind. Clapp writes that 'neither word nor gesture in *Zeno's Conscience* intimates that anyone around Zeno wants him to quit smoking. Zeno's grateful bride even goes so far as to create comfortable, well-equipped smoking areas in their household' showing a complete lack of resistance to Zeno's tobacco consumption.³⁴² The social state of modernity does not effectively prevent Zeno from smoking for most of the novel as the modern self is inherently a consumer. As a text displaying Commodity Modernism, *Confessions of Zeno* therefore reflects this, placing commodities not only in the physical realm but also occupying a large portion of Zeno's self-perception. The move from citizen to consumer occurred over modernity, making commodity consumption a facet of everyday life.

A state approaching enlightenment is conferred on Zeno by the novel's closing chapter as his psychological treatment draws to a close, brought about by Dr S's psychological treatment. Zeno states that 'The doctor polished me off by saying that my retina had become ultrasensitive from so much nicotine' having been convinced he had discovered 'the physiological theory of colour' and mentioning '[his] predecessors, Goethe and Schopenhauer'.³⁴³ Despite being clearly delusional, Zeno is comically convinced by his own wisdom. This leads him to be likewise convinced that his self-diagnosis is the correct one and ignoring the fact that his perception of

³⁴² Clapp, 'Nicotine Cosmopolitanism: From Italo Svevo's Trieste to Art Spiegelman's New York', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 13.2 (2015), p. 323.

³⁴³ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6209.

illness is far more problematic than any actual malady. It is also here that Zeno reflects on his relationship with his father. The doctor's assessment of Zeno's condition is that '[he] had adopted that vice merely in order to compete with my father, and had attributed a poisonous effect to tobacco because of my secret conviction that he would punish me for attempting to compete with him. I left the doctor's house that day smoking like a Turk'.³⁴⁴ This is, at least in part, corroborated by Zeno's previous writing. The cigarette appears to be a progression from his father's cigars, an evolution from one commodity to another. The cigarette reflects the faster pace of life wrought by modernity as well as standing for a rejection of not only the commodities of the nineteenth century, but its values too. Zeno's consumption habits reflect the society at large, creating a break with the past through newer modes of consumption. Furthermore, Zeno remembers the, seemingly correct, advice from his doctor that 'smoking did not hurt me at all, and if I only could persuade myself that it was harmless it would really become so'.³⁴⁵ His ill health is as much a disease of perception as a physical ailment, though his obsession does lead to physical effects such as 'a sleepless night' and 'chronic bronchitis' requiring the use of 'the spittoon'.³⁴⁶ This reflection is shortly followed by the realisation that he 'loved [his] disease' with the appeal stemming from 'a whole programme of life (not of death!) drawn up for the various stages of the disease'.³⁴⁷ Much like the modern world in which he lives, Zeno craves predictability and routine. In desiring this he reflects the more regimented and regularised elements of early twentieth-century society. Cigarettes serve as a means of regulating his life in a succession of 'last cigarettes' that provide a sense of meaning to

³⁴⁴ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6226.

³⁴⁵ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6226.

³⁴⁶ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6226.

³⁴⁷ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6295.

his life: if he is yet to give up smoking he retains a purpose. However, Zeno's final tobacco related insight is that 'with his help and by dint of studying my psyche, I only infected myself with new diseases'.³⁴⁸ This realisation stamps addiction as the disease of modernity, with modern investigative techniques raising awareness of illness as well as modern societies becoming increasingly predictable in the availability of commodities within them.

Tobacco production and consumption in Joyce's Ireland

In contrast to Svevo's focus on cigarettes, Joyce weaves a multitude of commodities throughout *Ulysses*. The novel is deep and expansive enough to contain a myriad of references and puzzles to commodities and commodity culture, reflecting the increasingly commercialised world of 1904 and 1922. Through an examination of tobacco consumption in six episodes of the novel—'Telemachus', 'Lotus Eaters', 'Aeolus', 'Cyclops', 'Circe', and 'Eumaeus'—I will explore how Joyce uses commodities to reveal the complexities of consumption and nationalism in relation to Irish cultural identity. Wicke notes that Joyce's work presents 'a material world awash in the detritus of consumer objects'.³⁴⁹ Just as Svevo highlights that addiction is the disease of modernity, Joyce reveals that 'the culture of consumption is the culture of modernity'.³⁵⁰ Wicke's analysis builds upon Leonard's examination of commodities in relation to Joyce, exploring the ways in which they interact with advertising and the marketplace. He writes that 'Joyce not only presents and examines twentieth-century commodity culture in his fiction, he also explores the pattern and

³⁴⁸ Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, loc. 6311.

³⁴⁹ Jennifer Wicke, 'Joyce and Consumer Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, ed. by Derek Attridge, Cambridge Companions to Literature, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 235.

³⁵⁰ Wicke, 'Joyce and Consumer Culture', p. 236.

process of consumption by which people interact with objects of the marketplace in a manner that betrays their fears, aspirations, and desires to other people'.³⁵¹ Here I intend to advance this analysis, exploring the ways in which tobacco is consumed in the fictional Dublin of *Ulysses*. Joyce's text is replete with commodities which provide insight into the characters that consume them, often providing vital insight that would otherwise be missed. Leonard goes further in his analysis of Joyce's representation of 'commodity culture', noting the 'synergistic relationship among the machines that produce; the goods that are produced; the advertisements that generate a particularly modern, historically specific desire to consume; and the consumers who reveal the hopes and anxieties of their time by responding to some appeals and ignoring others'.³⁵² Though consumption is as central to *Ulysses* as *Confessions of Zeno*, Joyce's treatment of tobacco differs significantly from Svevo's, representing two distinct modernist forms. Whilst the central theme of *Confessions of Zeno* rests upon the performance of psychoanalysis from the perspective of a single character over the course of his life—with the satirical use of tobacco as an unlikely route to enlightenment—*Ulysses* features a far more heterogeneous narrative with multiple focalisations on a single day. The approach taken by Joyce therefore creates a more diverse range of meanings related to commodity consumption.

The meanings associated with tobacco consumption in *Ulysses* vary significantly by chapter: 'Telemachus' and 'Lotus Eaters' highlight colonialism, class disparities, and social decay; 'Aeolus' portrays tobacco as a medium for cultural ritual and satirical critique of modern

³⁵¹ Garry Martin Leonard, *Advertising and Commodity Culture in Joyce*, The Florida James Joyce Series (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 60.

³⁵² Leonard, *Advertising and Commodity Culture in Joyce*, p. 9.

communication; ‘Cyclops’ utilises tobacco to ironically critique prejudice, nationalism, and violence; ‘Circe’ depicts tobacco as a psychoactive substance symbolic of capitalist excess and commodified identity; and finally, ‘Eumaeus’ positions tobacco within discussions of Irish economic self-sufficiency, globalisation, and imperial hypocrisy. Throughout *Ulysses*, Joyce employs tobacco consumption to illuminate diverse dimensions of modern Irish society and its relationship with empire and identity. I now turn to fully explore this relationship, and the function of tobacco as a symbol replete with meaning in Joyce’s work.

Colonialism in ‘Telemachus’ and ‘Lotus Eaters’

The first mention of tobacco in the novel occurs in the ‘Telemachus’ episode. On the morning of Bloomsday, shortly after waking up, Stephen smokes a cigarette proffered by Haines. Joyce writes Haines as curious, intelligent, yet ignorant, and unable to comprehend Stephen’s antipathy toward his patronising attitude and intense, unwanted interest. This supports Hengel’s observation that ‘Written between 1914 and 1921, *Ulysses*’s drafting parallels the rapid decolonization of England’s first and most “developed” colony. Joyce writes as Ireland fights off the yoke of English Imperialism’.³⁵³ Tobacco features in the conversation between Stephen and Haines, highlighting the implicit conflict between England and Ireland, and each other:

– I am the servant of two masters, Stephen said, an English and an Italian.

– Italian? Haines said.

A crazy queen, old and jealous. Kneel down before me.

³⁵³ Daniel Hengel, ‘Rewriting Empire and Nationhood: The Phantasmagorical Promise of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*’, *Nordic Irish Studies*, 17.2 (2018), p. 112.

- And a third, Stephen said, there is who wants me for odd jobs.
- Italian? Haines said again. What do you mean?
- The imperial British state, Stephen answered, his colour rising, and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church.

Haines detached from his underlip some fibres of tobacco before he spoke.

- I can quite understand that, he said calmly. An Irishman must think like that, I daresay.

We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame.³⁵⁴

Commodities in *Ulysses* have their mode of production intimately tied to their consumption through the medium of empire. Commodities are explored and externalised with the background behind them examined as everyday objects embedded in the modern world. Joyce's commodities link his Ireland to the globalised world, situating his country squarely in the modern world and in the context of empire. Haines's colonialist opinions are highlighted here with his use of tobacco, linking the character to colonial enterprises that brought tobacco across the Atlantic to stick to his lip. The addition of tobacco serves as a wry nod to the British Empire and the structures that have benefited Haines, laying bare his relative ignorance from a position of privilege, as well as alluding to the colonial relationship between Ireland and England in the early twentieth century. History is not to blame for the persecution of the Irish or the inhabitants of other British colonies. Rather, Haines places blame upon history to deflect it away from himself and the English. It is evident that Haines enjoys the spoils of empire but is unwilling to admit the true cost of his way of life. The

³⁵⁴ James Joyce and Cedric Watts, *Ulysses*, Later Printing Edition (Wordsworth Editions, 2013), p. 19.

tobacco is offered to Stephen from ‘a smooth silver case in which twinkled a green stone’ which, along with his ‘nickel tinderbox’, again suggests that Haines comes from a relatively wealthy background in contrast with Stephen’s poverty-stricken circumstance.³⁵⁵ As an Englishman, this otherwise generous act has colonial allusions. Not only is Haines partaking in the spoils of empire; he is also preserving the structures of an empire that made tobacco consumption possible.

The interactions between Haines and Stephen in ‘Telemachus’ epitomise the modern relationship between England and Ireland, one fraught with assumptions and misunderstandings. However, this episode likewise points to Haines’s guilt over the English treatment of Ireland. The ‘collection of [Stephen’s] sayings’ he intends to make is patronising, yet also relatively complimentary.³⁵⁶ Stephen’s response highlights Haines’s awareness of the English role in Irish oppression, ‘Speaking to me. They wash and tub and scrub. Agenbite of inwit. Conscience. Yet here’s a spot’ alluding to Lady Macbeth’s blood-stained hands.³⁵⁷ Haines’s cigarette is mentioned again later, in Joyce’s ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ episode. Stephen, having heard that Haines has already left the library, muses ‘We feel in England. Penitent thief. Gone. I smoked his baccy. Green twinkling stone. An emerald set in the ring of the sea’.³⁵⁸ This thought from Stephen reinforces Joyce’s criticism of the English in the novel as penitent thieves of Irish culture. Haines, though well-meaning, cannot escape the history of his nation; ‘History’ may be to blame for the treatment of Ireland, but it is English history specifically, and not easily escaped with Haines’s offer of colonial spoils. Tobacco, like history, sticks to Haines, showing his unwillingness to fully atone

³⁵⁵ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 83.

³⁵⁶ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 19.

³⁵⁷ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 19.

³⁵⁸ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 167.

for his nation's actions. His consumption exemplifies the relationship between England and Ireland, bound together within the empire.

Contrasting Stephen's morning cigarette with Haines, Bloom's first interaction with tobacco in *Ulysses* is observing it on the street. Joyce's depiction of Dublin's streets interweaves a tapestry of landmarks, characters, and objects. Bloom observes on his morning walk—in the 'Lotus Eaters' episode—that 'By Brady's cottages a boy for the skins lolled, his bucket of offal linked, smoking a chewed fagbutt'.³⁵⁹ The child lying adjacent to the cottage bears similarities to Homer's original Lotus Eaters in *The Odyssey*. However, the psychoactive substance is not lotus, but tobacco, imbuing the plant with a mythical quality. This scene also suggests a decadence in childhood smoking habits that holds clear parallels to Zeno's experience in *Confessions of Zeno*, both authors choosing to depict child smoking to highlight the more debased elements of modern society. Bloom passing the boy is followed by his interaction with an unnamed speaker: 'Tell him if he smokes he won't grow. O let him! His life isn't such a bed of roses! Waiting outside pubs to bring da home. Come home to ma, da'.³⁶⁰ The smoking child highlights the poverty that surrounds Bloom, but also the need for small pleasures to cope with inhospitable surroundings. Haines's earlier conversation with Stephen about British Imperialism over a cigarette is more clearly presented here through Joyce's description of an Irish child addicted to the spoils of the British Empire that reach Ireland's shores.

A load of hot air? Tobacco in 'Aeolus'

³⁵⁹ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 62.

³⁶⁰ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 62.

Tobacco is unique among commodities for its method of consumption through the lungs. Where it is featured in the ‘Aeolus’ episode of *Ulysses* it further adds to the blustery wind-focused atmosphere of the newsroom. The characters of the newsroom talk at length, expelling their hot air. Stuart Gilbert writes that ‘A gale of wind is blowing through this episode, literally and metaphorically. Doors are flung open violently, Myles Crawford blows violent puffs from his cigarette, the barefoot newsboys, scampering in create a hurricane which lifts the rustling tissues into the air; swing-doors draughtily flicker to and fro’.³⁶¹ Featuring both Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, Joyce uses cigarettes here as a focal point for the characters’ meeting. By imitating the action of Aeolus, Greek god of wind in the *Odyssey*, cigarettes hold a clear social function in this passage:

- He’s pretty well on, professor MacHugh said in a low voice.
- Seems to be, J. J. O’Molloy said, taking out a cigarette case in murmuring meditation, but it is not always as it seems. Who has the most matches? The calumet of peace. He offered a cigarette to the professor and took one himself. Lenehan promptly struck a match for them and lit their cigarettes in turn. J. J. O’Molloy opened his case again and offered it.
- Thanky vous, Lenehan said, helping himself.³⁶²

Here Bloom’s colleagues and acquaintances, a loose analogue for Odysseus’s crew, unleash the winds of smoke by lighting cigarettes and cigars. However, although the function of cigarettes—

³⁶¹ Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Study*, Peregrine Books: Y13, New rev. ed. (Penguin Books, 1963), p. 170.

³⁶² Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 116.

inhaling, and exhaling—imitates the wind, their role is different in *Ulysses*. Here, Joyce refers to ‘The calumet of peace’, noting tobacco’s origins as a substance that encouraged dialogue and negotiation in Indigenous American societies.³⁶³ The calumet, or peace pipe, was an integral part of ‘a ritual that made temporary friends out of deadly foes and gave warring enemies a respite of peace’.³⁶⁴ The cigarette ritual, an established feature of modern society, creates the conditions necessary for the exchange of ideas. This relates to Ortiz’s transculturation concept, with Joyce demonstrating that modern culture is a fusion of new signs alongside indigenous ritual. The peace pipe concept is re-contextualised as a modern cigarette smoked in twentieth-century Ireland. Cigarette consumption here symbolises the transfer of new elements to an otherwise dominant culture. The chaos of turbulent winds in the passage is imitated by a turbulent conversation, shown through their use of tobacco products. The activity is also analogous with the ‘hot air’ espoused by newspapers, humorously highlighting their largely vacuous content. Further, Indigenous American uses of tobacco are wryly transposed across the Atlantic where they are subsumed into Joyce’s modernity. However, there is an implicit irony here that the calumet of peace arrives in Ireland via the supply chains of empire, with the exceedingly violent and contested history it carries, likewise symbolised by Haines’s generosity in the first episode.

Joyce, already departing from conventional narrative style with his use of newspaper headings, makes use of a stylistic twist directly related to the act of smoking. A moment of reflection occurs over the trivial act of lighting a match for a cigar, with Joyce writing:

³⁶³ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 116.

³⁶⁴ Joseph C. Winter, *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans: Sacred Smoke and Silent Killer*, Illustrated edition (University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), p. 22.

Pause. J. J. O'Molloy took out his cigarette case. False lull. Something quite ordinary. Messenger took out his matchbox thoughtfully and lit his cigar. I have often thought since on looking back over that strange time that it was that small act, trivial in itself, that striking of that match, that determined the whole after-course of both our lives.³⁶⁵

Here there is a blurring of character and author, with Stephen reflecting upon the events of the newsroom from an undefined point in the future. Stephen ponders a butterfly effect, tracing the broad direction of two lives—most likely Bloom's and his own—to the simple striking of a match. Joyce is using a form of hyperbole here, satirising the overblown claims put about by newspapers. A moment that is otherwise unremarkable becomes significant by dint of being reflected upon and observed. Zeno's memoir operates in a similar way, endowing past events with meaning that they may not have had originally. Additionally, just as *Confessions of Zeno* is a semi-autobiographical memoir for Svevo, so too are there significant parallels between Joyce and Stephen Dedalus. The act of smoking enables the recalling of events that are otherwise utterly unremarkable. Cigarettes serve as repeated actions, spliced into everyday life, that occasionally hold greater significance than it originally appears. Zeno's cigarettes provide both a structure to his life and a window to his past. Likewise Stephen, remembering the lighting of a cigar, links that single event to the rest of his life, beyond the single day recorded in the novel.

Ireland holds a contentious place within the colonial history of the British Empire, with *Ulysses* exploring the idea of Irish nationhood through conflict between its characters (such as the conflict between Stephen and Haines in 'Telemachus'). As Kenny asks, 'Was Ireland a sister

³⁶⁵ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 124.

kingdom, or equal partner, in a larger British archipelagic state? Was it, by virtue of its location and strategic importance, the empire's most subjugated colony? Or was it both simultaneously, its ostensible constitutional equality masking the reality of its colonial status?'.³⁶⁶ These questions are not answerable here, but more developed assessments of Irish colonial history can be found in the work of Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly, Kevin Kenny, and Stephen Howe, who deliver explorations of Irish national identity.³⁶⁷ However, I acknowledge the heterogeneous nature of the debate on Irish national identity and empire in order to give context to Joyce's complex response within the novel. It is important to note that the distinction between Britain and its colonies is not a dichotomy, but rather a complex idea featuring differing perspectives. Joyce acknowledges this complexity in *Ulysses*, but in true Joycean fashion obfuscates in order to better communicate this conceptual complexity.

Fighting prejudice: 'Cyclops' and the cigar

The novel moves from the newsroom to Barney Kiernan's pub, where Bloom finds Joyce's version of the Cyclops: an Irish nationalist 'Citizen' with unpleasant antisemitic opinions. The episode is written from the perspective of an unidentified narrator, ostensibly another pub-goer, who observes the unfolding conflict between Bloom and the one-eyed Citizen. Not wanting to cause offence

³⁶⁶ Kevin Kenny, 'Ireland and the British Empire: an Introduction' in *Ireland and the British Empire*, edited by Kevin Kenny, The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1.

³⁶⁷ Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine*, Cultural Margins, 10 (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Kevin Kenny, *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

after declining to drink with the cyclops, Bloom opts to ‘just take a cigar’³⁶⁸ in lieu of alcohol and receives ‘one of [Terry’s] prime stinkers’.³⁶⁹ Returning to Leonard, Bloom is revealing ‘hopes and anxieties [...] by responding to some appeals and ignoring others’, he does not want to be associated with The Citizen.³⁷⁰ By remaining abstemious at the bar, Bloom signals his unwillingness to join in the pub-dwellers’ conversation. The cigar, rather than an alcoholic beverage, is Bloom’s concession to politeness whilst remaining in possession of his faculties. However, in accepting the cigar Bloom unwittingly accepts the invitation to combat. Gilbert notes the classical allusion to ‘an obvious recall to the blinding of the giant, and the huge club of olive wood sharpened and heated in the fire by Odysseus for that purpose, has its pygmy caricature in Mr Bloom’s “knockmedown cigar”’.³⁷¹ Joyce’s farcical use of tobacco here transforms tobacco into a weapon with which to defend and to attack. In the modern world of *Ulysses*, direct violence is replaced with the sparring of words. In the confines of Barney Kiernan’s pub, the cigar serves to defend Bloom from the onslaught of bigotry, whilst signalling that he is not willing to break bread—in this case in the form of beer—with those that seek to insult him.

‘Cyclops’ also brings us Bloom’s musings about the nature of nationhood, bringing parallels with Svevo’s exploration of identity in *Confessions of Zeno*. Bloom is asked ‘do you know what a nation means?’ a leading question intended to ostracise and offend.³⁷² His answer, ‘A nation is the same people living in the same place [...] Or also living in different places’ is met

³⁶⁸ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 274.

³⁶⁹ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 274.

³⁷⁰ Leonard, *Advertising and Commodity Culture in Joyce*, p. 9.

³⁷¹ Gilbert, *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Study*, p. 236.

³⁷² Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 299.

with derision.³⁷³ This leads to Bloom's valiant self-defence:

—And I belong to a race too, says Bloom, that is hated and persecuted. Also now.

This very moment. This very instant. Gob, he near burnt his fingers with the butt of his old cigar.

—Robbed, says he. Plundered. Insulted. Persecuted. Taking what belongs to us by right. At this very moment, says he, putting up his fist, sold by auction off in Morocco like slaves or cattles.³⁷⁴

The irony here is palpable. The nationalistic Citizen is seemingly unable to draw parallels between Ireland's position under English imperial rule and Bloom's status as a Jewish son of a Hungarian immigrant. As Pearson notes, Joyce complicates the conflict between the cosmopolitan Bloom and the nationalistic Citizen. Pearson writes, 'the deepest irony of the scene is that as the men bond over this inflated yearning for a restored *international* Ireland, they cast a xenophobic eye at Bloom, who represents both transnational and economic livelihood in a very quotidian, realistic sense'.³⁷⁵ Bloom with his cigar—a product of international trade and a symbol of cosmopolitan luxury consumption—is ironically the outward-looking defender of an internationalist Ireland that the Citizen himself idealises.

The imperial history of tobacco is ironically tied to Bloom's passionate self-defence against the bigotry of the Citizen, presenting a visceral reminder of the impacts of colonial

³⁷³ Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 299-300.

³⁷⁴ Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 300-301.

³⁷⁵ Nels Pearson, *Irish Cosmopolitanism*, p. 28.

domination. Further, the ‘cooling effect’ that Bloom attaches to cigars in the novel acts as an antithetical device against the Citizen’s drink-fuelled rant.³⁷⁶ Gilbert writes that ‘The Citizen is persistently clamorous and fulminant; the more liquid he absorbs, the greater his eruptive violence. He has a patriotic fixed idea: he will not brook the presence in his land of foreigner[s]’.³⁷⁷ In choosing the cigar Bloom goes into combat with the volcanic Citizen cyclops, choosing the cooling Cigar over the inflammatory alcohol. The cigar being finished signals Bloom’s retreat; in declining a round of drinks, Bloom’s consumption in the pub is limited to the lone tobacco product that ultimately fails to cool the hostile Citizen’s temper.

Tobacco as a psychoactive substance in ‘Circe’

The mind-bending nighttown episode in *Ulysses*—originally titled ‘Circe’—details Bloom’s visit to a local brothel. Once there, he experiences vivid hallucinations, covering an extensive range of desires, fears, and circumstances. Bloom’s experience in the episode is summarised by Flynn, writing that ‘Over the course of some sadomasochistic antics, Bloom is used as a bench, an ashtray and a hobbyhorse’.³⁷⁸ In a similar vein, Elmann dubs ‘Circe’ ‘psychoanalysis turned into comedy’ for its distinctive insight into the analysis of conscious desire.³⁷⁹ Tobacco is used as a signifier of wealth, power, and boorish masculinity in the episode, particularly in the way it helps to distinguish Bella Cohen from her gender swapped alter ego, Bello. The result is a kaleidoscopic exploration of the modern condition. Flynn also writes that ‘Circe’ serves as ‘both a representation and a

³⁷⁶ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 69.

³⁷⁷ Gilbert, *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Study*, p. 235.

³⁷⁸ Catherine Flynn, ““Circe” and Surrealism: Joyce and the Avant-Garde”, p. 127.

³⁷⁹ Elmann, p. 495.

critique of the contemporary experience of capitalism and commodity culture', something that I will build upon here in the context of tobacco consumption and empire.³⁸⁰ Tobacco features in Bloom's initial foray into nighttown. Bloom, like Zeno, is a smoker and the two men have shared views about the weed, though perhaps not a shared paranoia. The hallucinations of nighttown in 'Circe' reveal otherwise suppressed thoughts within the minds of Joyce's characters. Having stolen Bloom's lucky potato, Zoe elicits from Bloom his wittily hypocritical views on smoking:

Zoe: (Catches a stray hair deftly and twists it to her coil.) No bloody fear. I'm English. Have you a swaggerroot?

Bloom: (As before.) Rarely smoke, dear. Cigar now and then. Childish device. (Lewdly.) The mouth can be better engaged than with a cylinder of rank weed.

Zoe: Go on. Make a stump speech out of it.

Bloom: (*In workman's corduroy overalls, black gansy with red floating tie and apache cap.*) Mankind is incorrigible. Sir Walter Raleigh brought from the new world that potato and that weed, the one a killer of pestilence by absorption, the other a poisoner of the ear, eye, heart, memory, will, understanding, all. That is to say, he brought the poison a hundred years before another person whose name I forget brought the food. Suicide. Lies. All our habits. Why, look at our public life!³⁸¹

Bloom recalls the cigar he had only earlier in the day while fighting The Citizen cyclops in Barney Kiernan's pub. The conditions of modernity are inextricably linked to one of its defining

³⁸⁰ Flynn, "Circe" and Surrealism: Joyce and the Avant-Garde', p. 123.

³⁸¹ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 424.

commodities: tobacco. The poisoning effect of tobacco relates to Zeno's own mixed views on smoking; Bloom is highly critical of its consumption, yet still partakes despite voicing his opposition. This slight hypocrisy is humorous and parallels Zeno's opposition to his own habit.

Dublin's nighttown in *Ulysses* links with all the other previous episodes of the novel, forming a self-parodying cornucopia of perception, desire, and memory. Bloom's walk into nighttown links intratextually with his walk down the Highstreet that morning:

Odd! Molly drawing on the frosted carriagepane at Kingstown. What's that like? (*Gaudy dollwomen loll in the lighted doorways, in window embrasures, smoking birdseye cigarettes. The odour of the sicksweet weed floats towards him in slow round ovalling wreaths.*) THE WREATHS: Sweet are the sweets. Sweets of sin.³⁸²

Joyce uses the same word in both episodes, 'loll', to describe a kind of nicotine-induced relaxation. There is the implicit suggestion here that cigarettes contribute to the overall sense of 'sinfulness' in the scene. The 'birdseye cigarettes' smoked here are a brand owned by Lambert & Butler, then a part the English-owned Imperial Tobacco Company. Their presence here indicates the power of British imperialism in the consuming choices made by in Ireland. Unlike the boy lolling next to Brady's cottages, these cigarettes do not signify poverty, but serve to accentuate the atmosphere of hedonistic consumption in the episode. To further the association with hedonism, Joyce borrows from popularised descriptions of opium dens, such as those in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. Wilde describes the 'opium dens where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory

³⁸² Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 405.

of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new' which bear a striking resemblance to Joyce's own description of a decadent nighttown.³⁸³ The effect is satirical, tobacco being far less potent a drug than opium, yet also shows the role held by imperial Britain in bringing addictive commodities to market in colonised lands. The proliferation of addictive commodities can be traced back to their discovery and deliberate export through the manufactured supply chains of empire. It is also not the last time in the novel that tobacco would stand-in for a narcotic. In 'Eumaeus' Bloom suggests that Buck Mulligan has poisoned Stephen with tobacco, saying that 'it wouldn't occasion me the least surprise to learn that a pinch of tobacco or some narcotic was put in your drink for some ulterior object' suggesting that tobacco—originally a mysterious New World substance—holds properties and powers capable of altering states of mind.³⁸⁴ Here, it is used to suggest both the malign influence that Buck Mulligan represents, and Bloom's fatherly concern towards Stephen. Joyce playfully spoofs the father-son relationship, showing Bloom's desire to protect Stephen from the company that he keeps. Additionally, in a similar vein to Zeno, it shows Bloom's misgivings about addictive substances.

Choi writes that Joyce deftly subverts the sexual politics of British Imperialism by ridiculing the 'over-idealized sexual respectability of Victorian and Edwardian society'³⁸⁵ and thus '[decolonises] Irish people by means of literature'.³⁸⁶ This is shown through the masochistic fantasy Bloom forms around Mr/s Bello/a in which the cigar is a key indicator of a boorish

³⁸³ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (AmazonClassics Edition, 2017), p. 201.

³⁸⁴ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 530.

³⁸⁵ Seokmoo Choi, 'Joyce's Subversion of Imperialism's Sexual Politics', *The Harp*, 15 (2000), p. 99.

³⁸⁶ Choi, 'Joyce's Subversion of Imperialism's Sexual Politics', p. 99.

masculinity through commodity use. Bello, speaking to Bloom, degrades him with commodity consumption, saying ‘I shall sit on your ottomansaddleback every morning after my thumping good breakfast of Matterson’s fat ham rashers and a bottle of Guinness’s porter. (*He belches.*) And suck my thumping good Stock Exchange cigar while I read the Licensed Victualler’s Gazette.’³⁸⁷ This cigar plays a prominent role in emasculating Bloom in his submissive guise. As a capitalist and imperialist caricature, the power that Bello holds over the submissive Bloom is shown in the way in which he wields his cigar. Bello ‘*Squats, with a grunt, on Bloom’s upturned face, puffing cigarsmoke, nursing a fat leg*’, ‘*quenches his cigar angrily on Bloom’s ear*’ turning Bloom into his personal ashtray, and ‘*thrusts out a figged fist and foul cigar*’ for Bloom to kiss, all while complaining about a missed opportunity to purchase discounted shares in the Guinness brewery.³⁸⁸ The scene is inherently satirical, playing on notions of economic and sexual domination intersecting with one another. Bello, as the epitome of bourgeois imperialist capitalism, brandishes his tobacco-weapon as a means of subjugating Bloom. Tobacco is used in a similar way to Bloom’s self-defence against the cyclops, but here the roles are reversed; tobacco is no longer a refuge for Bloom, it is instead an offensive weapon used against him. Bello is presented as a grotesque figure with absurdly gendered mannerisms and behaviours. As a metaphor for imperialism and capitalism Bello is the ultimate consumer. Concerned predominantly with consumption, sadomasochism and the stock market, Joyce makes Britain’s colonial domination over the people of Ireland abundantly clear.

Writing from the vantage point of 1922, Joyce’s 1904 setting allows for an ironic look

³⁸⁷ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 465.

³⁸⁸ Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 466-467.

at capitalism in Ireland. Through ‘Circe’ the taboos of Victorian and Edwardian society are shown to be replete with hypocrisy; although Bello is Irish, his behaviours have clear parallels with British imperial industrialists and capitalists. Tratner contends that ‘the political liberations of the early twentieth century, like the sexual liberations, could end up bought and sold as packaged fantasies and be merely part of a changing form of economic exploitation’.³⁸⁹ Bello’s purpose in *Ulysses* is to dominate and exploit. He is Joyce’s extreme parody of capitalist modernity, showing the degradation associated with capitalist consumption, and a means to ironically display the power relations inherent in commodity driven societies. Bloom, in his masochistic fantasy, enjoys his subjugation. The scene therefore serves as a poignant criticism of consumptive impulses coupled with a skewed power dynamic. Bello’s expression of consumption and sadomasochism works as a darkly satirical take on twentieth-century capitalists and the power they hold over the Irish citizenry. Bloom is exploited within the confines of Bella Cohen’s brothel, seemingly unable (and unwilling) to escape.

Conspicuous consumption in ‘Eumaeus’

Conspicuous consumption of tobacco is repeated throughout *Ulysses* with its final mention in Joyce’s ‘Eumaeus’ episode. On the heels of ‘Circe’, the organ and art that Joyce seeks to represent are the Nerves and Navigation, respectively.³⁹⁰ ‘Eumaeus’ is therefore, in part, about Ireland’s place in the world both in relation to England and the wider world, and as part of a wider system.

³⁸⁹ Michael Tratner, ‘Sex and Credit: Consumer Capitalism in “Ulysses”’, *James Joyce Quarterly*, 30/31 (1993), p. 709.

³⁹⁰ Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Study*, Peregrine Books: Y13, New rev. ed. (Penguin Books, 1963), p. 299.

The episode features a righteous anti-imperial tirade from D. B. Murphy, a sailor of dubious origin ‘who scarcely seemed to be a Dublin resident’.³⁹¹ Whether, or to what extent, Murphy can be trusted by the reader is left an open question, with Bloom nourishing ‘some suspicions of our friend’s *bona fides*’.³⁹² Murphy’s tall tales are accompanied by his consumption of chewing tobacco, asking the jarvies for a plug before his talk with Bloom and Stephen, ‘– You don’t happen to have such a thing as a spare chaw about you, do you? [...] He deposited the quid in his gob and, chewing, and with some slow stammers, proceeded’.³⁹³ Murphy’s commodity consumption here is comically juxtaposed with his imperialist outlook, at once enjoying the spoils of South America and denigrating the native inhabitants as ‘savage[s]’.³⁹⁴ Hayward’s analysis that, in *Ulysses*, ‘[commodities work] as both the means and the measure of colonial exploitation’ rings true here in Murphy’s consumption of chewing tobacco.³⁹⁵ Yet, to Murphy the connection remains unexamined; he serves as a participant in the very same imperial structure that he rails against. As a sailor, chewing tobacco links Murphy to the progenitors of tobacco consumption in Europe, the sailors of Columbus’s voyage to the Americas in 1492. Within the novel Murphy’s tobacco consumption links him to Haines, talking at length about empire whilst consuming one of its more prominent products.

Just as tobacco acts as an aide-mémoire for Zeno in Svevo’s work, so too does tobacco accompany the weaving of Murphy’s tall tales. As Maddox writes, ‘Murphy represents Odysseus

³⁹¹ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 534.

³⁹² Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 536.

³⁹³ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 534.

³⁹⁴ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 535.

³⁹⁵ Hayward, ‘Invalid Port: The Politics of Consumption in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*’, p. 152.

Pseudangelos, the lying Ulysses who tells false stories in order to disguise his return to Ithaca. He is thus a kind of alter ego to Bloom, the prudent and resourceful Ulysses³⁹⁶ highlighting Murphy's apparent return home from a perilous journey. Maddox justifies this writing that 'he shares with Bloom the qualities of Ulysses [and] he tells the archetypal Bloom-story, the story of return' with Murphy, Bloom, and Stephen all nearing the end of their respective journeys.³⁹⁷ Murphy's apparent experience contrasts deeply with Bloom's more localised odyssey in the streets of Dublin. Although Bloom is Joyce's *Ulysses*, Murphy fits a more traditional conception of the character, a difference that Joyce uses in a form of self-parody. However, there is also perhaps a more serious undertone to Murphy's return under an apparent alias.

As a product of the international trade networks, tobacco serves as an ironic signifier of modernity in 'Eumaeus'. As Murphy continues his tales of the Americas, he uses the tobacco plug as a prop for dramatic effect:

– You seen queer sights, don't be talking, put in a jarvey. – Why, the sailor said, shifting his partially chewed plug, I seen queer things too, ups and downs. I seen a crocodile bite the fluke of an anchor same as I chew that quid. He took out of his mouth the pulpy quid and, lodging it between his teeth, bit ferociously. – Khaan! Like that.³⁹⁸

Through his storytelling, Murphy creates a primitivised opposition to modernity, moulding a narrative of Irish civilisation through the otherisation of South America. This creates an implicit

³⁹⁶ James H. Maddox, "'Eumaeus' and the Theme of Return in *Ulysses*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 16.1 (1974), p. 212.

³⁹⁷ Maddox, "'Eumaeus' and the Theme of Return in *Ulysses*", p. 215.

³⁹⁸ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 535.

irony in his consumption of a product that a modern capitalist system of colonisation and trade commodified for European consumption. Tobacco's status in the episode reinforces how ubiquitous formerly exotic commodities have come to dominate the European sphere.

The irony in Murphy imitating the indigenous South Americans by chewing a product that originates on their own continent is amplified in the sailor's reference to tobacco production in Ireland. Murphy's anti-imperial rant against the English takes on a more humorous element in light of the Irish War of Independence coming to a close shortly before *Ulysses* was published. As Duffy writes, 'the completion of the greatest novel ever to appear from an Irish writer, and the achievement, after much violence, of an independent Ireland, occurred within six weeks of each other in 1921'.³⁹⁹ The issue of Irish independence from the British Empire runs strongly, and in multiple forms, throughout *Ulysses*. Murphy's rant serves as a fictional foretelling; Joyce deftly showing the sentiments that would eventually lead to Irish independence from the imperialistic United Kingdom. Murphy tells Bloom and Stephen that 'a day of reckoning [...] was in store for mighty England, despite her power of pelf on account of her crimes'⁴⁰⁰ and predicting that 'There would be a fall and the greatest fall in history'.⁴⁰¹ This comes from the same speech that features an important reference to tobacco and tobacco growing: 'Their conversation accordingly became general and all agreed that that was a fact. You could grow any mortal thing in Irish soil, he stated, and there was Colonel Everard down there in Cavan growing tobacco'.⁴⁰² This line of Murphy's

³⁹⁹ Andrew Enda Duffy. 'Parnellism and Rebellion: The Irish War of Independence and Revisions of the Heroic in "Ulysses"', *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1990, p. 180.

⁴⁰⁰ Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 548-549.

⁴⁰¹ Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 548-549.

⁴⁰² Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 548-549.

yarns shows us tobacco's symbolic importance in 'Eumaeus'. Chewing his quid, Murphy consumes tobacco as the product of empire, but Joyce plays with the meaning of tobacco as a consumable commodity. In 'Eumaeus', tobacco serves as a means to take agency over a global commodity, as well as to blur the status of Ireland within the British Empire.

Joyce's reference to tobacco growing Irish soil symbolises the complicated relationship between national and international identities. Murphy, like Stephen, serves as a proxy for the author, with Joyce's status as an émigré writer providing his vantage point from which to view Irish identity. Unlike Svevo writing in Italy, Joyce writes about his nation from the outside looking in. To further complicate the notion of national identity in *Ulysses*, and unlike Italy in the early twentieth century, Ireland was still struggling for its independence as a nation. Hayward writes that Joyce 'expose[s] the hypocrisy of imperial consumerist ideologies' in his representation of Plumtree's Potted Meat in 'Ithaca', the product being an English product in reality.⁴⁰³ Referring to the production of Plumtree's Potted Meat, Hayward writes that 'What Joyce represents as an Irish home industry was in reality a British manufacturer enjoying the trade benefits of empire'.⁴⁰⁴ This also holds similarities with the 'Telemachus' episode and the 'thick rich milk' brought by the old Irish woman to the Martello tower, revealing a pastoral Irish idyll through locally made produce.⁴⁰⁵ The same is true of tobacco in 'Eumaeus', with tobacco production seized from the international trade networks of empire and re-figured as a home industry. In 'Eumaeus', soil and

⁴⁰³ Matthew Hayward, 'Plumtree's Potted Meat: The Productive Error of the Commodity in "Ulysses"', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2017, p. 72.

⁴⁰⁴ Hayward, 'Plumtree's Potted Meat: The Productive Error of the Commodity in "Ulysses"', p. 62.

⁴⁰⁵ Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 14.

sea are juxtaposed, tobacco arriving in Ireland just as Murphy returns home. Ireland therefore is placed within the modern world. It is for this reason, however, that Joyce's Ireland occupies a unique place in the texts I have examined so far: the Ireland that Joyce shows in the text straddles the line between a colonial state and a nation state, between a commodity producing nation and a consuming nation.

The production of tobacco in Ireland for commercial purposes brings an element of tobacco culture usually found on the other side of the Atlantic to Irish fields. The Colonel Everard, referred to by Murphy as 'down there in Cavan growing tobacco', was political figure operating in Cavan in 1904.⁴⁰⁶ A prominent political figure in Irish politics throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Colonel Everard trialled the growing of tobacco in Ireland in order to boost the local economy in County Meath.⁴⁰⁷ The non-fictional Colonel Everard was a supporter of the Irish Free State, with Ireland a continued member of the Commonwealth.⁴⁰⁸ The venture was originally intended 'as a means of solving the problem of unemployment for the local population'.⁴⁰⁹ Despite not supporting an Irish Republic—neither in 1904, nor 1921—Everard's agricultural experiment brought commodity production within Ireland's borders to strengthen the local economy. Everard growing tobacco indicates a patriotic belief in the producing abilities of Ireland, as well as a philanthropic desire to bring wealth to Irish citizens. Though not integrated

⁴⁰⁶ Joyce, *Ulysses*, pp. 548-549.

⁴⁰⁷ Note: Colonel Everard ran for the Irish parliament in county Cavan, though his experimental tobacco fields existed in county Meath, making it an error on Murphy's part.

⁴⁰⁸ Note: Irish Republicans, on the other side of the Irish Civil War, wanted a Republic entirely free from British control and influence.

⁴⁰⁹ Richard H. A. J. Everard, 'Everard, Sir Nugent Talbot', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. by James Quinn (Royal Irish Academy, 2009).

into the state, as with Italy's tobacco monopoly, Joyce is still highlighting the importance of commodity production through the cultivation of tobacco. Domestic tobacco production is used within nation-building contexts to demonstrate agricultural prowess. Comparable to the way in which Ortiz shows Cuban independence through tobacco production, Joyce is using a literary representation of domestic tobacco production to show Irish self-sufficiency and perhaps suggest the capability of an independent Ireland. Rather than importing commodities through imperial trade networks, Joyce suggests that a modern Ireland is able to produce them for the benefit of its citizens. Joyce includes a mention of Everard to indicate the potential for Ireland's self-sufficiency outside of the British Empire, blurring the distinction between modern nations that consume and those that produce. The quid chewed by Murphy and the tobacco in the fields of County Cavan symbolises trade, travel and return to Irish shores. With it, Joyce represents a cosmopolitan Ireland which is inherently fertile and woven into the network of international trade. Just as the Citizen decries the contemporary position of Ireland in an international world order, so too does Murphy raise questions about Ireland's place in relation to other tobacco producing countries, and even other colonies of the British Empire.

Smoking with Svevo and Joyce

Though differing in their authorial approaches, Svevo and Joyce's seminal works reflect the different modernist anxieties surrounding their respective nations and commodity consumption. For Svevo, modernity is concerned with individual exploration of the unconscious, utilising Freudian psychoanalysis and self-reflection. For Joyce, part of Ireland's modernity was centred around the unfettering of his homeland from the strictures of the British Empire—though this would not be fully realised politically for over three decades. The role of consumption has been proved to be central to these texts, allowing for individual expression to be externalised and for

concepts such as nationhood and empire to be expressed.

Confessions of Zeno and *Ulysses* contain distinct and insightful explorations of how commodities operate in their respective European spheres. Mental health, addiction, social degradation and imperialism are all covered, showing us how commodities shape and are shaped by the contexts in which they are used—particularly in urban environments. Svevo's novel, an insightful exploration of a man and his relationship with an addictive commodity, shows us modernism's inherent preoccupation with mental health. By exploring his own mind, Zeno desperately attempts to explore his unconscious mind in search of the cure to his illness. Ostensibly Zeno's illness is clear: addiction. However, Zeno's exploratory diary is not in search of a cure but rather illness itself. His physical health is far better than his hypochondriacal mental state. Zeno represents a preoccupation with health that only became possible with the technical advancements of modernity and his cigarettes serve as an expression of the symptoms of modernity, not the cause. The cigarette becomes not simply a harmful recreational drug, but an incising tool of psychological diagnosis and even treatment. Ultimately, *Confessions of Zeno* provides a valuable insight into the perception of tobacco as a western commodity, transformed into its most popularised form: the cigarette. Seen through the lens of the nation state, Zeno's addiction can be seen as the logical result of a modernity that prizes consumption above all else, and ignores the means by which it is produced. There are few barriers to consumption in the modern world presented by Svevo, those that do exist are almost entirely self-made.

In direct contrast to Svevo, Joyce offers a heterogeneous perspective on tobacco consumption. Rather than any one individual, tobacco and smoking are more often related to the national status of Ireland under the British Empire. 'Telemachus', 'Aeolus', 'Circe' and 'Eumaeus' all present different facets to consumption, but all share a united theme of Irish consumption and

its relationship to imperial control. Joyce's work defies easy conclusions on the nature of Irish identity or the meaning of consumption on the island. However, the central role played by commodities in *Ulysses*, in this case specifically tobacco, shows that consumption plays a vital role in Joyce's expression of Hibernian modernity. Conspicuous consumption is used to reveal the tensions and conflicts that underpin Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. Irish modernity in *Ulysses* is therefore implicitly tied not only to the way in which characters consume, but the international linkages that have brought goods from distant lands to the streets of Dublin. This is complicated by the mention of Colonel Everard's tobacco growing project in County Cavan. Commodity production, as well as consumption, becomes a key marker of Irish modernity, enabling greater independence from the British Empire. It also marks Ireland as able to join in international trade on its own terms, or at least to fulfil its own needs.

The examinations of smoking in *Ulysses* are far more outward looking than those in *Confessions of Zeno*. Rather than a focus on the unconscious, we are led to observe a representation of how tobacco is used by multiple characters in modern Dublin. Zeno and Bloom consume tobacco with distinct anxieties attached relating to health and well-being. In Zeno's case mental and physical health are intimately related to his habits of consumption with his anxiety surrounding a succession of last cigarettes serving as a consistent source of satire. Bloom views tobacco as a harmful narcotic, albeit one that he is happy to occasionally indulge in when offered. The attitude exhibited by Bloom towards the habit is far more abstemious to Zeno's, but it holds other meanings that are omitted from Svevo's novel. Tobacco products act as a means to create space for dialogue, as well as a means to demonstrate imperialistic and sexual power dynamics. The act of smoking is presented as an inherently sociable activity with the power to either calm or disrupt. These two differing ways of presenting tobacco consumption are seen early in the novel with Stephen and

Haines, and later with Bloom's adversaries *The Citizen* and *Bello*. Although smoking is not as central to *Ulysses* as it is to *Confessions of Zeno*, it remains an crucial motif in the novel with which to satirise power and empire. All these elements combined provide a distinct analysis of tobacco use in the European modernism of Svevo and Joyce. Although the sites of tobacco production—the plantations of the Caribbean and the American South—are conspicuously absent from their narratives, Svevo and Joyce nonetheless fold tobacco into their novels as a feature of Commodity Modernism. For both authors, tobacco consumption was the sole way in which Europeans interacted with tobacco, though tobacco's presence alone signifies the far-off sites of imperial production. To examine these areas more fully I now turn again to the other side of the Atlantic.

Tobacco and literary modernism

Tobacco, as conspicuous as it is prolific, plays a key cultural role in the societies in which it is produced or consumed. In this section I have covered a range of texts from around the Atlantic by Ortiz, Warren, Svevo, and Joyce, each offering a unique perspective on the commodity. Despite each approaching the significance of tobacco in different ways, there are some comparisons that can be made between them.

Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint* demonstrates the central role tobacco plays in the foundation of modern Cuba. One of the agricultural and industrial pillars of Cuba, for Ortiz the commodity also forms the basis for cultural cohesion. Tied to Taino creation myths and modern trade, tobacco comes to represent the ideal of Cuban national independence, as well as a distinct identity related to, yet distinct from, outside influences. The transculturation concept neologised by Ortiz helps to define a Cuban conception of modernity, one that accounts for cultural formation associated with indigenous ritual and histories of colonialism. Tobacco is itself transculturated

across the Atlantic, bringing with it associations with spiritual fulfilment through its attendant rituals. As a commodity, tobacco blends with the cultures into which it is introduced, carrying with it notions of independence on a national and individual level.

Set in the U.S. South, Warren's 'Prime Leaf' and *Night Rider* reveal the contested and violent aspects of tobacco production. Like Ortiz, Warren shows tobacco to be of crucial importance to the regional culture and economy. Furthermore, although *Cuban Counterpoint* associates outside influence over commodity production with domination, Warren's texts represent a vision of organised violence in the interests of opposing economic oppression. Integrated into an international economy, Warren's tobacco producers reveal the threats of monopolisation to the rural South. Dependent upon tobacco for their livelihoods, the Night Riders turn to terrorism to sustain their way of life. Percy Munn, having been isolated, reveals the dangers of violent resistance in the face of an invisible yet powerful monopoly. Tobacco becomes a totemic symbol in the struggle for a sub-national, rural, individualistic identity promulgated by the Agrarians. The tobacco producers in Warren's work shows the impact of modern commodity consumption combined with predatory monopolistic practices. Through 'Prime Leaf' and *Night Rider*, Warren demonstrates the inequality that underpins tobacco as a prominent modern commodity.

Predominantly concerned with tobacco consumption, Svevo and Joyce emphasise the significance of smoking in the urbanised environments of the early twentieth century, relating the habit to themes concerning psychological addiction and colonialism. Transcultured across the Atlantic from the New World to the Old, tobacco becomes a beguiling and addictive vice that signifies national pride alongside the commercialisation of tobacco. These themes relate to tobacco's addictive qualities in metropolitan environments, with tobacco becoming an essential

commodity to large numbers of modern consumers. Alongside addiction, Svevo's *Confessions of Zeno* points to the psychological meaning behind tobacco consumption, explored in the context of tobacco's importance to the newly formed Italian state. The link made with Svevo between tobacco production, consumption, and national identity is shared by Joyce and Ortiz. The latter two authors use their representations of tobacco production and consumption to emphasise the differences between their cultures and those of a colonising force.⁴¹⁰

Together, these texts demonstrate the power of tobacco as a commodity, both as it is produced and consumed. In the areas where tobacco is produced, tobacco is used as a signifier of agricultural fertility and of national or regional independence. Where the commodity is consumed, themes of vice come to the fore. This pattern holds true to Winter's distinction between 'the Red road of positive tobacco use and the Dark road of tobacco abuse', with tobacco representing calm and insight alongside violence and addiction.⁴¹¹ However, uniting the texts that represent tobacco is the association between the commodity and independence. This relates to national independence, or to individuals who assert it through smoking. Remaining instantly recognisable from plant to product, tobacco is transculturated around the Atlantic, bringing with it cultural elements of the indigenous peoples by whom it was originally cultivated and consumed. These texts featuring tobacco constitute examples of different national and regional concepts of modernity engaged in international and planetary conversations. By looking at representations of tobacco as a commodity, the links between these distinct conceptions of modernity become clear. Through the process of transculturation, tobacco inserts itself into new cultural contexts to become

⁴¹⁰ The British Empire for Joyce, the Spanish Empire and the United States for Ortiz.

⁴¹¹ Winter, *Tobacco Use by Native North Americans*, p. xvii.

an enduring symbol of both an industrialising modernity and an exoticised consumable.

Section Introduction: Sugar and Modernism

In this part I turn to look at sugar. Inspired by the dichotomy initially explored by Ortiz in *Cuban Counterpoint*, sugar forms a deep contrast with tobacco. Where tobacco is often associated with individuality and independence, sugar is typically associated with homogeneity and colonial domination—or the struggle against it. Additionally, whereas tobacco is typically consumed conspicuously in literature, it is the production of sugar that is more commonly featured across early twentieth-century texts. This draws our focus towards the plantations of literature; featured here in texts set in Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, and the American South. Perhaps more than any other commodity, sugar provided the impetus for the transatlantic trade, the end that justified the means of human enslavement on an unprecedented global scale. I begin with a focussed history of sugar in the New World, how it came to be there and the extent to which it precipitated the creation of colonies which owed their existence to a plantation economy. To achieve this, I situate my work on modernist texts in the history of sugar production and trade. Sidney W. Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* provides the most comprehensive account of this, and it is upon his preeminent work in the field of commodity history that I expand. In using the established anthropological and historical research completed by Mintz and others, I hope to shed new light on the function of sugar in texts from multiple sites around the Atlantic.

Following an analysis of plantation literature in Chapters Four and Five, in Chapter Six I turn to the consumption of sugar. Almost exclusively consumed as part of a cooked confection, sugar displays its protean side in its literary representations of consumption. Completely divorced from its raw form, when consumed sugar adopts new meanings that were not present on the plantations. This contrasts with the conspicuous consumption of tobacco, instead hiding in an almost infinite range of recipes and sweet treats. This approach towards

representations of sugar in literature allows not only for a better understanding of commodities in literature, but also for a chance to place texts from producing areas in relation to their corresponding sites of consumption.

Sugar in Context

The history of sugar is both complex and lengthy. My approach in this focussed history is to provide a short, broad, general history of sugar, not one that is country specific. Beginning the two following chapters I provide more region and country specific history, particularly in relation to sugar production in Cuba, Brazil, and Haiti. While my analysis of the texts remains predominantly literary-critical, the commodity history of sugar provides important context that informs such an analysis. The abundance of sugar in the twentieth century is easy to overlook, a point made by Bosma writing that ‘Most consumers are unaware of the full extent of sugar’s presence. Cigarettes, for example, contain sweetening tobacco—first introduced by Reynolds just before World War I in its blended Camel cigarettes—which makes it easier to inhale nicotine deep in the lungs’.⁴¹² Sugar is almost always coupled with other ingredients, becoming hidden within a recipe or product and consumed in cooked form. Its need for extensive processing intertwined sugar with trade and an industrial capitalism that was born on the plantations. This is echoed by Bosma, noting that ‘The big leap that sugar made from being consumed in tiny amounts by most people to being a key commodity in a globalized food industry occurred in less than a century and could only happen through the emergence of powerful corporate sugar industries’.⁴¹³ An almost ubiquitous commodity, sugar exemplifies a strident globalisation that nonetheless became fused with the national identities of former sugar colonies. Literary texts reflect the impact of sugar as a commodity but require a knowledge of how sugar came to be quite so dominant.

⁴¹² Ulbe Bosma, *The World of Sugar: How the Sweet Stuff Transformed Our Politics, Health, and Environment over 2,000 Years* (Harvard University Press, 2023), p. 307.

⁴¹³ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 307.

Origins

The story of sugar begins on the island that is now known as New Guinea, on the opposite side of the world to the New World plantations that would become strongly associated with sugar. Mintz writes that

The sugar cane (*Saccharum officinarum* L.) was first domesticated in New Guinea, and very anciently. The botanists Antoinevague and Brandes believe that there were three diffusions of sugar cane from New Guinea, the first taking place around 1000 B.C. Perhaps two thousand years later, the cane was carried to the Philippines and India, and possibly to Indonesia⁴¹⁴

The botanical properties of sugar cane provide clues as to how it became so prolific. Mintz writes that sugar cane is ‘a large grass of the family Gramineae’ in which there are six distinct species, though *Saccharum officinarum* stands as by far the most cultivated.⁴¹⁵ The exact method of propagation is noted by Mintz, writing:

Cane is propagated asexually from cuttings of the stem having at least one bud. Once planted, the cane sprouts and with adequate heat and moisture may grow an inch a day for six weeks. It becomes ripe—and reaches the optimum condition for extraction—in a dry season after anywhere from nine to eighteen months. “Ratoon” cane, grown from the stubble of the preceding crop without replanting, is normally cut about every twelve

⁴¹⁴ Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin Books, 1986), p. 19.

⁴¹⁵ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 21.

months. Seed cane cuttings in the tropics take longer to reach maturity. In all cases cane must be cut when ready so as not to lose its juice or the proportion of sucrose in this juice; and once it is cut, the juice must be rapidly extracted to avoid rot, desiccation, inversion, or fermentation.⁴¹⁶

This final point, sugar cane's propensity for decay, would become a crucial problem in the later mass production on New World plantations. Unlike tobacco, by its very nature sugar had to be produced at speed. Just a few hours could turn a bumper crop of sugar cane into a pile of rotting stalks. The need for speed contributed to the development of the plantation, merging the agricultural field with the factory in the interests of dramatically increased productivity, at the expense of human dignity.

Although as a crop sugar cane is fast growing, it has little defence to the cold. Even relatively slight changes in temperature can decimate the plant's yield. Galloway writes that

Climate strongly determines where sugar cane can be successfully cultivated. It is native to the humid tropics and demands an abundance of heat and water the year round for the best results. The threshold for satisfactory growth is 21°C, but higher temperatures between 27°C and 38°C are preferable. Below 21°C the rate of growth is greatly reduced and none at all occurs below 11°C to 13°C, the precise point depending on the variety of cane. In cold weather cane will not germinate.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 21.

⁴¹⁷ J. H. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from Its Origins to 1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 14.

Sugar cane not only has a poor shelf-life when harvested, but also demands a narrow band of optimal conditions to realise its maximum potential. Again, the intrinsic traits of the crop helped to shape the nature of the sugar plantations. The need for a tropical climate provided a strong incentive for colonial exploitation.

The sugar trade and westward expansion

From Asia, sugar turned westward toward the Middle East and, later, the Mediterranean. Beginning this move, sugar cane first arrived in Egypt during the ninth century, becoming a major sugar exporter to Europe by the 13th century.⁴¹⁸ Sugar production in this period was driven by its status as a luxury commodity, preceding the intensive plantation agriculture that would later come to redefine sugar as a common necessity. As Mintz writes,

Sugar making, which in Egypt may have preceded the Arab conquest, spread in the Mediterranean basin after that conquest. In Sicily, Cyprus, Malta, briefly in Rhodes, much of the Maghrib (especially in Morocco), and Spain itself (especially on its south coast), the Arabs introduced the sugar cane, its cultivation, the art of sugar making, and a taste for this different sweetness.⁴¹⁹

The production of sugar in the Middle East and the Mediterranean reflects the growing power and wealth found further westward. As Europe developed, more wealthy consumers were able to afford the luxuries provided by the Mediterranean and Egyptian sugar producers.

⁴¹⁸ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. vii.

⁴¹⁹ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 23.

Like any other consumable, the availability of sugar was limited by the stark reality of relatively limited supply. This is expanded upon by Galloway, asserting that

The history of the use of cane sugar in the western world since the Middle Ages is well documented in trade statistics, in inventories of the possessions of the well-to-do and in cookery books. Returning Crusaders brought news of cane sugar to the nobility of northern Europe and they began to import it to use both as a medicine and as a rare costly additive to food and drink.⁴²⁰

As Mintz notes, ‘Only after the eighth century was sugar known and consumed in Europe itself; and only from that same time do references to cane growing and sugar making around the eastern Mediterranean begin to appear’.⁴²¹

Before the colonisation of the New World, the Mediterranean was Europe’s main supply of sugar. Focusing on European consumption, Mintz writes that

From the Mediterranean basin, sugar was supplied to North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe for many centuries. Production there ceased only when production in New World colonies became dominant, after the late sixteenth century. During the Mediterranean epoch, western Europe very slowly became accustomed to sugar. From the Mediterranean, the industry then shifted to the Atlantic islands of Spain and Portugal, including Madeira, the Canaries, and São Tomé; but this relatively brief phase came to an end when the

⁴²⁰ J. H. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from Its Origins to 1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 5.

⁴²¹ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 23.

American industries began to grow.⁴²²

The American and Caribbean sugar plantations had a crucial advantage over those found in the Mediterranean: the supply of enslaved labour. The distance provided by the Atlantic Ocean prevented any feasible return for those who were enslaved.

Crucially, sugar cane remained mobile, with Spain and Portugal transferring the crop and their methods for propagating it to their Atlantic islands. The first of these sugar islands was Madeira, which was established as a sugar island in 1419.⁴²³ According to Schwartz, ‘The techniques were, for the most part, common to all the sugar-producing regions’.⁴²⁴ Becoming established on the Eastern side of the Atlantic, sugar cane was primed to be transplanted across the ocean. Within these early plantations were clues to their eventual dominance. Schwartz contends that

the early sugar industries were harbingers of the future, and contained the seeds of more “modern” forms of economic organization yet unborn. They demonstrated the adaptability of traditional agrarian practices and archaic forms of labor to a new kind of organization that provided the basis for a dynamic, if often destructive, political economy.⁴²⁵

The development of sugar plantations in the Mediterranean, the Canary Islands, and eventually the

⁴²² Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 24.

⁴²³ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. vii.

⁴²⁴ Stuart B. Schwartz, *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 13.

⁴²⁵ Schwartz, *Tropical Babels*, pp. 20-21.

New World between 1450 and 1680 marked the simultaneous development of a new economy. Schwartz writes that ‘The sugar mill, with its attendant labor force of slaves and its potential to generate great wealth for some by the oppression of many, came to symbolize the emerging Atlantic system’.⁴²⁶ This new system for commodity production and trade had, as its foundation, systemic coercion, exploitation, and wealth extraction. Examining the economic development aspects of sugar history, Higman argues for ‘the determinative role attributed to sugar’, in the context of the ‘sugar revolution’.⁴²⁷ By examining the transformative impact of sugar and its influence on the Atlantic economy, Higman suggests that the crop laid the foundations for the industrial revolution, noting that ‘In the larger history of the Atlantic economy, the sugar revolution marks a genuine historical discontinuity, the significance of which remains to be fully explored and interpreted’.⁴²⁸ Further, Higman writes that

It was sugar above all that made vast profits for its capitalists, consumed enormous numbers of enslaved people, created plantation economies and slave societies, and shaped the modern world in ways other crops and commodities could barely approach. Approximately two-thirds of all the people carried in the slave trade from Africa to the New World went to sugar colonies. It did not have to be that way. Sugar might have been much less prominent on the world stage, produced by the much lamented yeomanry, with different consequences.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ Schwartz, *Tropical Babels*, p. 21.

⁴²⁷ B. W. Higman ‘The Sugar Revolution’, *The Economic History Review*, 53.2 (2000), p. 230.

⁴²⁸ Higman ‘The Sugar Revolution’, *The Economic History Review*, 53.2 (2000), p. 232.

⁴²⁹ Higman ‘The Sugar Revolution’, p. 229.

However, the promise of a reliable supply of sugar—literally and figuratively whitened and distanced from the means of its production—created perverse incentives toward transatlantic exploitation. Sugar, and other commodity crops like it, led to rampant colonisation of the Americas and the Caribbean. It is the exploitative production of sugar that is often left out of more Eurocentric texts featuring it as a commodity. Typically, the consumption of sugar is related instead to delicious cooked confections as signifiers of wealth and providers of comfort.

Sugar and colonialism

Sugar's journey from the Old World to the New was finally completed by Christopher Columbus, forming a major part of the Columbian Exchange of plants and animals. Mintz notes that

Sugar cane was first carried to the New World by Columbus on his second voyage, in 1493; he brought it there from the Spanish Canary Islands. Cane was first grown in the New World in Santo Domingo; it was from that point that sugar was first shipped back to Europe, beginning around 1516. Santo Domingo's pristine sugar industry was worked by enslaved Africans, the first slaves having been imported there soon after the sugar cane.⁴³⁰

The colonisation of the Caribbean marked the beginning of sugar's rise as a mass-produced commodity. Frank Trentmann notes that 'From the late seventeenth century, commerce started shifting towards the Atlantic world' in a move that was in part due to the production of refined sugar in the Caribbean and its consumption in Europe.⁴³¹

⁴³⁰ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 32.

⁴³¹ Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, p. 26.

As I note in Chapter Six, sugar production on the island of Saint Domingue (later Haiti) proved pivotal in the economic exploitation of the wider Caribbean, and the turn against the transatlantic slave trade there in 1791.⁴³² Further, as Bosma writes, ‘When the people rioted in Paris in 1792, it is well known that they were protesting against the doubling of the sugar prices, which heavily affected their daily lives’.⁴³³ With increasing abundance, sugar transformed from a luxury into a necessity in Europe. On the other side of the Atlantic, the system imposed by planters would ultimately forge entire societies around the plantation, forming new cultures with both forced and unforced diaspora.

Schwartz’s work traces ‘The transference of sugarcane cultivation and sugar production from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic islands in the fifteenth century and then to the Americas in the sixteenth century’ charting its complex rise as a global commodity.⁴³⁴ Bosma makes a similar point, noting the development of sugar plantations in the Atlantic based on previous Mediterranean models:

The real rupture between the Mediterranean and Atlantic systems of sugar production came with African slavery. Slavery remained the exception rather than the rule at Mediterranean estates, even after waves of the Plague that caused severe labor shortages. After the devastating ninth-century rebellion by thousands of enslaved East Africans who toiled in the cane fields and maintained the irrigation works of the Euphrates Delta, the risks of

⁴³² Laurent Dubois’s *Avengers of the New World* provides an in-depth analysis of the Haitian revolution and its impacts.

⁴³³ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, pp. 41-42.

⁴³⁴ Schwartz, *Tropical Babels*, p. 1.

putting large groups of enslaved people in the cane fields had become all too obvious.⁴³⁵

However, by removing people from their countries of origin and transporting them across the Atlantic escape became almost impossible. The structure of the plantation formed an open-air prison for enslaved Africans and their decedents.

The plantation

Plantation history is ingrained into the national histories of what were formerly the great Western superpowers. Plantations themselves are complex structures that straddle definitions and defy easy categorisation. My work runs parallel to Clukey and Wells, whose work seeks to ‘understand how “plantation” is a larger word than it may have seemed previously, and how it represents a force not marginal but rather central to the concept of modernity’.⁴³⁶ In their analysis, Clukey and Wells place plantations within the context of global capitalism. They further contend that the systems developed in the New World for provision of commodities in the Old helped shape the modern global economy, entrenching both wealth and inequality based on racial hierarchies. Plantations are categorised as ‘Simultaneously old and new, fabricated and natural, feudal and capitalist, local and global, the plantation is a locus of modern contradictions’.⁴³⁷ This interconnected web of definitions marks the plantation as a progenitor of the modern capitalist world economy. Spurring both international trade and the transformation of commodities from luxury goods into staples, plantations were the result of international cooperation and domination.

⁴³⁵ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 33.

⁴³⁶ Amy Clukey, and Jeremy Wells, ‘Introduction: Plantation Modernity’, *The Global South*, 10.2 (2016), p. 3.

⁴³⁷ Clukey and Wells, ‘Introduction: Plantation Modernity’, p. 7.

Integral to the plantation system, the institution of slavery served as the human engine by which they operated. As Simonsen writes, ‘an understanding of the roots and nature of slavery can contribute to an understanding of modernity. Without an understanding of the cultural roots and hybrid cultures of the sugar plantations, it is impossible to understand the development of the countries they write about’.⁴³⁸ Without the labour of enslaved men and women, sugar as a commodity would have remained a luxury spice produced in relatively small quantities. Instead, the West’s insatiable addiction to sucrose led to a system of international exchange that spanned over 300 years. The end of this system was uneven, spread throughout the nineteenth century but with continuing effects into the present day. Simonson notes that ‘England abolished slavery in her Caribbean colonies in the early 1830s; France did the same in 1848. Cuba did not abolish slavery until 1886, and in Brazil it took until 1888’.⁴³⁹ The slow unravelling of the global trade in enslaved workers was, in part, the result of a system of production that required the coercion of human labour. Sugar, with its need for a swift processing via dangerous methods, maintained its systems of production even after Abolition.

Incentives created by supply and demand fuelled the transatlantic trade in sugar. As well as ever greater supply, the metropole’s continued addiction to sweetness served as a warped justification for continued abuses. Conversely, greater supply allowed the addictive commodity to reach ever greater numbers of people. Mintz succinctly encapsulates the history of sugar as a consumable in England, though the broad facts are the same across the European metropolises:

⁴³⁸ Karen-Margrethe Simonsen, ‘Opening Remarks’, in *Sugar and Modernity in Latin America*, ed. by Vinicius De Carvalho and others (Aarhus University Press, 2014), p. 139.

⁴³⁹ Simonsen, ‘Opening Remarks’, p. 138.

In 1000 A.D., few Europeans knew of the existence of sucrose, or cane sugar [...] by 1650, in England the nobility and the wealthy had become inveterate sugar eaters [...] By no later than 1800, sugar had become a necessity—albeit a costly and rare one—in the diet of every English person; by 1900, it was supplying nearly one-fifth of the calories in the English diet.⁴⁴⁰

On a transatlantic scale, the forced migration of enslaved Africans formed a central pillar of the plantation system of commodity production. Mintz notes that the African slaves constituted ‘a “false commodity” because a human being is not an object, even when treated as one’.⁴⁴¹ The transatlantic slave trade formed a circular economy of exploitation in which ‘products were shipped to Africa; by their labor power, wealth was created in the Americas. The wealth they created mostly returned to Britain; the products they made were consumed in Britain; and the products made by Britons—cloth, tools, torture instruments—were consumed by slaves who were themselves consumed in the creation of wealth’.⁴⁴² This created a cycle which would prove difficult to break, changing cultures on all sides of the transatlantic triangle. Commodities and enslaved labour were consumed, enriching the metropolises at the expense of those labouring in the colonies.

The imposition of colonial power affects both the coloniser and the colonised. Gikandi writes that ‘Generations of Caribbean writers and intellectuals have had to bear the burden of modern European history and its ideologies as that history was initiated by the “discovery” and

⁴⁴⁰ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 6.

⁴⁴¹ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 43.

⁴⁴² Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 43.

then transformed, shaped, and even distorted by subsequent events and institutions such as the plantation system and the colonial condition'.⁴⁴³ The Columbian perspective of history—one in which the Old World was a civilising influence over the New—is challenged by histories of the plantation and the human cruelty that they instituted. Current conceptions of modernism engage directly with post-colonial thought and the inclusion of non-Western perspectives of modernity. By considering plantation history and its relationship to modernist texts, writers from sites of colonisation therefore have their conception of modernity acknowledged. Gikandi articulates this view of differing perspectives, writing that 'modernity and modernism in the Caribbean pose a set of questions different from that raised in an Anglo-American context'.⁴⁴⁴ This extends from the Caribbean to other sites of modernity outside of the urban centres. Ortiz, Rêgo, and Toomer all articulate the different ways in which commodity production complicates notions of modernity by offering narratives that incorporate the structures of the plantations. Gikandi's contention that 'Caribbean writers cannot adopt the history and culture of European modernism' whilst simultaneously being unable to 'escape from it because it has overdetermined Caribbean cultures in many ways' shows a need to explore alternative modernisms in relation to their colonial histories.⁴⁴⁵

Regarding Édouard Glissant, Murdoch posits that 'The plantation thus became the crucible of Caribbean creole cultural formation, the product of contact between English, French,

⁴⁴³ Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 3.

⁴⁴⁴ Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo*, p. 4.

⁴⁴⁵ Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo*, p. 3.

Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and West African languages, cultures, and peoples'.⁴⁴⁶ Covered in my tobacco chapter on Ortiz, this transcultural identity is reflected in *Cuban Counterpoint* with Ortiz showing Cuba's modern national identity to be intimately tied to new cultural production forged from a multitude of colonial influences. Glissant himself identifies the 'plantation system' as a distinct 'civilizational region' which is 'composed of the West Indies and the Caribbean, the Caribbean coast of Latin America [...] the Guyanas, the northeastern part of Brazil, and part of the southern United States'.⁴⁴⁷ This idea of a civilisational region marks a departure from Western conceptualisations of what modernity signifies and is signified by, as well as making a new way of defining formerly colonised nations. The transculturation concept developed and promulgated by Ortiz partially reflects the idea of a civilisational region, with a new culture born of diverse migrations, both forced and unforced, from across the globe. Commodity history becomes a shared thread between each of these distinct areas, sharing their method of production.

Conditions on the sugar plantations

It would be impossible to discuss sugar as a modern commodity without also discussing its history of violence against the plantation labourers who produced it. Mathieson's 1926 history of slavery provides important context to the twentieth-century perspective of the plantation system and its legacy. Mathieson writes that 'Those who fed the mill with canes were liable, especially when tired or half-asleep, to have their fingers caught between the rollers. A hatchet was kept in readiness

⁴⁴⁶ H. Adlai Murdoch, 'Édouard Glissant's Creolized World Vision: From Resistance and Relation to "Opacité"', *Callaloo*, 36.4 (2013), 875–89.

⁴⁴⁷ Édouard Glissant, 'Creolization in the Making of the Americas', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 54.1/2 (2008), p. 81.

to sever the arm, which in such cases was always drawn in; and this no doubt explains the number of maimed watchmen'.⁴⁴⁸ Away from the mill, the boilermen bore different but not lesser risks. They were forced to stand 'barefoot for hours on the stones or hard ground and without seats for their intermissions of duty, they frequently developed "disorders of the legs." The ladle suspended on a pole which transferred the sugar from one cauldron to another was "in itself particularly heavy"; and, as the strainers were placed at a considerable height above the cauldrons, it had to be raised as well as swung'.⁴⁴⁹ In comparison to the tobacco farms, sugar plantations were yet more brutal, exploitative, and cruel. The process by which sugar cane was processed into its granulated commercial form was extremely labour intensive, with alarmingly high rates of injury and mortality. The entire sugar production industry was initially predicated upon having a near-inexhaustible supply of enslaved labourers, with no hope of liberation, equitable treatment, or social mobility. Disturbingly, slavery and modernity are not contradictory terms.⁴⁵⁰ Simonson writes that

Especially in the sugar industry, slavery was organized according to a modern economic rationality and was even seen as a locomotive of modernity. Despite the inherent racism and the feudal, paternalistic structure of many sugar mills, these mills became the most modern industries not only in America but in the world.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸ William Law Mathieson, *British Slavery and Its Abolition, 1823-1838* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1926), p. 64.

⁴⁴⁹ Mathieson, *British Slavery and Its Abolition, 1823-1838*, p. 64.

⁴⁵⁰ Postcolonial scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Walter D. Mignolo, Saidiya Hartman, and Walter Rodney—amongst others—all explore the intersection between modernity and colonialism.

⁴⁵¹ Karen-Margrethe Simonsen, 'Opening Remarks', p. 137.

Slavery laid the foundations for the modern world, forming the basis for international trade and capitalist division of labour. Although by the twentieth century slavery had been abolished, the economic inequality and societal scars left by racialised violence weighs heavily on authors of the period in areas where plantations were instituted, building new concepts of identity from imposed systems of domination and extraction.

Plantations as Pan-Atlantic structures

Plantations built in Caribbean and American colonies ensured that sugar could be readily supplied to the metropolises in ever greater quantities. Bosma notes that ‘Between half and two-thirds of the 12.5 million Africans shipped across the Atlantic Ocean in the course of the slave trade were destined for sugar plantations’.⁴⁵² Sugar cane, itself transplanted from New Guinea to new lands, had a similar effect on the people who cultivated it. The importance of slavery to sugar production continued through to the late nineteenth century, so much so that ‘By the late 1860s, when Karl Marx was writing his monumental *Capital*, half of the sugar consumed by the industrial proletariat in Europe and North America was produced by enslaved people’.⁴⁵³ Throughout the nineteenth century new productive spaces were opened for exploitation. As Tomich notes on the restructuring of the Atlantic economy:

The lower Mississippi valley, the broad prairie (llanura) of western Cuba, and Brazil’s Paraíba Valley emerged as new zones of plantation production on the basis of slave labor.

The creation of these zones—the fateful combination of plantation monoculture, mass

⁴⁵² Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 2.

⁴⁵³ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 2.

slavery, and the reordering and transformation of environments—was not simply the result of choices made by local or regional elites. Rather, these zones were the outcome of the complex interaction of world-economic and local relations and processes. Each represents a distinct response to the forces restructuring the nineteenth-century world-economy.⁴⁵⁴

The interaction between local and global processes is a recurring theme in the literature I include in relation to this history. Much like the texts I explore, the plantation structure works on local, national, international and global scales, with impacts across the Atlantic world.

Bosma notes the differing modes of consumption for sugar, writing that the consumption of refined sugar versus raw sugar cane is a key indicator of a wealth and class divide.

At the end of the nineteenth century, sugar emerged as an issue of national or political identity, also because of the changing modes of production and consumption expressing themselves in contested relations between farms and factories, between traditional sugars and factories, and between rural and urban consumption. White centrifugal sugar became the standard for urban consumption, whereas raw sugars continued to be widely consumed in the countryside, at that time the residence of most of the world's population.⁴⁵⁵

White, refined sugar came to represent an everyday luxury with a blanched history. Furthermore, Bosma raises a distinction that I will examine further in Chapter Six 'Sweet Temptations: The Role of Confectionery in Modernist Literature', that between raw and cooked sugar. As sugar is refined it becomes unrecognisable, and a signifier of wealth and class, far removed from the grass from

⁴⁵⁴ Dale W. Tomich and others, *Reconstructing the Landscapes of Slavery*, p. 13.

⁴⁵⁵ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 175.

which it is extracted. Cooked centrifugal sugar becomes as much a product of international trade and industrialised modernity than agriculture.

Mass production

On the industrialisation of the plantation, Higman writes that ‘The sugar revolution has come to be placed at the symbolic centre of the “consumer revolution” and at the heart of European dietary transformation associated with the industrial revolution’.⁴⁵⁶ Sugar’s role in the development of industrial capitalism is stark. As Ayala notes, ‘[The sugar refiners] were among the pioneers of the “industrial trusts” of the late nineteenth century and of the modern corporation as we now know it’.⁴⁵⁷ This corporate culture, in part pioneered by sugar, would come to permeate the industrial aspects of twentieth-century life. Furthermore, legacy of slavery continued to remain a part of the fabric of sugar production. Ayala contends that

In regions where the new sugar barons encountered established plantation systems, the transition was complex and the resulting product was a hybrid system in which the descendants of the old planter class became independent contract farmers delivering cane to the mills and the descendants of the slaves became a permanent agricultural proletariat.⁴⁵⁸

Eastern Cuba proves a notable exception to this development in the production of sugar, where

⁴⁵⁶ Higman ‘The Sugar Revolution’, p. 226.

⁴⁵⁷ César J. Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom: The Plantation Economy of the Spanish Caribbean, 1898-1934*, UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE (The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 3.

⁴⁵⁸ Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom*, p. 3.

‘corporate plantations achieved nearly universal control of land resources and, lacking a resident agricultural proletariat, they resorted to the importation of immigrant workers at harvest time’.⁴⁵⁹ As I will discuss in Chapter Five on Haiti, many of these workers travelled from other Caribbean sugar islands, bringing their expertise and experiences with them.

The continued importance of slavery in the production of sugar can be explained by a blend of Free Trade doctrine and uneven emancipation around the Atlantic. Britain banned the slave trade in its colonies in 1807, with the rest of Europe following suit by 1820.⁴⁶⁰ However, although the slave trade was banned within European empires, the practice still continued outside the bounds of their direct control. According to Bosma:

[Britain] struggled to contain the Atlantic slave trade in Cuba and Brazil. Cuba emerged as the world’s largest sugar exporter through massive importation of enslaved Africans. In spite of heroic slave resistance and unstinting efforts by abolitionists, slavery continued to dominate in the cane fields of the Americas.⁴⁶¹

Despite growing resistance against slavery in the nineteenth century, sugar continued to be produced with exploitative practices. The justification proved to be continued economic development. Bosma writes further that, after the European abolition of slavery,

Cuba and Java emerged as giant cane sugar exporters, accounting for almost half of the world’s cane sugar exports between the 1860s and 1920s. Both pulled off a tropical

⁴⁵⁹ Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁶⁰ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 123.

⁴⁶¹ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 123.

industrial revolution that would have been impossible without slavery or forced labor.⁴⁶²

This tropical industrial revolution helped to set the stage for the independence movements that would sweep the Caribbean in the early twentieth century. I will now turn to texts by Fernando Ortiz, José Lins Do Rêgo, and Jacques Roumain to explore how Caribbean and South American authors responded to this economic, social and cultural legacy.

⁴⁶² Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 123.

4 Colonial Legacies: Plantations in American and Caribbean Literature

The other side to Ortiz's commodity treatise, sugar, features strongly in the modernist literatures of the New World. This shared experience forms links between texts which are otherwise disparate. Here, I will return to Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint*, this time placing the text's references to the sugar industry in conversation with the first three novels of José Lins Do Rêgo's *Sugar Cane Cycle* (1932-1935) and Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923). All three texts use the sugar plantation as a site of modern experience that reckon with the legacies of slavery in their respective nations: Cuba, Brazil, and the U.S. South. They differ substantially in form, offering diverse approaches to the sugar industry's violent history. Following cane's introduction to the new world, refined sugar as a commodity became white gold, the basis for economies on both a regional and global scale.

***Cuban Counterpoint*: sugar and the Cuban economy**

In my tobacco section chapter on Ortiz I explored historical and cultural aspects of tobacco in *Cuban Counterpoint*. Now, I will turn to Ortiz's perspective on politics and the economy in relation to the sugar industry. As a commodity export-based economy, Cuba was heavily reliant on tobacco and sugar. However, of the two, Ortiz demonstrates far more affection for the native tobacco leaf over the invasive sugar cane. The cane is perceived as being inextricably tied to imperial extraction, with foreign ownership of plantations causing economic exploitation and inescapable poverty. Regarding the sugar trade, Argote-Freyre writes that

Cuba's economy was in rapid freefall throughout the 1920s with the collapse of the world sugar market. In an effort to boost the price on the world market, Machado curtailed exports

and discouraged further sugar cultivation with the hopes of reducing worldwide supply.⁴⁶³

Much like the policy of a modern OPEC petrostate, Machado sought to control the price of sugar with constrictions on supply. Highly analogous to the events of Warren's *Night Rider*, sugar as a multinational commodity could not be so easily controlled. The export restrictions were a disaster. Argote-Freyre notes that

Cuban sugar production fell from 5 million tons in 1925 to 1.5 million by 1933. The policy increased unemployment among agricultural workers and led to growing discontent as wages were reduced by 75 percent.⁴⁶⁴

As a result, 'Cuban exports went down from a value of \$353 million in 1925 to \$80 million in 1932'.⁴⁶⁵ Without adequate national income, Cuba's economy was in a hopeless spiral of high unemployment, low government spending, and violent political clashes leading to the fall of the Machado regime in 1933 and the installation of the short-lived Ramón Grau San Martín government.

Central to Cuba's political turmoil of the 1920s and 30s is the dominant role that sugar played in the national economy. Carr contends that 'Sugar workers were at the center of the mobilizations that helped to shape political outcomes during the second half of 1933'.⁴⁶⁶ Between

⁴⁶³ Frank Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista: From Revolutionary to Strongman*, 2 vols (Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 37.

⁴⁶⁴ Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista*, p. 37.

⁴⁶⁵ Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista*, p. 37.

⁴⁶⁶ Barry Carr, 'Identity, Class, and Nation: Black Immigrant Workers, Cuban Communism, and the Sugar Insurgency, 1925-1934', *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 78.1 (1998), pp. 84-85.

August and October 1933—sugar harvesting season—‘field and mill workers seized 36 sugar mills and estates, and in a number of cases the occupations adopted the form of worker and peasant councils, or soviets’.⁴⁶⁷ These occupations both reflected and spurred more radical solutions to Cuba’s political and economic problems. Nonetheless, influence from the U.S. proved extremely difficult to remove. Carr writes that ‘the combination of an aggressively hostile and interventionist United States government in alliance with the army strongman, Fulgencio Batista, secured the collapse of the Grau administration in the middle of January 1934’ after just 100 days in office.⁴⁶⁸ It was within this fraught political and economic environment that Ortiz sought to define the Cuban national identity.

Sugar plantations and Cuban modernity

In writing *Cuban Counterpoint* as a text that spans different forms—sociology, anthropology, ethnography, economics, history, and literature—Ortiz crafts a work that works formally as an experimental modernist text that reflects the Cuban experience of the twentieth century. It is therefore no surprise that the sugar plantation forms one of the two central pillars of Ortiz’s text. Clukey and Wells reflect the position that Ortiz advanced decades previously, writing that ‘As both a real-world mode of economic production and an imagined space within mass culture, the plantation has long been both a central engine of transnational modernity and the staging ground for its myriad conflicts, clashes, and contradictions’.⁴⁶⁹ This idea is related to, but distinct from, Ortiz’s notion of transculturation. Whilst Ortiz is concerned predominantly with the formation of

⁴⁶⁷ Carr, ‘Identity, Class, and Nation’, pp. 84-85.

⁴⁶⁸ Carr, ‘Identity, Class, and Nation’, p. 84.

⁴⁶⁹ Clukey and Wells, ‘Introduction: Plantation Modernity’, p. 6.

national Cuban identity as a result of transcultural formation, Clukey and Wells show the international links formed through a shared history of plantation commodity production.

Concerning Cuban cultural production, Ortiz writes that the ‘urgent agricultural-chemical nature of the sugar industry has been the fundamental factor in all the demographic and social evolution of Cuba’.⁴⁷⁰ Industrial production of refined sugar, available far before the comparable invention of the Bonsack cigarette rolling machine, meant far greater mass production of sugar as a commercial product. Modern industrialisation had a different impact on colonies compared to the European metropolises, though development in areas of commodity production helped to define modern life in the metropolises. If modern capitalism is dominated by machines and the commodities they produce, sugar becomes the exemplary commodity. Ortiz notes that ‘There can be no manufacture of sugar without machinery, without milling apparatus to grind the cane and get out its sweet juice, from which saccharose is obtained’.⁴⁷¹ The machines of the colonial plantation needed to process the cane include ‘a titanic system of mills, wheels, cogs, pumps, evaporating-pans, boilers, and ovens, powered by water, steam, or electricity’, emphasising that ‘Sugar is made by man and power. Tobacco is the voluntary offering of nature’.⁴⁷² Contrasting the two commodities in this way, Ortiz highlights how sugar and tobacco differed greatly in their modes of production. Rather than a natural gift, sugar requires human labour combined with domination of nature and landscapes to transform the product into a commodity. It is this aspect of the transformation of sugar cane into refined sugar that led to the

⁴⁷⁰ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 34.

⁴⁷¹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 48.

⁴⁷² Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 49.

exploitative practices on the plantation being imprinted onto a burgeoning global capitalism. Processing requires development and innovation, though the structure of the plantation results in investment diverted only towards further capital accumulation and extraction.

Ortiz notes that the centrals (the centre of the plantation structure and where the sugar was processed) led to economic development with the plantation at its centre. For example, because of the economic activity on the island of Cuba, trains were introduced before the Spanish metropole, with Ortiz noting that ‘Railways were first introduced into Cuba in 1837, before Spain had them’.⁴⁷³ By the twentieth century, ‘These Cyclopean machines and those great tentacles of railways that have turned the centrals into monstrous iron octopuses have created the demand for more and more land to feed the insatiable voracity of the mills with canefields, pasture land, and woodland’.⁴⁷⁴ The plantation, to meet the demand from beyond Cuba’s borders, expands to take ever more space. In this way the plantation mimics the city space as a signifier of capital and wealth accumulation. As a man-made structure, the plantation’s purpose is to extract wealth from the combination of sugar cane produce, human labour, and complex machinery. Ortiz goes further in his description, writing that

The latifundium is only the territorial base, the visible expression of this. The central is vertebrated by an economic and legal structure that combines masses of land, masses of machinery, masses of men, and masses of money, all in proportion to the integral scope of

⁴⁷³ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 50.

⁴⁷⁴ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, pp. 51-52.

the huge organism for sugar production.⁴⁷⁵

Land, labour, and capital are all combined in the plantation to form a commodity producing behemoth powered by international networks of trade and forced human labour. Plantations are not only their infrastructure, but also the impact they have upon human states of mind and behaviour.

In *Cuban Counterpoint* the commodities themselves reflect the racist structures that enable commodity production. Ortiz uses tobacco and sugar as a metaphor for white supremacy and the privilege conferred upon the predominantly white ruling class:

Tobacco does not change the color of its race. Sugar changes its coloring; it is born brown and whitens itself; at first it is a syrupy mulatto and in this state pleases the common taste; then it is bleached and refined until it can pass for white, travel all over the world, reach all mouths, and bring a better price, climbing to the top of the social ladder.⁴⁷⁶

To the Cubans, according to Ortiz, tobacco is an almost artisan product. It is fashioned into cigars, each with their own character and style. In contrast, ‘As the taste of all refined sugars taste the same, they always have to be taken with something that will give them flavor’.⁴⁷⁷ Rather than a product requiring individual cultivation, sugar is the result of monoculture and intense processing to create a homogeneous commodity. The protean sugar presents in a multitude of forms, becoming entirely unrecognisable from the grass it once was. As Ortiz writes, ‘From the time the

⁴⁷⁵ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 52.

⁴⁷⁶ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 9.

⁴⁷⁷ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 23.

Arabs with the alchemy brought “*alçucar*,” as it was still called in the royal decrees having to do with America, into our Western civilisation, it has been used in syrups, frosting, icings, cakes, candy, always with other flavors added to it’.⁴⁷⁸ Aware of the longer history of sugar in the Old World, Ortiz shows the nascent sugar addiction present before the creation of the New World plantation system. However, limits to supply and trade served as an important restriction on Old World appetites. No longer restrained by these limits, the human addiction to sugar led to the creation of colonies that would match supply with almost unlimited demand.

As a mechanised capitalist structure, sugar plantations relied heavily upon timekeeping. Specifically, the refinement of sugarcane demands speed in order to prevent rot and degradation:

Cut cane begins to ferment and rot in a few days. The operations of cutting, hauling, grinding, clarification, filtration, evaporation, and crystallization must theoretically be carried out one after the other, but without interruption; nearly all of them are going on at the same time in the mill. While one field of cane is being cut, others are being converted into sacks of sugar. And all at top speed. From the time the machete fells the cane until the receptacle of the sugar is closed, there is only a short lapse, a few hours.⁴⁷⁹

As a crop, sugarcane demands speed. It grows quickly, and once harvested needs to be processed almost immediately. This intensive mode of farming informed how consumer capitalism would develop; for supply to meet demand, ever greater improvements in productivity would have to be

⁴⁷⁸ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 23.

⁴⁷⁹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 33.

made.

An innovation essential for industrialised production was accurate and synchronised timekeeping. For Ortiz, the sugar plantation's imposition of time markers is indicative of the Old World domination of the New:

The bell that put all social life on an exact schedule as it pealed the four canonical hours in the convents of the Middle Ages, and that later marked the watches on the ships sailing to the Indies, introduced the chronometry of work into America, signalling the beginning and end of work for the slaves on the sugar plantations.⁴⁸⁰

Ways of keeping time are attributed here to Western domination. Time becomes a class-based tool with which to control the workers. Rather than spaces separated from urban modernity, the cane-field and the plantation both run by similar rules that governed other areas of an increasingly industrialised world. According to Ortiz, it is the time demanded by commodity production that provides a dreadful incentive for enslaved labour and inhumane working practices:

The rapidity with which the cane must be ground after cutting and milled in an unavoidably brief space of time gave rise to the need for having on hand plenty of cheap, stable, and available labor for work that is irregular and seasonal.⁴⁸¹

It is extremely difficult to find labourers that will willingly harvest cane and process the raw material into a refined commodity for export. The hours are long, the injury rate high, the work

⁴⁸⁰ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 36.

⁴⁸¹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 33.

extremely hard. The profits to be gleaned from sugar justified the means by which it was won, with scant regard for the labourers' working conditions. These conditions, imposed by the nature of the commodity, ensured that conditions on the sugar plantations were broadly similar across the New World.

José Lins Do Rêgo, the *Sugar Cane Cycle* and the Brazilian plantation

José Lins Do Rêgo's work shows the profound changes that occurred on the twentieth-century plantation. His texts, of which I will discuss three here, are told from the perspective of Carlos, the heir of the Santa Rosa plantation and the narrator of the novels. Rêgo's *Sugar Cane Cycle*, of which the novels are a part, is loosely based upon his own experience growing up on a Brazilian plantation and the changing nature of the Northeastern sugar culture. I will discuss the novels' relationship with themes of class struggle, race, and modernisation. In a similar vein to the work of Ortiz on Cuba, Kenyon observes that 'As a regional study, Jose Lins do Rêgo's sugar-cane cycle achieved a nation-wide reputation, and has therefore contributed to Brazilian cultural unity and nationalism'.⁴⁸² Sugar and its production played an essential role in the development of Brazil; first as a colony, then as an independent nation. Specifically, Rêgo focusses the narrative of the *Sugar Cane Cycle* on the experience of advancing capitalist modernity from the perspective of the plantation-owning class, and the paternalistic social structure that the owning class perpetuated. Rêgo's work is more complex than a straightforward denunciation of the plantation system. Instead, Rêgo's critique shows the flaws of the system through various perspectives throughout the *Sugar Cane Cycle*, including those of the plantation owners in the first text. In parsing the

⁴⁸² Kenyon, 'The Sugar-Cane Cycle of Jose Lins Do Rêgo', pp. 299-300.

different systems of commodity production, Rêgo's work becomes a holistic view of sugar as a pervasive controller of human behaviour.

Rêgo's *Sugar Cane Cycle*: author and text

Part of a group of Brazilian modernists—amongst them, José Américo de Almeida, Jorge Amado, Rachel de Queiroz, and Graciliano Ramos—Rêgo set out to explore the nature of modern Brazilian identity. Rêgo became so intertwined with the movement that '[his] death in 1957 was regarded by many critics as marking the end of the so-called "Modernist novel," which dealt with the Brazilian Northeast' and the condition of Brazilian society more generally.⁴⁸³ As the driving force behind the Brazilian economy sugar plays a central role in Rêgo's work. Taking a similar approach to Robert Penn Warren and his treatment of the Southern tobacco industry in *Night Rider*, Rêgo charts the profound impact of sugar production on twentieth-century Brazil. *Plantation Boy* (1932) serves as the first text in Rêgo's *Sugar Cane Cycle*. Semi-autobiographical, the text is based upon Rêgo's own experiences growing up on a sugar plantation in Northeast Brazil. Published a year later, *Doidinho* (1933) follows Carlos to a more urbanised and 'modern' life at a boarding school, transforming the titular 'plantation boy' of the previous novel into an educated poet. In *Bangüê* (1934) Rêgo returns Carlos to the plantation, ten years since he left for school. This text chronicles the decline of the premodern conception of sugar production, with Carlinhos assuming control of the family engenho after his grandfather's death. His attempts to maintain control fail spectacularly, leading to the sale of the Santa Rosa plantation, and the end of the traditional model

⁴⁸³ Emmi Baum, 'A Note About the Author' in *Plantation Boy* by José Lins Do Rêgo, trans. by Emmi Baum (Knopf, 1966), p. 533.

for sugar production. Rêgo changes his narrator in *O Moleque Ricardo* (1935) from Carlinhos to Ricardo, a plantation labourer of the same age, who leaves the Santa Rosa plantation to a better life in the city. The final novel in the cycle, *Usina* (1936), continues Ricardo's narrative. Returning to the Santa Rosa plantation, now a modern factory, Ricardo witnesses the victory of a more capitalist mode of sugar production, with ecological consequences for the environment and social consequences for the workers. The *Sugar Cane Cycle* shows the move towards monocultures and the resulting over-dependence of plantation workers on the supply of goods beyond the plantation for their survival, whilst also exploring the moral and ethical inconsistencies of the plantation-owning class.

Here, I will focus on the first three texts narrated by Carlinhos. Forming one narrative throughout the early years of the narrator's life, *Plantation Boy*, *Doidinho*, and *Bangüê* explore the perspective of the plantation-owning class and their crumbling way of life in the early twentieth century as traditional methods gave way to mechanisation.

Brazilian plantations: history and structure

Decadence and social hierarchy play an important role in Rêgo's *Sugar Cane Cycle*, showing the nature of a stratified Brazilian society based upon extreme wealth inequality and racialised class divides. Semi-autobiographical and told in the first person, Rêgo's *Plantation Boy* shows plantation culture from the perspective of the owning class and details the experience of Carlos growing up on the family plantation. This narrative perspective offers a way to reevaluate the history of Brazilian sugar production, particularly its origins in slavery, from the point of view of an innocent. Nationally, Rêgo's work was celebrated upon its release. Rogers writes that 'Starting with the 1932 publication of *Menino de Engenho* (*Plantation Boy*), Lins do Rêgo produced a series of novels, essays, and memoirs that have achieved amazing penetration in the mental world of the

region, a feat realized in part through the books' ubiquitous incorporation into school curricula'.⁴⁸⁴ Despite having a far smaller readership outside of Brazil, I have included Rêgo due to his importance to the region, and his reflection on sugar production from the vantage point of the twentieth century. Rodgers also notes that Rêgo describes the 'decline of a benevolent rural patriarchy and the rise of impersonal capitalism' with a level of nostalgia for the traditional and paternalistic Brazilian system of slavery.⁴⁸⁵ The *Sugar Cane Cycle* charts this transformation, with sugar driving profound changes in society through commodity capitalism. Rêgo is clearly conflicted, trapped between romantic notions of youth and the legacy of slavery on the plantations that perpetuated human misery. Although in Brazil 'Slavery was not finally abolished until 1888', the inequalities left in the post-abolition era continued well into the twentieth century, forming an integral part of Rêgo's young experience.⁴⁸⁶ Rogers notes that 'workers remained on engenhos after the abolition of slavery in 1888. In fact, the formal end of slavery is a deceptive temporal benchmark for examining labor relationships in the cane zone' indicating the enduring hold that slavery had over Brazilian society.⁴⁸⁷ Here, I discuss first the structure of the plantation model in northeastern Brazil before an examination of how it was upended, as represented by Rêgo in his *Sugar Cane Cycle*.

⁴⁸⁴ Thomas D. Rogers, 'Laboring Landscapes: The Environmental, Racial, and Class Worldview of the Brazilian Northeast's Sugar Elite, 1880s–1930s', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 46.2 (2009), p. 36.

⁴⁸⁵ Rogers, 'Laboring Landscapes', p. 40.

⁴⁸⁶ Kit Sims Taylor, 'The Economics of Sugar and Slavery in Northeastern Brazil', *Agricultural History*, 44.3 (1970), p. 268.

⁴⁸⁷ Thomas D. Rogers, *The Deepest Wounds: A Labor and Environmental History of Sugar in Northeast Brazil*, UPCC Book Collections on Project MUSE (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 74.

The relationship between the plantation and the rest of the world are seen through the eyes of Carlinhos' developing maturity. In *Doidinho* the modern is contrasted with the traditional as Carlinhos moves to a more academic mode of life at boarding school. The localism of the Santa Rosa Plantation is also contrasted with an increasing awareness of Brazil as a nation state. Illustrating this, Carlinhos recalls the president's train passing by his grandfather's plantation:

In those days there was no such thing as Brazil to me. My world, my country, extended only to the limits of the Santa Rosa plantation. What did the president of the republic matter to me? The man who ruled over all of us was old Zé Paulino.⁴⁸⁸

The plantation becomes a microcosm of Brazilian society, with the success of the nation reflected in the Santa Rosa plantation. Carlinhos' coming of age at his boarding school shows his increasing disillusionment with the plantation upon which he grew up. Beginning from a position of childish innocence, Carlinhos develops a more critical view of the plantation. This is shown in his new understanding of his grandfather:

At school I had already learned a great deal. And the more I learned, the more I came to see that old Zé Paulino was not the great man I had always thought him to be. His power was very small in comparison with that of governors and presidents.⁴⁸⁹

This emerging awareness of life beyond the plantation shows not only Carlinhos' changing worldview, but also an indication of the power held by plantation owners such as José Paulino.

⁴⁸⁸ Rêgo, 'Doidinho' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 170.

⁴⁸⁹ Rêgo, 'Doidinho' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 170.

Through the production of sugar, and despite fluctuating international commodity prices, José Paulino exerts absolute control over landscape and people.

An understanding of the structure of the typical Brazilian plantation is essential to understand the nature of Rêgo's work in relation to Commodity Modernism. Taylor writes that the 'major production unit of the slave era was the *engenho*. The owner of the *engenho*, known as the *senhor do engenho*, was also the owner of the slaves, animals, and equipment necessary to process sugar cane'.⁴⁹⁰ A figure of immense power over his domain, the *senhor do engenho* is represented by Carlos' grandfather. Showing him around the plantation, Carlos' grandfather José Paulino is presented as the god-like 'lord of the manor [who] would visit his lands and get a close-up view of his serfs'.⁴⁹¹ Regarding its continuation of a traditional system of production, the Santa Rosa sugar plantation appears fundamentally non-modern. It is fundamentally patriarchal in its essence, with José Paulino going 'from door to door knocking on the closed windows with his cane' to demonstrate his continued dominance and maintain the functioning of the plantation.⁴⁹² However, the *engenho* plantations remain the foundation upon which modernity in Brazil sits, touching every aspect of its racial, sociological and economic development. In the first part of the *Sugar Cane Cycle*, Rêgo shows the steady decline of traditional modes of sugar production, as well as valorising owners and maintainers of the traditional system.

José Paulino's death and legacy

⁴⁹⁰ Kit Sims Taylor, 'The Economics of Sugar and Slavery in Northeastern Brazil', *Agricultural History*, 44.3 (1970), p. 268.

⁴⁹¹ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 32.

⁴⁹² Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 32.

Through José Paulino, Rêgo reveals the nature of power and inheritance across the three novels. Inseparable from his plantation, his life is dedicated to maintaining and expanding the structure over ever greater plots of land. However, after José Paulino's death in *Bangüê*—long feared by the other characters—the Santa Rosa plantation begins to unravel. Carlos, convalescing at the Gameleira plantation after a heartbreak, passes ruined plantations on his return to Santa Rosa, foreshadowing his own disastrous tenure as a plantation owner:

It was almost dark when we passed the Comissário plantation. The walls of the mill had fallen to the ground, and there lay the big lazy wheel, its teeth rotting with rust. And the Big House leading to one side, without doors or windows but with holes the size of caves. A few years before, large shipments of raw sugar had been sent to Goiana from that plantation.⁴⁹³

The Comissário plantation highlights the rapidity that plantations could fall into ruin. Decay stalks the traditional plantation system where a failure to concede to a more aggressive and competitive mode of production means destruction. Carlos observes that 'Cane syrup never again would boil in its kettles. The smokestack never again would belch smoke into the sky. It was just a piece of land, nothing more'.⁴⁹⁴ The transfer of power to Carlos is also foreshadowed in the Santa Fe plantation owned by Mr. Lula, largely abandoned and encircled by the Santa Rosa plantation:

The price of sugar would rise and fall, but Santa Fe was always behind, moving slowly

⁴⁹³ Rêgo, 'Bangüê' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 422.

⁴⁹⁴ Rêgo, 'Bangüê' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 422.

toward death like a sick man without the money to go to the pharmacy and get medicine.⁴⁹⁵

Mr. Lula serves as a recurring reminder of plantation failure through each of the novels. His plantation is not productive and is in a state of steady decay, yet he maintains control over what little remains. Carlos mirrors Lula with a precipitous descent into debt, failing to maintain his grandfather's legacy partially as a result of his education outside of the plantation system. José Paulino's death symbolises the death knell of the traditional plantation structure at Santa Rosa. The knowledge and experience needed to maintain the plantation could not be passed on through education alone. In being sent away to be educated in a modern setting outside of the plantation, Carlos is ill equipped for the practical demands of running a plantation.

The plantation, class consciousness, and the failure of legacy

Rêgo writes of José Paulino that 'The pride of caste was the only vanity of this sainted man who planted sugar cane'.⁴⁹⁶ In contrast, Carlos steadily develops caste-consciousness over the course of the three novels. *Doidinho* features his realisation that, though he shared a childhood with his friends, the relative wealth and power of Carlos' family determines extremely divergent outcomes. After returning to Santa Rosa for a school holiday, Carlos heads out with his friends 'who had been left to the care of the sugar mill' and 'had forgotten their real names'.⁴⁹⁷ Rather than receiving education, their social and economic status keeps them trapped at the plantation, locked into a life of sugar production. Rêgo writes that 'For them to become field hands was the same as for a

⁴⁹⁵ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 72.

⁴⁹⁶ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 84.

⁴⁹⁷ Rêgo, 'Doidinho' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 226.

woman to fall into a life of prostitution’, acknowledging the lack of opportunity for life beyond the plantation and its sugar.⁴⁹⁸ Getting wet on his excursion, Carlos borrows clothes, an act that triggers his caste-consciousness: ‘As I stood there dressed in the clothes of a poor man, I realised sadly that I was rich’.⁴⁹⁹ The difference between Carlos and his childhood friends is further emphasised by José Paulino’s reaction, shouting at the boys “‘Next time you take the boy from the plantation, I will beat you with a stick’.⁵⁰⁰ The legacies of slavery are inherent in this reaction, showing the remaining tendency to impose order by arbitrary force. Following the incident, Carlos reflects upon his position on the plantation in relation to food:

My dinner was put on the table. I kept thinking, as I ate my food, of the poverty of that house in Riachão, of the dry farina Andorinha had to eat. In the kitchen the Negro woman Generosa was dishing out the workers’ rations, complaining all the while. They had the same meal for a change: dried meat with farina. And they stayed outside, talking.⁵⁰¹

Carlinhos realises that there is a fundamental economic and social divide between himself and the plantation workers. Whilst throughout the first novel there is an implicit acknowledgment of caste differences resulting from enslavement on the plantations, this becomes more explicit as Carlos grows older. This emerging guilt over his place in Brazilian society has psychological parallels with the neurosis of Svevo’s Zeno. Both construct anxieties about their place in the world, expressed in association with a commodity. For Zeno, it is the consumption of tobacco. For Carlos,

⁴⁹⁸ Rêgo, ‘Doidinho’ in *Plantation Boy*, p. 227.

⁴⁹⁹ Rêgo, ‘Doidinho’ in *Plantation Boy*, p. 227.

⁵⁰⁰ Rêgo, ‘Doidinho’ in *Plantation Boy*, p. 227.

⁵⁰¹ Rêgo, ‘Doidinho’ in *Plantation Boy*, p. 228.

the production of sugar and the society it creates. Applying this psychological lens, it is partially through his doubts surrounding sugar commodity production that Carlos disengages and fails to live up to the legacy of his grandfather.

Carlos' education and neurotic disposition preclude him from successfully running the Santa Rosa plantation. The power exhibited by his grandfather stems from a need to maintain that power over others through commodity production—the plantation functions as an empire with an industrial base geared towards to the commercial production of sugar alone. Displaying a poor aptitude for the life of a plantation owner, Carlos displays interest in Santa Rosa but lacks the requisite ability:

I tried to do things the way my grandfather had done them. He had risen early in the morning and had stayed out in the fields until lunchtime, after which he had gone back and had not returned until late in the evening for supper. I stuck to this plan for about two days.

Almost always I slept until noon. The foreman could look after everything.⁵⁰²

Following the death of the old patriarch, the engenho begins its own steady demise. Carlos fails to fulfil the role vacated by Jose Paulino, with the patriarchal system falling apart without adequate effort and guidance. Further, the passage shows Carlos' refusal to adhere to the importance of time on the plantation. Much like the sugar cane itself, without continual effort at speed, the plantation is destined to rot. The plantation system remains functioning and profitable only with unfailing competence in administering to the needs of the crop, the workers, and the machinery. Though he

⁵⁰² Rêgo, 'Bangüê' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 433.

feels a need to maintain his position at the head of the plantation, Carlos' failure is Rêgo's critique of the unbalanced power relations at play in modern Brazil. Carlos' ownership of the plantation is, in every respect, an inherited role which he wears uncomfortably.

Slavery and the plantation

Although slavery had been abolished in Brazil in 1888—13 years before Rêgo was born—Rêgo's semi-autobiographical novels heavily feature the legacies of slavery, with the texts occasionally featuring short spirituals inspired by the black plantation workers.

The plantation was in the midst of harvest and everyone was working twelve hours a day. The poor millworkers sang a song that their forefathers had made up in their days of enslavement. The refrain had the foreman asking for fire to light the ovens. The beat of the poem simulated the rhythm of the machine that stirred the hot spumy cane syrup. It went like this:

Beat the cane, Negro.

I just did

Oh, the mill at Massangana

Hasn't ground in three long years.

Yesterday they planted cane again,

Even though they haven't ground in three long years.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰³ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, pp. 92-93.

Rêgo's use of spirituals in his work demonstrates an attempt to represent the experience of black plantation labourers, albeit from the perspective of the white plantation-owning class. In this song, the workers are inseparable from the machine, matching the beat of their song to the rhythmic stirring of the product. The spiritual therefore forms part of the functioning of the machine, providing a social and cultural incentive to continue its operation. Intimately tied to the production of sugar, the spiritual forms a vital part of the process, connecting the workers with their past and parsing the experience of continued trauma. As a child, Carlinhos' perspective celebrates the black spirituals, showing their historical connection to the plantations on which they were created. Rêgo's work reflects that the production of sugar is accompanied by the sound of black labourers' voices. Their creativity not only forms the sweet, highly profitable sugar, but also musical contributions that form part of the modern canon.

As is detailed in *Cuban Counterpoint*, machinery is central to the production of sugar. This aspect of the plantation fascinates Carlos who, entranced by the machine, is 'drawn to the mechanics of the mill and nothing else'⁵⁰⁴ as he 'saw the piles of sugar cane and the men who were boiling the juice that had been extracted from the cane'.⁵⁰⁵ Through this observation Rêgo provides an insight into the production methods of refined sugar. The description continues:

Two men brought buckets of syrup to the molds, which were supported by frames and stood in pits. The head strainer was in charge there, a colored man whose hands were buried in the dirty black mud that covered the opening of the molds. My uncle explained how this

⁵⁰⁴ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 10.

⁵⁰⁵ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 10.

black lime whitened the sugar.⁵⁰⁶

The racialised undertones here again show the steep divide between the experience of the plantation owners and the labourers. Sugar is whitened, but only through the labour of black workers, representing the core of injustice at the heart of sugar production. Unlike Ortiz, Rêgo focusses less on the place of Brazil on the international stage and instead shows the way in which sugar is made. It is only through inequality passed on through generations of Brazilians that the system continues to function.

Rêgo and Brazilian regionalism

Rêgo is one of a handful of Brazilian writers from Northeastern Brazil who held sugar to be a blessing rather than a curse—contrasting directly with Ortiz’s sentiments regarding sugar to be imperialistic—in conjunction with nostalgic positions on the paternalistic institution of Brazilian slavery. The regionalism that features in Rêgo’s five-book *Sugar Cane Cycle* is most significantly shown in *Plantation Boy*, the first in the series. Carvalho contends that the Brazilian regionalists were ‘able show a Brazil that had been forgotten by the urban centres of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo’, best articulated by Gilberto Freyre in his 1926 reading of his *Manifesto Regionalista*.⁵⁰⁷ This marks the modernism shared by Cuba, Brazil, and the American South as an expression of modernity that celebrates otherwise neglected regions. Rêgo brings this form of regional modernity

⁵⁰⁶ Rêgo, ‘Plantation Boy’ in *Plantation Boy*, p. 11.

⁵⁰⁷ Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho, ‘The Perceptions of Modernity in José Lins Do Rego’s *Sugar Cane Cycle*, or “Not All Sugar Is Sweet”’, in *Sugar and Modernity in Latin America*, ed. by Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho and others, Interdisciplinary Perspectives (Aarhus University Press, 2014), p. 146.

to the fore, including colloquial speech patterns and songs of the enslaved plantation labourers. An analysis focusing solely on Rêgo would offer a comparative analysis of each of the distinct works in the *Sugar Cane Cycle*, roughly corresponding with a particular period of Rêgo's life or a particular aspect of plantation society in Brazil. For my purposes here I focus on *Plantation Boy* as a means of showing a contrasting vision with *Cuban Counterpoint* and *Cane*, as well as the nostalgic notions surrounding the engenho system and its relationship with an advancing modernity.

The enduring elements of slavery found on the Brazilian plantations after emancipation is well articulated by Rêgo. Carvalho notes that 'A significant aspect of Rêgo's *Sugar Cane Cycle* is that it describes a post-slavery society in which slavery is still the defining institution'.⁵⁰⁸ Due to local and national over-reliance on the sugar industry, there was little other work available. Rêgo depicts the surviving social order on the plantation in shocking terms, reflecting the legacy of white supremacy in the region:

My grandfather's former slaves remained on the plantation even after Abolition. [...] There they stayed until they grew old. [...] Their children and grandchildren succeeded them as servants, with the same loyalty toward the plantation and the passivity of well-trained domestic animals.⁵⁰⁹

The system of slavery on the plantations is extended beyond Abolition, with the closed-system of the plantation preventing a move beyond it. The strength of the plantation system is shown, with

⁵⁰⁸ Karen-Margrethe Simonsen, 'Opening Remarks', p. 139.

⁵⁰⁹ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 49.

its inextricable relationship with racial prejudice and hierarchy. In Carlos' comparing of the plantation labourers with animals, Rêgo is showing not only the pervasiveness of racism in Brazil after Abolition, but the continued existence of a system descended from plantation slavery. Carlos is instituted into a racialised space and, as a child, fails to acknowledge the inequity of his position.

The women of the Santa Rosa plantation and responses to trauma

The women on the Santa Rosa point to the responses to trauma on the plantations, both of the former enslaved labourers and the plantation owning class. Highlighting the historical differences between women on Brazilian plantations versus those of the U.S. South, Karasch contends that 'Brazil was, and is, different from the United States in the character of its race relations. Perhaps one key to unlocking some of the features of the differences and their meaning lies in the place of the slave woman in both societies'.⁵¹⁰ It is Rêgo's approach to women that provides some of the greatest depth and ambiguity in his writing, compounded by the unreliable narrator that is the infant Carlos.

Although Abolition in 1888 signified progress away from a system based upon slavery, the production of sugar continued to dominate the Brazilian economy. Similar to the Cuban relationship with cane, Brazil's sugar producers maintained—even expanded—their hold over their dominion. Faced with few economic alternatives, emancipated slaves had little option but to stay. Three women are described by Carlos: Maria Gorda, Old Galdina, and Generosa. Maria Gorda shows a dissociative response to the trauma of enslavement. She is described as an 'old

⁵¹⁰ Mary Karasch, 'Slave Women on the Brazilian Frontier in the Nineteenth Century', in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. by David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 96.

African woman' who 'was originally from Mozambique and though she had been in Brazil eighty years she still spoke a mixture of her own language and of I do not know what'.⁵¹¹ In refusing to speak, or perhaps even learn, Portuguese Maria Gorda rejects the system into which she has been forced. Colonial legacies are at play in the figure of Maria Gorda as a figure of fear from Carlos' young perspective, believing that 'The Devil danced with her at night. I even thought that the old Negress was in some way infernal; I never felt that there was anything human about her as there was about other people'.⁵¹² Rêgo criticises the forced migration that allowed sugar to be produced in Brazil. Carlos' belief that Maria Gorda is 'infernal' shows the unwillingness of the plantation-owning class to acknowledge the source of their wealth and power. Taken from her home, Maria Gorda's only remaining recourse is total non-cooperation with her captors.

Old Galdina, from Angola, forms a stark contrast to the hostile Maria Gorda. Galdina is the matriarch of 'the Street', the living quarters for the plantation labourers, who 'had nursed [Carlos's] grandfather and had carried him in her arms and all of us called her "grandmother"'.⁵¹³ Galdina's role on the plantation is maternal, providing care and comfort to the roaming children. In conversations with Galdina, Carlos uncovers her traumatic forced journey from Africa to South America, relating that 'She had come from [the coast of Africa] when she was ten years old. One of her brothers had stolen her from her father and sold her to the slave-traders, who had scarred her face with a branding iron'.⁵¹⁴ Although set in Brazil's post-Abolition period, slavery remains well within living memory for most of Santa Rosa's inhabitants. Physically branded as a reminder

⁵¹¹ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 51.

⁵¹² Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 51.

⁵¹³ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 52.

⁵¹⁴ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 52.

of her experience, Galdina sanitizes her journey for Carlos:

She told me the story of her long voyage across the sea, of how the adult Negroes were kept chained and the children were left to run loose during the day, of how everyone was brought up to the deck for fresh air and to see the sky and water. She was content with her life aboard the sailing ship as it sped across the waters like a regular steamship.⁵¹⁵

Carlos' narration here is highly unreliable, with Galdina's experiences filtered through her storytelling to a child. In the context of Maria Gorda's characterisation, Galdina's story hints at a far darker history of transatlantic enslavement. Hiding the truth behind her enslavement, an alternative narrative is offered to explain their presence in northeastern Brazil, one suitable for the consumption of children. Through storytelling the experience of slavery is sweetened until it bears little resemblance to the historic reality. A crucial clue to Galdina's experience of trauma can be found in Carlos' observation that 'For no reason at all she would often break into tears and cry like a baby'.⁵¹⁶ Stolen, transported across the Atlantic, and enslaved from a young age, Galdina's tears act as Rêgo's expression of sorrow over enslavement on the Brazilian plantations. While Carlos seeks a surrogate maternal figure in Galdina, she provides care to the plantation children as a means of reckoning with her traumatic history.

As 'the cook in the Big House', Old Generosa provides sustenance for the plantation workers and reflects a particularly Brazilian approach to the role of women on the plantation.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁵ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 52.

⁵¹⁶ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 52.

⁵¹⁷ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 52.

As Karasch writes,

Unlike the system in the North American South, where slave women often prepared food for their own families, a common pattern in Brazil was the employment of one female or male cook to prepare food for the entire household, a mining crew, or a gang of plantation workers.⁵¹⁸

Not characterised as fearsome or particularly maternal, Generosa is shown to embrace her role in the Big House as a provider. Gaspar notes that '[Gender] roles were shaped by the demands the total plantation environment made on slaves, and by the codes of behavior nurtured by the slaves themselves within their communities', with the system of the plantation directing the roles of the enslaved.⁵¹⁹ Defining Generosa's role on the Santa Rosa plantation, Rêgo writes that 'The boys knew that her heart was like a lump of sugar. She gave them medicine for whatever ailed them, healed their wounds, and mended their clothes'.⁵²⁰ Although Generosa insists to the boys that 'The days of slavery are over!' there remain few options available for formerly enslaved plantation workers in the novel.⁵²¹ A crucial insight from Rêgo can be found in his relating Generosa directly with the commodity responsible for her enslavement. Mintz's contention that enslaved Africans constituted 'a "false commodity" because a human being is not an object, even when treated as

⁵¹⁸ Mary Karasch, 'Slave Women on the Brazilian Frontier in the Nineteenth Century', in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. by David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 87.

⁵¹⁹ David Barry Gaspar, 'From "The Sense of Their Slavery" Slave Women And Resistance In Antigua, 1632-1763', in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. by David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 220.

⁵²⁰ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 53.

⁵²¹ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 53.

one' holds relevance here, with Rêgo showing how the production of sugar led to further commodification of female slaves.⁵²² Following Rêgo's description of Generosa that 'her heart was like a lump of sugar' is a statement on her caring, nurturing role on the plantation.⁵²³ Directly linked to the sugar of the plantation with her heart quite literally described as the commodity by which she is trapped, the description also suggests the false commodification referred to by Mintz. Generosa's caring nature is commodified and used in within the system of the plantation, with her 'heart' referring to the gendered exploitation suffered by enslaved women.

Rêgo includes Maria Gorda, Galdina, and Generosa to consider the legacy of sugar plantation slavery and its impact on women. The crucial role of the three women on the plantation is shown in the maternal role they inhabit and as continual reminders of Brazil's contemporaneous recent past:

The slave quarters of the Santa Rosa plantation did not disappear with Abolition. They continued to exist alongside the Big House, and the Negro women perpetuated their race, wet-nursed the children of the Big House, and supplied the young men to serve the mill and the plantation.⁵²⁴

Through the formerly enslaved women of the Santa Rosa plantation Rêgo provides a critique of post-emancipation Brazil. All three women are trapped not only by slavery as an institution, but by the production of the commodity itself. Sugar's method of production demands the continued

⁵²² Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 43.

⁵²³ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 53.

⁵²⁴ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 53.

expenditure of human labour, perpetuating systemic and structural inequality. Carlos, as a child, does not critically evaluate the events he witnesses or the stories he is told, but rather accepts them as reality. Using this lens, Rêgo reveals the deep roots of class difference in Brazil, and the ways in which it is perpetuated. Though shown in different ways—Galdina’s tears, Maria’s depression, Generosa’s heart—Rêgo demonstrates the effects of dehumanisation and commodification on the emancipated plantation women.

Economic changes on the plantation

Taylor asserts that the plantation system of Northeast Brazil did encourage development, but only to the benefit of the plantation system. Plantations had the ‘ability to grow and stagnate without undergoing any structural changes’.⁵²⁵ It is in this respect that the plantations’ link to global capitalism becomes still clearer, shadowing the economic position of Cuba articulated by Ortiz. However, despite being part of the same ‘civilisational region’ via their shared commodity culture, ‘Brazil, with all of her scientific and cultural contacts coming by way of Portugal, was not aware of the advances in sugar processing technology which were being made in the West Indies’.⁵²⁶ Rather than an expression of modernity, the continued dominance of a Western network of trade routes instead produces uneven development between sugar-producing areas. The issue is complicated by Rêgo, whose work suggests a complicated relationship with the legacies of the traditional engenhos, as opposed to the more mechanised usinas.

Rêgo reflects upon his childhood experience of racialised discourse through Carlos,

⁵²⁵ Kit Sims Taylor, ‘The Economics of Sugar and Slavery in Northeastern Brazil’, *Agricultural History*, 44.3 (1970), p. 280.

⁵²⁶ Taylor, ‘The Economics of Sugar and Slavery in Northeastern Brazil’, p. 274.

referencing his perception of black labourers working on the Santa Rosa plantation. The racial divide is shown as a source of poverty, in sharp contrast to the gilded existence of Carlos' family:

I got so used to seeing these people every day in their degradation and misery that I accepted their state as something natural. I thought it quite natural to see them living and sleeping in a pigsty, having nothing to eat, and working like beasts of burden. My understanding of life at that time made me accept all this was part of God's plan. They had been born like this because God had wanted it that way, just like God had wanted us to be born white and to rule over them. Did we not also rule over the cattle, the donkeys, the fields, and the forests?⁵²⁷

Rêgo demonstrates a point made by Glissant that 'absolute separation was the rule on the plantation. Not only an absolute social separation, but also an irremediable break between forms of sensibility, despite their being changed by each other'.⁵²⁸ *Plantation Boy* explores perceptions of the racialised hierarchy that maintained commodity production on the sugar plantations. Carlos, as heir to the *engenho*, views the hierarchy on the plantation as 'natural' through the lens of an unquestioning child. The human desire for sweetness maintains the class difference on Rêgo's plantation. Just as Ortiz views sugar as a commodity 'made by man and power', so too is the system of plantation slavery in Brazil.⁵²⁹ Though Carlos is unable to envisage an alternative, Rêgo uses the child's naivety to show the horrors of sugar production from a neutralised perspective. It

⁵²⁷ Rêgo, 'Plantation Boy' in *Plantation Boy*, p. 80.

⁵²⁸ Glissant, 'Creolization in the Making of the Americas', p. 84.

⁵²⁹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 49.

is this naivety that amplifies the horror of the institution; Carlos fully internalises the system without question.

In a direct parallel to the enslaved labourers on the Santa Rosa plantation, Carlos observes the exotic birds he has captured: ‘Yet my bird cages, in which I imprisoned the singing canaries of the Santa Rosa plantation, were the source of my greatest delight in the glorious days of my youth’.⁵³⁰ Carlos’ approach to the birds mirrors the treatment of the plantations workers, showing his role as a future inheritor to the plantation. Although Carlos is relatively benevolent to the birds, he shows the same paternalistic attitude towards the natural world as operates within the plantation itself. As a man-made landscape, the plantation represents a human—specifically a white European—attempt to rule control the natural world for economic benefit.

I was completely absorbed in my cruel sport. I left the boys and my cousins to go their own way. But my canaries would not sing. When I saw them flying about freely, they twittered and tweeted and sang concerts in the branches of the trees. In the bird cages they became mute. They went on to strike against me. I treated them with maternal love.⁵³¹

Experimenting with them with a childlike curiosity, Carlinhos’s birds ‘would work only at the price of their liberty’ even with their cages hung in the trees, prompting a recrimination from the black women of the plantation: “People who torture little birds end up in Hell, boy. The Lord God made birds to sing in the trees in freedom.”⁵³²

⁵³⁰ Rêgo, ‘Plantation Boy’ in *Plantation Boy*, p. 62.

⁵³¹ Rêgo, ‘Plantation Boy’ in *Plantation Boy*, p. 61.

⁵³² Rêgo, ‘Plantation Boy’ in *Plantation Boy*, pp. 61-62.

The metaphor is clear: following a long literary tradition Rêgo uses the imagery of a caged bird to reveal the injustice of human enslavement and racial inequality. Imprisoned, the birds mirror the experience of the black labourers of the plantation. In their capture Carlinhos demonstrates, in miniature, the attitude that underpins Brazilian plantation society of the early twentieth century. Nature is subverted by the plantation system, causing both environmental destruction and human misery.

On the Santa Rosa plantation Rêgo acknowledges the brutality of sugar production with the haunting of a murdered mill worker on the plantation: ‘The dead man had left the floorboards covered with blood. Next day they tried to scrub it away, but the marks remained. Human blood does not wash out’.⁵³³ Blood taints the plantation. A foil to the whitened commodity, the blood of the labourers is as much a part of the commodity’s production as the sugar cane. Gonçalo haunts the plantation, continuing to perform the roles he filled in life: ‘Someone else had seen Negro Gonçalo cutting sugar cane in the fields’.⁵³⁴ Gonçalo’s apparition underscores the violence of the system in which he worked, compelling production through either violent means or economic coercion. Although the institution of slavery is dead, Gonçalo represents its continuing legacy on the plantation, continuing his work in producing the sugar for international markets.

Rêgo shows the complex legacy of the sugar plantation in Brazil. Though comparison with Ortiz, we can see the clear differences in the production of sugar in the Americas and the Caribbean, as well as the conditions and challenges that unite them. As I have shown so far, both

⁵³³ Rêgo, ‘Plantation Boy’ in *Plantation Boy*, p. 103.

⁵³⁴ Rêgo, ‘Plantation Boy’ in *Plantation Boy*, p. 103.

Ortiz and Rêgo explore the development of modern societies that had the plantation entwined with their economies. Both authors also wrestle with the impact of commodities on their sense of belonging, nationhood, and identity. In Cuba and Brazil, sugar dominated the economic sphere whilst fostering dependence on international commodity markets. The importance of sugar also extends into the environmental sphere, with land in both places enveloped in the plantation system. However, while the impact of sugar production haunts both writers, there remain distinct differences in their respective approaches. Rêgo's approach integrates semi-autobiographical details into a fictional narrative that explores themes of nostalgia for an inequitable, and traditional, plantation system. Ortiz, in contrast, forms an explicitly anti-colonial critique by merging different genres, while making the case for a culturally distinct Cuba born of transculturation. In the *Sugar Cane Cycle* and *Cuban Counterpoint* modernity is not separated from plantation history, but rather grows from it. The plantations paradoxically serve as upholders of an Old World order whilst also bringing new nations into being. Both authors' works are attempts to re-figure plantation history into an expression of New World civilisational modernity.

Jean Toomer's *Cane*: lyricism and the legacy of slavery

In conjunction with *Cuban Counterpoint* and *Plantation Boy*, Jean Toomer's *Cane* re-centres the plantation within modernity. Rather than a more traditionally High Modernist outlook that prioritises a break from the past, Toomer demonstrates the vital role that plantation structures played in constructing modernist discourse. Commodities, particularly cotton and sugar cane, dominate the plantation landscapes presented in *Cane*. Like Ortiz, Toomer attempts to decolonise the underlying social structures of a modernity built upon racialised exploitation. *Cane* is concerned with the conditions created by a history of commodity production, embodied by the cane fields that stretched across the Southern United States.

In contrast to Rêgo, Toomer's *Cane* brings plantation workers and their descendants into full focus. In part set in the cane fields of the Southern plantations, *Cane* provides a vital insight into the legacies of commodity production. In blending an historic subject and modernist verse, Toomer highlights the significance of commodities in black American history. Furthermore, in writing a series of vignettes that straddle the forms of narrative prose, poetry, and play, Toomer applies modernist techniques to the plantation. There are parallels here with Ortiz's variation in *Cuban Counterpoint*, as well as Rêgo's subjectivity in writing from Carlos's perspective. Thematically, Toomer's work is steeped in the interplay between politics, race, and class while placing commodity production at the heart of American history. Just as sugar production defined aspects of the Brazilian and Cuban nations in literature, so too did it impact the U.S. Just as Rêgo shows that Abolition did not instantly erase the deep racialised class divides present in Brazilian society, Toomer examines the impacts of slavery on post-emancipation America, in particular raising questions over identity and violence.

Toomer and Ortiz

Both Toomer and Ortiz share concerns over identity and nationhood in their respective works, although they embrace two different approaches. While Ortiz uses predominantly historical and anthropological frameworks in *Cuban Counterpoint*, Toomer instead employs the variations in literary form alongside settings typical of Southern Gothic literature. Borst contends that 'Toomer's story does not displace Modernism with the Gothic, but deploys its Modernist aesthetic

and political concerns through Gothic forms'.⁵³⁵ In combining these two distinct forms, Toomer creates both an exploration of black Southern identity and an avant garde modernist masterpiece. To both authors, sugar is of central importance to their respective regions, forming the basis for slavery and a commodity-driven economy. Taylor-Wiseman writes that 'the world of *Cane* exists as it does because of transplanted species—human bodies and sugarcane, for the success of the cash crop system in the South depended on importation of non-native bodies'.⁵³⁶ The growing of sugarcane in the Americas is an example of the defining features of the Anthropocene: the movement of people, plants, and animals facilitated via human actions. Beginning with the Columbian Exchange, sugarcane becomes an early signifier of a new epoch influenced by human desire.

Toomer places the landscape at the forefront of 'Carma', constructing a pastoral scene between two parentheses, 'The sun is hammered to a band of gold. Pine-needles, like mazda, are brilliantly aglow. No rain has come to take the rustle from the falling sweet-gum leaves. Over in the forest, across the swamp, a sawmill blows its closing whistle'.⁵³⁷ The cane, a symbol of toil and violence, is left out of the scene. Instead, it features in the refrain, 'Wind is in the cane. Come along. / Cane leaves swaying, rusty with talk, / Scratching choruses above the guinea's squawk, / Wind is in the cane. Come along.'⁵³⁸ Unlike the native landscape surrounding the plantation the

⁵³⁵ Allan G. Borst, 'Gothic Economics: Violence and Miscegenation in Toomer's 'Blood-Burning Moon' 1', *Gothic Studies*, 10.1 (2008), p. 15.

⁵³⁶ Rebekah Taylor-Wiseman, 'Reading *Cane* in the Anthropocene: Toomer on Race, Power, and Nature', *Mississippi Quarterly*, 70/71.3 (2017), p. 274.

⁵³⁷ Jean Toomer, *Cane*, edited by Darwin T. Turner. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1988, p. 10.

⁵³⁸ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 10.

cane drowns out nature, the ‘guinea’s squark’. It also emulates metal blades and sharpness with its rust and ‘Scratching choruses’. The melodrama of Toomer’s short story is set in amongst the anthropomorphised cane, serving as a witness to conflict and violence.

Time, as noted by Ortiz, is warped by sugar production. The cane demands fast and hard labour from those who harvest it, quickly rotting if abandoned. In ‘Carma’ Toomer writes that ‘Time and space have no meaning in a canefield. No more than the interminable stalks’ indicating the strange temporality created by the forest of cane, with sugarcane’s demands on time as unusual as its status as a cash crop in the American South.⁵³⁹ Imported to the South to satisfy the desire for sweetness, the sugarcane rejects the pastoral idyll for human melodrama. In contrast, ‘Song of the Son’ denies temporality to celebrate the end of slavery whilst acknowledging its enduring impacts. Ramsey notes that Toomer’s narrative in ‘Song of the Son’ ‘hovers intermittently and lyrically above time-bound, harsh social realities in what is often termed a “spectatorial” authorial detachment’.⁵⁴⁰ Time is manipulated in the poem to forge ‘An everlasting song, a singing tree, / Caroling softly souls of slavery,’ as a form of remembrance.⁵⁴¹ The landscape offers a bridge between epochs, linking the contemporary modern period with that of the enslaved labourers. Toomer writes

In time, for though the sun is setting on
A song-lit race of slaves, it has not set;

⁵³⁹ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 10.

⁵⁴⁰ William M. Ramsey, ‘Toomer’s Eternal South’, *Southern Literary Journal*, 36.1 (2003), p. 77.

⁵⁴¹ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 13.

Though late, O soil, it is not too late yet
To catch thy plaintive soul, leaving, soon gone,
Leaving, to catch thy plaintive soul soon gone.⁵⁴²

The land here plays an important role as both a witness and participant in the growing of sugarcane. However, the focus is on cultural, rather than commodity production. The slaves of ‘Song of the Son’ are ‘song-lit’, illuminated by the poem and remembered in conjunction with culture and nature, rather than sugar. Ortiz’s belief in the extractive nature of the sugar industry is defied here; Toomer instead chooses to centre the labourers and their cultural legacy.

The spirituals of Toomer and Rêgo

Featured prominently in *Plantation Boy*, spirituals have a profound impact in *Cane* with their rhythms and structures repeated throughout the text. Du Bois’s discussion of Sorrow Songs in *The Souls of Black Folk* illuminate their significance, defining them as ‘the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways’.⁵⁴³ By integrating spirituals into *Cane* and utilising them to develop the text’s form and structure, Toomer emphasises the crucial role of black plantation labourers in forging modernity. Furthermore, Du Bois writes that

Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm

⁵⁴² Toomer, *Cane*, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁴³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (AmazonClassics, 2019), p. 101.

confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins.⁵⁴⁴

This highlights the fundamental importance of spirituals in communicating the suffering endured on the plantations, as well as a collective cultural hope for a better future. In *Cane*, Toomer articulates similar points, but integrates them into contemporary modernist forms by utilising, as I will show, innovative changes in style, form, and structure.

On the literary effect of the presence of spirituals in texts—and focusing on their stylistic qualities rooted in an oral tradition—Glissant describes them as

akin to other subsistence—that is, survival-techniques set up by the slaves and their immediate descendants. The perpetual need to get around the rule of silence creates a literature that is not naturally continuous, but that bursts forth in fragments. The storyteller is the odd-job man, the *djobeur*; as we say in Martinique, of the collective soul.⁵⁴⁵

Glissant's assertion that spirituals were a means of communicating between individuals within and across generations is exemplified by Toomer in 'Georgia Dusk'. The fragmented spirituals in *Cane* evoke the context of the black plantation labourers of the American South, telling stories of spirituality, forced labour, and shared suffering:

⁵⁴⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (AmazonClassics, 2019), p. 104.

⁵⁴⁵ Edouard Glissant, 'Creolization in the Making of the Americas', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 54.1/2 (2008), p. 86.

O singers, resinous and soft your songs
Above the sacred whisper of the pines,
Give virgin lips to cornfield concubines,
Bring dreams of Christ to dusky cane-lipped throngs.⁵⁴⁶

The ‘cane-lipped’ singers evoke Christ, signifying spiritual protection from the circumstances in which they find themselves, physically trapped by commodity production. The spiritual rises ‘Above the sacred whisper of the pines’ suggesting transcendence beyond the physical, and away from the man-made structures of the plantation to a place of religious refuge. As noted by Glissant, the spiritual is used here as a mode of survival, a means of communication through oral literary means, and even a mode of worship. Labour on the plantation thus becomes an act from which the labourers can be delivered.

‘Georgia Dusk’ celebrates black American culture and, like Langston Hughes’ ‘The Negro Speaks of Rivers’, links plantation labourers to an African past:

Meanwhile, the men, with vestiges of pomp,
Race memories of king and caravan,
High-priests, an ostrich, and a juju-man,
Go singing through the footpaths of the swamp.’⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 14.

⁵⁴⁷ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 14.

While Ortiz constructs Cuban national identity in *Cuban Counterpoint*, Toomer is concerned with black cultural identity within the broader U.S. The scene in this stanza is quasi-mystic, evoking the secular and spiritual leaders of the past through spirituals. The labourers, while physically separated from their ancestors by the Atlantic, retain strong cultural links that transcend temporal and spatial concerns. Through collective memory the walk through the swamp becomes a procession with deeper cultural significance, instead showing a shared history to be celebrated. This helps to counter the more violent aspects of *Cane*, demonstrating cultural rather than commodity production.

The blood spilled in ‘Blood Burning Moon’ is comparable to that which haunts Carlos from his early years on the Santa Rosa plantation. The violence behind the chapter is highly racialised, pitting the white plantation owner Bob Stone against the black field labourer Tom Burwell. Just as Gonçalo is seen still cutting the cane of Santa Rosa, the relationship between sugarcane and death brings forth connections with the supernatural in *Cane*. Toomer writes that ‘The full moon in the great door was an omen. Negro women improvised songs against its spell’ utilising superstition over the prophetic properties of the moon to foreshadow the lynching of Tom Burwell.⁵⁴⁸ Oral spirituals and references to the supernatural showcase the more gothic elements of Toomer’s work and link the cane fields of the American South and northeast Brazil: Louisa’s quiet, ineffectual incantation to counter the blood burning moon,

Red nigger moon. Sinner!

Blood-burning moon. Sinner!

⁵⁴⁸ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 29.

Come out that fact'ry door.

prophesies the tragic end of the short story, while incorporating the rhythms and textures of black spirituals into the text.⁵⁴⁹ Toomer therefore roots the text in both Southern plantation culture and modernism.

Events in 'Blood Burning Moon' are shrouded not only in moonlight, but also the cloying smell of the sugar refinery. The plantation dominates the landscape, social relations and even the air of the town. Although the moon is considered the source of madness in the text, sugar is a more likely culprit. It determines the love triangle between Louisa, Bob, and Tom, leading to the death of both men. The dominance of sugar on the town is described by Toomer:

The scent of cane came from the copper pan and drenched the forest and the hill that sloped to factory town, beneath its fragrance. It drenched the men in circle seated around the stove. Some of them chewed at the white pulp of stalks, but there was no need for them to, if all they wanted was to taste the cane. One tasted it in factory town. And from factory town one could see the soft haze thrown by the glowing stove upon the low-hanging heavens.⁵⁵⁰

Sugar—the driving force behind the town—is inescapable. As with Ortiz's Cuba and Rêgo's Brazil, Toomer's South is defined by the production of this sweet white commodity. It is all-consuming, igniting conflict and infecting the minds of the townsfolk through the social relations fostered by the plantation structure. The factory workers consume cane in its rawest form, 'the

⁵⁴⁹ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 29.

⁵⁵⁰ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 31.

white pulp of stalks', as a means to recreation.⁵⁵¹ In producing and consuming the cane, the lives of those working on the plantation are entirely enveloped by its production. Further, the perfume of the sugar refinery forms a contrast to the smell of burning flesh as Tom is executed:

The mob yelled. The mob was silent. Now Tom could be seen within the flames. Only his head, erect, lean, like a blackened stone. Stench of burning flesh soaked the air. Tom's eyes popped. His head settled downward. The mob yelled.⁵⁵²

The scene is made more horrific through its quasi-gothic comparison with the sickly sweet smell usually produced by the factory. Rather than Gonçalo's blood on the factory floorboards, Tom's death taints the air, fulfilling the ironic omen in Louisa's spiritual.

Bob Stone, consumed by rage at the thought of losing Louisa to Tom Burwell, is first injured by the cane itself. Running to the liaison, 'He crashed into the bordering canebrake. Cane leaves cut his face and lips. He tasted blood. He threw himself down and dug his fingers in the ground. The earth was cool. Cane-roots took the fever from his hands'.⁵⁵³ The cane appears hostile to Bob, urging violence. Though the cane roots cool the fever in his hands, his mind remains intent on revenge. There is bestial imagery in Bob's anger, particularly where 'He bit down on his lips. He tasted blood. Not his own blood; Tom Burwell's blood'.⁵⁵⁴ As a descendant of a plantation owner, Bob Stone is destroyed by his belief in racial superiority and the commodity that he and

⁵⁵¹ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 31.

⁵⁵² Toomer, *Cane*, p. 40.

⁵⁵³ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 37.

⁵⁵⁴ Toomer, *Cane*, p. 37.

his ancestors used to gain their positions of social and economic power over the South. Sugarcane sets the scene and provides the impetus to violence, transforming an otherwise pastoral landscape into a gothic horror that underscores contemporary racialised conflict. Toomer's work in *Cane* recalls a passage in W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) noting that

For this much all men know: despite compromise, war, and struggle, the Negro is not free. In the backwoods of the Gulf States, for miles and miles, he may not leave the plantation of his birth; in well-nigh the whole rural South the black farmers are peons, bound by law and custom to an economic slavery, from which the only escape is death or the penitentiary. In the most cultured sections and cities of the South the Negroes are a segregated servile caste, with restricted rights and privileges.⁵⁵⁵

Economic, cultural, and social limitations still apply in the shadow of plantation slavery. As Toomer shows, the cane fields continue to mark the landscape, serving as a constant physical reminder of racialised division and prejudice. As the descendent of white plantation owners, Bob Stone displays an ingrained prejudice that leads to horrific violence.

Ortiz, Rêgo, and Toomer all articulate experiences of commodity production that transcend national borders, languages, and literary genres. Like the protean sugar extracted from the cane, the experience of the plantation is re-figured into a multitude of different forms. The production of sugar reaches across national borders, forming an international community, or a literary civilisational region, with other commodity producing regions. Commodity modernism

⁵⁵⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (AmazonClassics, 2019), p. 18.

emerges not through direct communication between writers, but from their mutual engagement with a global commodity. Glissant writes that the chaos born from 'the extraordinary complexity of the exchange between cultures, which may yet forge future Americas that are at last and for the first time both deeply unified and truly diversified'.⁵⁵⁶ This is reflected in the work of all three of the authors I have explored here, each taking inspiration from the plantation to produce texts that define their respective places within modernity. In placing these texts in conversation, the parameters of literary modernism involving the plantations become clear,

Modernity, rather than forming despite the sugar plantations, is instead forged as a result of the economic, cultural and social structures of the agricultural-industrial complex. This is reflected in the work of Ortiz, Rêgo, and Toomer, each with different approaches. Ortiz focuses his work on a postcolonial critique of the plantation; Rêgo on the blurred line between nostalgia for a vanishing world and a critical awareness of its brutality; Toomer on the fragmented nature of plantation memory, expressed through diverse and varied literary styles. However, for all three of these authors, sugar as a commodity is not merely a literary backdrop, but is central to their respective texts.

The sugar plantation haunts the literary imagination of twentieth-century authors writing in Cuba, Brazil, and the U.S. South. It is this haunting that defines Commodity Modernism—a literary mode in which history, culture, and commodities converge to reveal a shared experience.

⁵⁵⁶ Glissant, 'Creolization in the Making of the Americas', p. 89.

5 Haiti and the Literary Impact of Sugar Production

An analysis of sugar as a commodity within literature would be incomplete without particular mention of Haiti and the authors who based their work upon its history and culture. Known as Saint Domingue before independence in 1804, Haiti was central to the international slave trade from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Renowned as one of the most productive commodity colonies in the world, Ferrer notes that, on the eve of revolution on 21st August 1791, Saint-Domingue was ‘Europe’s most profitable colony and the world’s largest producer of sugar, king long before cotton’.⁵⁵⁷ As such, Saint Domingue served as a major means of wealth creation for both individual French citizens and for France as the metropole. Inversely, the enslaved black labourers of the colony were consistently denied the most basic rights. In his groundbreaking history of the Haitian revolution, Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes that ‘In 1680, there were 2,000 slaves in Saint-Domingue. In 1700 (twenty years later), there were 20,000 slaves (ten times more). In 1726, there were 100,000. In 1789, there were around 600,000 slaves working like mules in Saint-Domingue from five o’clock in the morning until eleven o’clock at night!’.⁵⁵⁸ It is this history that serves as the backdrop to the three authors explored in this chapter: C. L. R. James, William B. Seabrook, and Jacques Roumain.⁵⁵⁹

Providing an extensive history of what would later become the nation of Haiti, Dubois

⁵⁵⁷ Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 1.

⁵⁵⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Stirring the Pot of Haitian History*, ed. by Mariana Past and others (Liverpool University Press, 2021), pp. 23-24.

⁵⁵⁹ Thorough histories of Haiti can be found in Marlene Daut’s *Awakening the Ashes*, Laurent Dubois’s, *Avengers of the New World*, and Popkin’s *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*.

writes on the rapid expansion of sugar estates almost from the moment of first European contact on the island of Hispaniola:

Sugarcane had been brought to the colony by Columbus in 1493, and by the early 1500s the Spanish began establishing the first sugar plantations in the New World. By the 1530s there were more than thirty sugar mills in the colony, and by the mid-sixteenth century the annual production of sugar reached several thousand tons.⁵⁶⁰

Although indigo also played an important role in the establishment of Saint Domingue, the commodity that would dominate and define the colony from its creation to the present was sugar. Dubois describes sugar as ‘the economic miracle of the eighteenth century’ that would fuel the expansion of Old World dominance over the New.⁵⁶¹ The sweet Asian cane, as noted by Dubois, is inextricably tied to the rise of capitalism around the Atlantic, particularly in Haiti, writing that

sugarcane had been cultivated on Spanish and Portuguese islands of the eastern Atlantic for centuries. The Spanish in Hispaniola and the Portuguese in Brazil pioneered cane cultivation in the Americas, and the French and English drew on their examples and on the knowledge and finances of the Dutch in establishing their plantation societies in the Caribbean.⁵⁶²

Transplanted first from Asia to Europe, then to the New World, sugarcane becomes a mark of colonial influence over Hispaniola and of a new transatlantic extraction economy. Revolutionary

⁵⁶⁰ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World* (Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 15.

⁵⁶¹ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, p. 18.

⁵⁶² Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, p. 18.

politics on the island of Hispaniola revolved around its production and export, with colonial dominance maintained through financial, educational, and military means.⁵⁶³ Crucially, this shows how the production of sugar in Haiti fostered dependence on international markets. With sugar as the dominant crop on the island, and the plantations a key part of Haiti's history, the texts I have selected in this chapter reflect the complex relationship between land, people, and crop. As Trouillot argues, 'if a country plants only sugarcane (or only sugarcane and coffee), it's not destined for native farmers. The country must sell the sugar (and coffee) abroad. It must buy most of the goods that the native farmers need from abroad. It's inevitably at the mercy of the big countries that are selling them those goods'.⁵⁶⁴ Haiti became trapped in a relentless cycle of commodity production, reinforcing enslavement and economic dependency—with both issues examined and interrogated by James, Seabrook, and Roumain.

Toussaint, Dessalines, and Christophe

The sugar plantations of Haiti instituted a power structure that kept black labourers enslaved while enriching the predominantly white French colonials. Casimir provides a decolonial lens through which to view the historical Saint-Domingue, writing that

The metropole successfully organized the plantation economy to produce tropical commodities, considering laborers as merchandise reproduced on the market. The public administration executed its instructions and made sure the profits from these activities

⁵⁶³ For further material, see Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 20.

⁵⁶⁴ Trouillot, *Stirring the Pot of Haitian History*, pp. 25-26.

filled its coffers. An entire armature of philosophy, ideology, projects of social engineering, instructions, investments, and management all made Saint-Domingue the Pearl of the Antilles.⁵⁶⁵

It is within the context of Saint-Domingue's extreme productivity that the Haitian Revolution gained traction. Enslaved black labourers, most of whom had been born into slavery, sought to free themselves from the yoke of colonial oppression and forced commodity production. Through a bloody and divisive revolution—differing on the extent to which the plantation system should be demolished—Louverture, Dessalines, and Christophe came to power. Louverture, now established in the historical record as the great national hero of that conflict, took a more conciliatory posture against the French with the aim of maintaining the wealth brought by commodity export. On Louverture's assumption of power, Popkin writes that although '[the members of the new governing elite] all claimed to support the elimination of slavery, they remained convinced that the basic features of the plantation system that created the colony's wealth had to be maintained'.⁵⁶⁶ Louverture's administration aimed to maintain the plantation economy that created the colony of Saint Domingue, but emancipate the enslaved labourers that maintained the plantations. However, this attempt was doomed to fail.

Following Louverture's assumption of almost absolute power in Haiti between 1794-1802, the plantations continued to function without enslavement but with significant and

⁵⁶⁵ Jean Casimir, *The Haitians: A Decolonial History*, trans. by Dubois, Latin America in Translation/En Traducción/Em Tradução (The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), p. 227.

⁵⁶⁶ Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 64.

continuing restrictions on Haitian labourers. Exploring this change under Louverture's regime, Dubois writes that

property owners did not have the unfettered power over their laborers they had enjoyed under slavery. The colonial state was committed to emancipation. But it was also committed to making the former slaves stay on their plantations and forcing them to work at the same tasks they had before they were free.⁵⁶⁷

Dubois expands this point, adding that 'Louverture defended his policies by insisting that it was necessary to limit liberty in order to sustain it' with the only alternative to plantation labour being military service.⁵⁶⁸ This points to a fundamental contradiction found at the heart of both the historical Toussaint Louverture's regime and Haiti as a whole: the plantation system that founded the colony could not be sustainably harnessed to maintain the newly free state. According to Popkin,

by 1801 coffee production had reached three-fifths of the level of 1789, and sugar production, although much lower and consisting almost entirely of less valuable raw sugar rather than the refined product that had been the colony's main cash crop, was steadily increasing as well.⁵⁶⁹

Despite the gradual resurrection of the plantation economy, Napoleon rejected Louverture's leadership of an independent, allied Saint Domingue. Haiti's freedom from colonial rule would

⁵⁶⁷ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, p. 189.

⁵⁶⁸ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, p. 190.

⁵⁶⁹ Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, p. 111.

have to come at the price of the former colony's plantation prosperity.

Louverture's failure to satisfy colonial demands led directly to the more violent approach adopted by Dessalines. By destroying the plantation structures and eliminating any whites remaining on the island after independence, Dessalines succeeded in establishing Haitian independence from French colonial rule, declaring the end of the plantation system in the process. Popkin writes that while 'Dessalines lacked Toussaint's subtlety and diplomatic skills, but he was single-mindedly devoted to defeating the French and he saw no need for a continuing white presence in the country'.⁵⁷⁰ Crucially, Dessalines included an anti-white provision in the new constitution. Casimir notes that 'On January 1, 1804, in the "Proclamation du Général en Chef" (Proclamation of the general-in-chief), Dessalines declared that no white colonist would ever set foot in Haiti as a property owner'.⁵⁷¹ The anti-white property owning provision within the proclamation ensured that Haiti would disassociate from France, fundamentally undermining the economic model of the plantation in the process. According to Popkin, 'This provision became one of the defining principles of Haitian independence; its cancellation during the occupation of the country by the United States in the early twentieth century still rankles with many Haitians'.⁵⁷² Although the plantation system would not return, the political shift ceding land ownership rights to outsiders dismantled one of the key achievements of the Haitian Revolution. This relates directly to Seabrook's zombies, James's historical fiction, and Roumain's pastoralism.

On the Haitian agricultural policies pursued after independence, Casimir writes that

⁵⁷⁰ Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, p. 131-132.

⁵⁷¹ Jean Casimir, *The Haitians: A Decolonial History*, trans. by Dubois, Latin America in Translation/En Traducción/Em Tradução (The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), p. 117.

⁵⁷² Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, p. 138.

‘The examples of the policies pursued by Toussaint and Christophe make clear that the reconstruction of the plantation economy could have been achieved only through militarized agricultural labor’ which faced a considerable opposition not only within Haiti, but also against reduced international demand for Haitian commodities.⁵⁷³ Casimir expands this point, writing that

Reconstructing an agrarian policy based on export commodities would have required the creation of a differentiated social class, and therefore the successful repression and indoctrination of the labor force. This would have required the application of an ideological tool—the racialization of human relations—and the budgetary means to satisfy the material needs of the repressive force needed to control the labor force.⁵⁷⁴

The Haitian economy, rooted as it was in the production and export of commodities, underwent a fundamental transformation that could not be reversed—despite concerted attempts by both the Haitian leadership and the French. Before the revolution, Saint-Domingue ‘accounted for more than one third of the foreign commerce of France’.⁵⁷⁵ After 1804, Haiti’s plantation economy was replaced by a peasant economy based predominantly upon subsistence agriculture. Concurring with Casimir, Popkin focusses on the material destruction on the plantations, writing that

The long years of fighting from 1791 to 1803 had also caused considerable damage to property, although this probably affected the whites more than the victorious blacks, who had no reason to lament the destruction of the costly sugar-processing machinery on the

⁵⁷³ Casimir, *The Haitians*, p. 210.

⁵⁷⁴ Casimir, *The Haitians*, p. 225.

⁵⁷⁵ Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 20.

plantations or of the masters' mansions.⁵⁷⁶

Either neglected or actively destroyed, the infrastructure that was so vital to growing, processing and exporting sugar could not be easily recovered. According to Schmidt, 'The great plantations were broken up into small plots and farmed by former slaves who became passionately attached to their individual holdings and were correspondingly unenthusiastic about working for wages'.⁵⁷⁷

Without the use of force, the plantation system was unable to function. Popkin further notes that

The irrigation systems vital for sugar-growing in drier regions had disintegrated, and many roads had deteriorated so badly that carriages could no longer use them, forcing travelers to go on horseback or by foot. The new nation of Haiti thus inherited little from its colonial past: its population would have to generate the resources to build its future.⁵⁷⁸

The material reality of the independent Haiti was very different to that of the colony of Saint Domingue. With the destruction of the physical infrastructure of empire alongside the elimination of colonial power structures, Haiti gained its independence. However, freedom from French colonialism would not mark an end to attempts from outside of Haiti to control the country.

Though free from external control, Haiti was not free of neocolonial influence. Where this is relevant to the literary texts explored in this chapter is best exemplified by two events. First, through the indemnity of 1825—signed by President Boyer and Charles X of France—and second, by the U.S. occupation of Haiti, beginning in 1915. Both events were in part related to the

⁵⁷⁶ Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, p. 142.

⁵⁷⁷ Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, p. 24.

⁵⁷⁸ Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, p. 142.

prosperity formerly brought by the sugar industry under the plantation system. On the former event, Popkin details the harsh terms of the document:

The terms of the 1825 arrangement proved impossible for Haiti to meet. Both the French officials who drafted it and Boyer himself still thought that, given peace and access to the French market, the island would quickly regain the prosperity it had known in the colonial era. In fact, however, sugar production in the island had never recovered from the disruption of the revolution. Sugar cultivation had shifted to new areas, particularly Cuba and Brazil, where growers used more efficient methods to process the cane; with a population unwilling to submit to disciplined labor in the fields and without resources to invest in the industry, Haiti could not compete with them.⁵⁷⁹

The pre-revolution economy could not return, yet recognition of Haitian independence exacted a toll that the fledgling country was unable to pay. This debt—150 million francs in addition to preferential tariffs for France—would, over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, prevent the material progress of Haiti while serving as a constant reminder of the threat of foreign domination.⁵⁸⁰

Occupied by the U.S. throughout the period 1915-1934, Haiti in this period serves as the setting for *The Magic Island*. Schmidt highlights the prevailing logic of the U.S. occupation, writing that ‘economic development should come about through plantation agriculture financed by private American investments’ destroying the independent peasant freeholder system in the

⁵⁷⁹ Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, p. 152.

⁵⁸⁰ Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, 1995), p. 25; p. 32.

process.⁵⁸¹ This marks a partial return of the sugar industry to Haiti, although not accompanied by enslavement. Instead, U.S. multinationals seek to use Haitian productive capacity to extract value for bond and shareholders. Following 1915, ‘American businessmen subsequently played leading roles in local sugar, banana, and sisal industries, and the beginnings of a tourist industry’ predominantly in the service of multinationals, such as the Haitian American Sugar Company (HASCO).⁵⁸² Just as Ortiz’s Cuban sugar industry experienced domination from U.S. business interests, so too did Haiti. Though free, Haitians worked in labour-intensive commodity production for the benefit of U.S. multinationals.

Haiti’s counter-modernity in *The Black Jacobins* and *Toussaint Louverture*

Beginning with his work on the journals *Trinidad* (1929-1930) and *Beacon* (1931-1933), James’s texts help to advance the West Indies in the literary cultural sphere. West Indian history and culture come to the fore and are placed within the context of the Atlantic world. Rosengarten notes that James’s work demands to be contextualised within the sphere of his political beliefs, writing that the *Beacon* group’s members uniting aim was to ‘deprovincialize Trinidadian society, and make of the country, as part of a larger Caribbean network of island-nations, a vital intellectual center where new ideas could be tested and where new avenues to racial and political justice could be discussed’.⁵⁸³ James shifts focus away from Trinidad to explore the nature of the Haitian revolution in his play *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History* (1934)

⁵⁸¹ Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, p. 11.

⁵⁸² Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, p. 234.

⁵⁸³ Frank Rosengarten, ‘Poetry and Truth in C. L. R. James’s Fictional Writings’, in *Urbane Revolutionary, C. L. R. James and the Struggle for a New Society* (University Press of Mississippi, 2008), p. 160.

and his history, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; 1963). Rosengarten notes that '*The Black Jacobins* is a historical work, yet its narrative sweep and underlying conception of human character and fallibility are literary to the core', developing the ideas James first explores in his earlier play.⁵⁸⁴ This is stated directly by James, writing that 'the individual leadership responsible for [the Haitian Revolution] was almost entirely the work of a single man – Toussaint L'Ouverture' placing him as one of the great strategists of his time.⁵⁸⁵

For this chapter I will be treating *The Black Jacobins* as a literary work to better place the text in conversation with other examples of Commodity Modernism. This is supported by Scott's analysis focusing on the literary—rather than historical—figure of Toussaint Louverture in James's text. The inspiration behind Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity* is formed 'by approaches that acknowledge the mythopoetic character of *The Black Jacobins*, that read it less for its facts than for its literary-political project'.⁵⁸⁶ Scott argues, extending beyond George Lamming's reading of Toussaint Louverture as Caliban,⁵⁸⁷ that 'in his revisions to the 1963 edition James's Toussaint is imagined not only as a newly language Caliban, but as a modernist intellectual, suffering, like Hamlet, the modern fracturing of thought and action'.⁵⁸⁸ The character of Toussaint Louverture is therefore cast as both the dispossessed—forced to learn the language of the oppressor

⁵⁸⁴ Rosengarten, 'Poetry and Truth in C. L. R. James's Fictional Writings', p. 157.

⁵⁸⁵ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Penguin, 2001), p. xviii.

⁵⁸⁶ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, E-Duke Books Scholarly Collection (Duke University Press, 2004), p. 15.

⁵⁸⁷ For Lamming's full analysis of Toussaint Louverture as Caliban see: George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Michael Joseph, 1960).

⁵⁸⁸ Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, p. 16.

and engage with the culture of Europe to survive—as well as a tragic hero of mythic proportions.

Both *The Black Jacobins* and *Toussaint Louverture* allow us to explore Haiti in the context of sugar production for transatlantic trade. Much like Fernando Ortiz's Cuba, James' Haiti is one that fundamentally relies upon the export of commodities to sustain itself, which began as the colony of Saint Domingue. Crucially, James bridges the Haitian revolution with the twentieth century, using the former to shed light on the latter. Noting this analogy, Rosengarten writes that 'The social conflicts of the new industrial age in the nineteenth century had remained of central importance to the more advanced forms of capitalist political economy in the twentieth century'.⁵⁸⁹ A fundamental feature of James's work is to root the decolonial movements of the mid-twentieth century in a history of economic and cultural oppression, of which sugar played a central role.

As an analyst of West Indian history and culture there are clear parallels between James and Ortiz. James writes that 'The history of Spanish imperialism, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, all the related sciences are [Ortiz's] medium of investigation into Cuban life, folklore, literature, music, art, education, criminality, everything Cuban', naming *Cuban Counterpoint* as 'the first and only comprehensive study of the West Indian people' and further noting that 'Ortiz ushered the Caribbean into the thought of the twentieth century and kept it there'.⁵⁹⁰ James explicitly builds upon Ortiz's legacy, working to carve space for Haiti and her plantations within the scope of the twentieth century. The Haitian Revolution is highlighted in both *Toussaint Louverture* and *The Black Jacobins* as a pivotal event that helped forge the modern world from

⁵⁸⁹ Frank Rosengarten, 'Poetry and Truth in C. L. R. James's Fictional Writings', in *Urbane Revolutionary, C. L. R. James and the Struggle for a New Society* (University Press of Mississippi, 2008), p. 158.

⁵⁹⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 308.

which he writes. The sugar plantations in the colony of Saint Domingue, later the nation of Haiti, entrenched racialised inequalities as a means to enrich France and establish European economic dominance.

Both James and Ortiz explore distinct visions of modernity on separate Caribbean islands. While James draws inspiration from Ortiz, *The Black Jacobins* differs in both form and content to *Cuban Counterpoint*. James uses Haiti's revolutionary history and the figure of Toussaint L'Ouverture to explore an idea of Haitian modernity rooted in political resistance and liberation from European colonial domination. In contrast, Ortiz's work explores Cuban anthropology, sociology, and cultural analysis, focusing on cultural transformation rather than revolutionary anti-colonial resistance. Alongside his transculturation neologism, Ortiz places tobacco and sugar into symbolic opposition, using the histories of these two products to explore the nature of Cuban cultural identity in the twentieth century. Where James emphasises revolution and the politics of state formation, Ortiz highlights cultural exchange and social change over time. Both are united in their analyses of the economic dependency created by sugar, as well as the meaning of nationhood in the Caribbean. Placed together, and alongside the other texts I have included in this thesis, the two authors reveal a broader postcolonial modernist tradition in the Caribbean, showing the multiple pathways through which writers engaged with the legacies of colonialism.

Grüner and McGlazer provide insight into the intersection between James' post-colonial work and the budding modernity displayed by the colonised Haitians. Dubbed *metamodern*, Grüner and McGlazer seek to define Haitian modernity in contrast to a more Eurocentric conception of the term, writing that it represents

another "modernity," a modernity divided against itself. A counter-modernity, we could

say, recalling the way in which, in the 1960s, we spoke of *counterculture*. Counter-modernity would thus be defined not as something located *outside* modernity, but rather something that undermines the dominant version of modernity from within its own interstices, pointing to this modernity's failures, its contradictions, its insoluble conflicts.⁵⁹¹

This assessment shares similarities with Marx's contention that a capitalist bourgeoisie sows the seeds of its own destruction. Counter-modernity challenges accepted, usually Eurocentric, notions of what it means to represent the modern world.

Although James's two texts concern themselves chiefly with the Haitian revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, his writing remains profoundly influenced by contemporary debates surrounding decolonisation—specifically in wake of the U.S. occupation of Haiti and the Pan-African decolonial movements gaining salience. Dalleo calls *The Black Jacobins* 'a text very much in dialogue with its 1930s context' that was intended to inform debate on the twentieth-century decolonisation movements sweeping the world.⁵⁹² In writing about the colonial period, financed by the production and trade in commodity crops, James seeks to recontextualise colonial history as a means of bolstering the argument for independence from empire. In agreement with Ortiz, James supports a redefined modernity that incorporates the industrial processes of the plantation, writing that on arrival in the West Indies, newly enslaved Africans 'entered directly

⁵⁹¹ Eduardo Grüner and Ramsey McGlazer, *The Haitian Revolution: Capitalism, Slavery and Counter-Modernity* (Polity Press, 2019), p. 59.

⁵⁹² Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism's Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism*, New World Studies (University of Virginia Press, 2016), p. 25.

into the large-scale agriculture of the sugar plantation, which was a *modern* system'.⁵⁹³ By participating in the strictures of commodity production, even by force, they become woven into the fabric of modernity. Gilroy proposes that 'we reread and rethink this expressive counter-culture not simply as a succession of literary tropes and genres but as a philosophical discourse which refuses the modern, occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics'.⁵⁹⁴ Forced to participate within the framework of modernity, a counter-culture is constructed to express alternative ideals, such as postcolonialism or, in Gilroy's case, Marxism. A similar argument is made by Scott, who notes that plantations, as represented in James's text, relate to 'the making of colonial modernities and the subjects who find themselves conscripts of that structure of power'.⁵⁹⁵ Here, Scott recognises the crucial element that enslaved labour played in forming the concept of modernity as a whole, with the enslaved as unwilling but essential participants in its foundations.

James notes the fundamental contradiction in Louverture's character: on the one hand as a great emancipator, and on the other maintaining a form of the colonial status quo. James writes that

even at the height of the war Toussaint strove to maintain the French connection as necessary to Haiti in its long and difficult climb to civilization. Convinced that slavery could never be restored in San Domingo, he was equally convinced that a population of

⁵⁹³ C. L. R. James, 'Appendix: From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro' in *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Second Edition, Revised (Vintage Books, 1989), p. 392.

⁵⁹⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁹⁵ Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, p. 115.

slaves recently landed from Africa could not attain to civilization by ‘going it alone’.⁵⁹⁶

Scott notes that this constitutes James’ conception of ‘Toussaint’s tragic dilemma’ which placed into conflict ‘the irreconcilable dissonance between Toussaint’s expectations for freedom and the conditions in which he sought to realize them, between the utopia of his desire and the finitude of his concrete circumstances’.⁵⁹⁷ In other words, Toussaint Louverture’s desire for both absolute freedom and relative prosperity. Louverture’s conception of an independent Saint Domingue relied upon both a continued connection to France and a continued sugar industry without slavery, opposing ideas that could not be reconciled. Scott writes further that

For Toussaint, James suggests, the problem of emancipation was, palpably, not merely a problem of ending slavery, of breaking the bondage of the slaves. Rather, the problem of emancipation entailed also—and simultaneously—the project of imagining and constructing a sustainable freedom within new forms of life.⁵⁹⁸

Toussaint Louverture is lionised as a martyr for freedom on the one hand, but nonetheless struggles with the complexities of post-imperial survival on the other. Like the literary figure presented by James, the historical Toussaint Louverture ultimately believed in the continued functioning of the plantations on Haiti to ensure economic stability, creating an unresolvable tension. The tragedy at the heart of Louverture’s plan for government, and the point of which James is most critical, is this belief in the need for the plantations. As drivers of infrastructure and as the major economic engine

⁵⁹⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 235.

⁵⁹⁷ Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, p. 133.

⁵⁹⁸ Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, p. 133.

of the colony plantations had a major role in forming Saint Domingue but became unsustainable in light of independence from France. Sugar presents a Janus-faced conundrum for Louverture, with the commodity serving as both the means of oppression for black enslaved Haitians whilst providing the economic means for their survival in a post-independence context. With a perspective taken from the anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century, James writes that ‘The defeat of Toussaint in the War of Independence and his imprisonment and death in Europe are universally looked upon as a tragedy’ referring to Louverture’s failure to reconcile his two convictions surrounding independence and the prosperity brought by sugar.⁵⁹⁹

Presenting a heroic and tragic view of Toussaint Louverture as a liberator, *The Black Jacobins* stands as James’s seminal history of the Haitian revolution from an avowedly West Indian perspective. It is in the appendix ‘From Toussaint L’Ouverture to Fidel Castro’ that James highlights the history of sugar specifically—and the structure of the plantation more generally—as a force that binds the West Indies together as a region distinct from Africa, the Americas, and Europe. The appendix, alongside significant additions to chapter thirteen, was added in 1963 and constitutes James’s evolving views on the Haitian Revolution in relation to the postcolonial movements igniting between the original publication in 1938 and 1963. Scott writes that the appendix is ‘James’s historiographical gift to the (then) emerging postcolonial Caribbean nation-states’. Furthermore, Scott offers a view on the underlying significance of James’s revised edition:

the significance of the appendix lies in its subtle alteration of the problem about slave plantation power: in the body of *The Black Jacobins* the problem of slave plantation power

⁵⁹⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 235.

is located in relation to the construction of a revolutionary narrative (a longing for anticolonial revolution); in the appendix by contrast it is located in relation to the postcolonial story of the making of a civilization. And central to this story is James's depiction of the distinctive modernity of that civilization'.⁶⁰⁰

By refocusing on the notion of nation-building, James asserts Haiti's claim to a distinctive form of modernity that interacts with both plantation history and the right to self-determination. By advancing the concept of a Caribbean form of modernity, James's revisions hold parallels with the idea of a 'civilisational region' as promulgated by Glissant.⁶⁰¹ As James writes:

The history of the West Indies is governed by two factors, the sugar plantation and Negro slavery. [...] Wherever the sugar plantation and slavery existed, they imposed a pattern. It is an original pattern, not European, not African, not a part of the American main, not native in any conceivable sense of that word, but West Indian, *sui generis*, with no parallel anywhere else.⁶⁰²

This conceptual separation of the West Indies from other regions helps to distinguish the distinct conception of modernity that I have linked to commodity production on the plantations. The expressions of modernism as interpreted by authors writing in Cuba, Brazil, and the American South is one that is linked by the shared cultural memory of plantations; they therefore share parallel, though distinct, cultural memories and interpretations of modernity. Considering the

⁶⁰⁰ Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, p. 107.

⁶⁰¹ Edouard Glissant, 'Creolization in the Making of the Americas', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 54.1/2 (2008), p. 81.

⁶⁰² James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 305.

shared historical experiences across these commodity-producing regions allow for meaningful comparative analysis. Commodity producing regions developed distinctive interpretations of modernity that are made comparable by an international, plantation-based structure of economic and cultural exchange.

James and Ortiz: responses to the plantation

James's work demonstrates clear affinities with Fernando Ortiz, explicitly referencing *Cuban Counterpoint* in the appendix to the second edition of *The Black Jacobins*, titled 'From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro'.⁶⁰³ Both authors work to define a distinctly Caribbean understanding of modernity, shaped significantly by transculturation and historical commodity production. As an industrial agricultural complex, the sugar plantation is defined by James as 'the most civilizing as well as the most demoralizing influence in West Indian development' positioning it as 'a modern system' that incorporated Haiti into a system of globalised trade.⁶⁰⁴ In a similar vein to Ortiz's *transculturation*, James identifies the structure of the plantation as the crucible of Haitian society. Suggesting that the conditions produced on the sugar plantations were fundamentally modern, James writes that

It further required that the slaves live together in a social relation far closer than any proletariat of the time. The cane when reaped had to be rapidly transported to what was factory production. The product was shipped abroad for sale. Even the cloth the slaves

⁶⁰³ As noted above, James's 1963 appendix amends *The Black Jacobins* to reflect the anti-colonial struggles across the globe in the intervening twenty-five years.

⁶⁰⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 305-306.

wore and the food they ate was imported. The Negroes, therefore, from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life. That is their history—as far as I have been able to discover, a unique history.⁶⁰⁵

The suggestion made here is that the Haitian revolution served as a form of proto-Marxist proletarian resistance. Sugar as a commodity is produced in the service of accumulating capital while extracting value for the French metropole. James emphasises the importance of the sugar plantation to the Caribbean, writing that ‘The dominant industrial structure has been the sugar plantation. For over two hundred years the sugar industry has tottered on the brink of disaster, remaining alive by an unending succession of last-minute rescues by gifts, concessions, quotas from the metropolitan power or powers’.⁶⁰⁶ Even post-independence, the Haitian economy depended upon the export of sweet white gold.

James writes not only on the conditions produced by the plantations, but also details the trap created by Haiti’s economic dependence on commodity export. Sugar, due to the strenuous and constant labour required to produce it, served as an ongoing justification for the transatlantic slave trade. James goes as far to contend that the British were supporters of Abolition predominantly to destroy the supply of slaves to the profitable French sugar colony of Saint Domingue. On the pervasive nature of the commodity-based economy created by the plantations, James writes

Toussaint could see no road for the Haitian economy but the sugar plantation. Dessalines

⁶⁰⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 305-306.

⁶⁰⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 317.

was a barbarian. After Dessalines came Christophe, a man of conspicuous ability and within his circumstances an enlightened ruler. He also did his best (a cruel best) with the plantation. But with the abolition of slavery and the achievement of independence the plantation, indelibly associated with slavery, became unbearable. Pétion acquiesced in substituting subsistence production for the sugar plantation.⁶⁰⁷

The economy of Saint Domingue was intertwined with sugar, so much so that following independence in 1804 the divorce from this powerful commodity proved to be extremely painful and exceptionally violent. James writes of the economic regime that replaced the sugar trade that

Subsistence production resulted in economic decay and every variety of political disorder. Yet it has preserved the national independence, and out of this has come something new which has captured a continent and holds its place in the institutions of the world.⁶⁰⁸

In James's narrative, it is only through the ultimate tragic failure of Louverture's independent vision for Haiti that true freedom from the strictures of colonial domination is brought about.

Placing the work in the context of Haiti's colonial history, Dubois writes that *Toussaint Louverture* 'seeks to tell the whole history of the Haitian Revolution, of international imperial rivalry, of the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness, and of the creation of both a nation and a people'.⁶⁰⁹ James's first attempt at defining Haitian identity through literature,

⁶⁰⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 306.

⁶⁰⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 307.

⁶⁰⁹ Laurent Dubois, 'Foreword' in *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History* by C. L. R. James, ed. by Christian Høgsbjerg, The C.L.R. James Archives (Duke University Press, 2012), p. viii.

Toussaint Louverture made its West End debut starring Paul Robeson in the titular role, providing an element of Broadway stardom to the production. Høgsbjerg dubs the play as ‘the most outstanding anti-imperialist play ever to make it onto London’s West End during the interwar period’ as well as ‘[symbolising] in an important sense the Ethiopian resistance to Mussolini’.⁶¹⁰ The use of Haitian revolutionary history in *The Black Jacobins* to symbolise other more recent revolutionary moments was initially used in James’s play with the violent acts of the Haitian Revolution used to show the violence of colonialism on stage. In the foreword to James’s play Dubois views *Toussaint Louverture* to be as pivotal as *The Black Jacobins*, writing that

Written in a different register, and to different ends, it nevertheless captures the density and drama of the Haitian Revolution. It bridges time and space, remarkably condensing an incredibly complex period into a series of memorable scenes and characters. It brings together the sense of an epic event with the apt portrayal of historical characters.⁶¹¹

The play serves as James’s first published attempt to transform the Haitian Revolution from an under-examined historical aside into a parable for the twentieth century. By using Haiti’s history in this way, James asserts a confidently Haitian interpretation of history that wrests control of the narrative away from non-Haitian authors and historians. Instead, the horrors perpetrated by European colonialism are dramatised and expressed theatrically, popularising Haiti’s history in the process.

⁶¹⁰ Christian Høgsbjerg, 'Introduction', in *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History*, by C. L. R. James, edited by Christian Høgsbjerg, The C. L. R. James Archives (Duke University Press, 2012), p. 26.

⁶¹¹ Dubois, ‘Foreword’ in *Toussaint Louverture* by C. L. R. James, p. viii.

The narrative of the play follows Louverture's rise to power through the revolution, and the resulting struggles in wielding and maintaining power in the febrile political environment that followed. *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History* opens on a discussion between monsieur Bullet and Colonel Vincent on the sugar economy:

BULLET: Colonel Vincent, we produce more sugar here than in Jamaica, Barbados, and all the British West Indian Islands put together. In fact, no part of the civilised world produces as much wealth in proportion to its size as the French part of the island of San Domingo.

VINCENT: They tell me that the soil is as fertile as the scenery is beautiful.

BULLET: There is more to it than that. The Spaniards own twice as much of the island as we do. Yet Spanish San Domingo is all decay and corruption.⁶¹²

The reference to the fertile land found in Haiti can be compared to Joyce's assertion in *Ulysses* on the excellent quality of Ireland's soil. Agricultural potential is transposed into national (or, in this case, colonial) pride. However, through the inclusion of this line James demonstrates the worth of the colony to the white colonialists in power. The potential for a decolonised Saint Domingue is shown through the wealth it produces and its importance to the metropole.

Bullet represents the power of white supremacy in Haiti, meting out cruel punishments to dissenters. The horror of the Haitian plantations is shown in James's play with Bullet's extreme

⁶¹² C. L. R. James, *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History*, ed. by Christian Høgsbjerg, The C. L. R. James Archives (Duke University Press, 2012), 49.

methods of torture and execution:

BULLET: You let him escape? Find him. Until he is found, every day, starting tomorrow, one of you will dig his own grave. Do you hear?

SLAVES: Yes, master.

BULLET: Now go. And remember—with honey and molasses, and no stone-throwing allowed.

*(Exit slaves.)*⁶¹³

The punishment is made all the more sadistic by Bullet's use of the sweet molasses with the products of sugar refining used to oppress enslaved labourers. James brings the power imbalance to the fore early in the play, showing the extreme methods by which enslaved labourers were corralled and forced to conform. Sweet commodities that are prized by consumers are used quite literally as a method of torture to ensure their continued production. Yet Bullet also possesses a contradictory awareness of the precarity of white control on the island. Bullet's fear of rebellion is displayed through an outburst at Colonel Vincent, stating that 'we have half a million slaves in this colony, and we could not exist without them'.⁶¹⁴ The harsh reality of sugar commodity production is embodied by Bullet and his methods of suppression, with the punishment symbolically intertwined with the product in an effort to suppress resistance. James suggests the inherent instability of the plantation system can be found in the unrestrained cruelty of the white colonialists, combined with economic incentives that reward terror. The sadism of colonial Saint

⁶¹³ James, *Toussaint Louverture*, p. 52.

⁶¹⁴ James, *Toussaint Louverture*, p. 50.

Domingue repeats throughout Haitian literature, with the exploration of sweet sugar contrasted with its harsh methods of production.

Seabrook and enslavement as corruption of the body

From James's postcolonial exploration of Haitian history, I now turn to the pop-anthropological work of William B. Seabrook. In a similar vein to the Gothic texts of the nineteenth century—Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)—Seabrook introduced a new monster to the Western Anglophone canon, intrinsically bound to commodity production. In *The Magic Island* (1929), Seabrook introduces the Anglophone world to one of the most infamous, and celebrated, monsters of the twentieth century: the zombie. Taken from the Haitian folklore encountered by Seabrook, he writes that 'these tales ran closely parallel not only with those of the negroes in Georgia and the Carolinas, but with the mediaeval folk-lore of white Europe' with the zombie noted as a uniquely Haitian creature.⁶¹⁵ Following *The Magic Island*, the idea would shamble across mediums from literature into film, where it would gain ever increasing cultural prominence. However, the flesh-craving pandemic zombies of our contemporary era differ significantly from the Haitian zombies of *The Magic Island*. The zombie that Seabrook introduced to the world was not driven by plague or the desire for human brains, but by spiritual magic, deployed in the interests of commodity production.

By including Seabrook's text, I situate his work in the context of other modernist literary works featuring Haiti—particularly alongside the works of James and Roumain—and Commodity

⁶¹⁵ William B., Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (Dover Publications, 2016), p. 93.

Modernism more generally. Following a close textual analysis of Seabrook's chapter 'Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields', I place Seabrook's text in conversation with Jacques Roumain's *Masters of the Dew*. Both authors, inspired by Haiti's landscape, culture, and history, present differing aspects of commodity production and consumption on the island. Part of the reasoning behind this chapter is to bridge the gap between sugar producer and consumer. The way sugar is consumed by the citizens of Haiti reflects the commodity's position as the very thing that economically sustains the island, while dooming its inhabitants. Furthermore, these works provide contrasting perspectives; Seabrook explicitly frames his approach to Haiti as that of an outsider, whereas Roumain adopts the viewpoint of Manuel, a character returning home after an extended absence.

The Magic Island straddles the line between fact and non-fiction in the form of a travelogue, documenting Seabrook's experiences travelling Haiti in 1918. Seabrook's blend of travelogue, pop-anthropology, and embellished personal anecdotes differentiates *The Magic Island* from some of the other explicitly fictional texts I have discussed so far in this thesis. Engaging with what Seabrook calls 'the tangled Haitian folk-lore' which 'Lies in a baffling category on the ragged edge of things which are beyond either superstition or reason', the text shows an outsider's perspective on Haitian culture.⁶¹⁶ The narrative moves from Seabrook's introduction as an outsider arriving in Haiti to increasingly strange representations of the practice of voodoo on the island, including his literary representation of the Haitian zombi. Embracing Eurocentric modernist notions of Primitivism, Seabrook produces a text that bolsters notions of

⁶¹⁶ Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, p. 92.

civilisation in relation to an underdeveloped Other. Bell notes Primitivism's two contradictory strains of thought: 'The "primitive" can be what is unspoiled, a pure origin, or it can be the crude and undeveloped' which 'may have not just a backward vista, whether nostalgic or condescending, but a forward and utopian one'.⁶¹⁷ This contradictory notion helps to explain Seabrook's position, as both a celebrator of Haitian culture and as an interloper attempting to package tales of Vodou for consumption by readers in English. As Luckhurst writes, 'Seabrook's Modernist primitivism embraces precisely what Victorian anthropologists of superstition and colonial authorities had vocally condemned', the celebration of voodoo rituals and black magic.⁶¹⁸ Haiti is cast by Seabrook as an exciting and exoticised frontier whilst, perhaps inadvertently, showing Haiti's crucial cultural contributions to the modern world.

Featured in the text as his own protagonist, Seabrook presents himself as a complicated figure, seemingly progressive for his time while displaying aspects of cultural fetishisation. Zieger writes that 'A racial dialectic animates Seabrook's writing: He abandons himself to impassioned, magical, "savage" practices, cultivating a black identity, but as an emissary from white modernity, he retains the privilege of Enlightenment rationality.'⁶¹⁹ The Haitians are othered and presented as curiosities, far from the bounds of modernity, despite their country's anti-colonial history. As McGehee and Taylor assert, 'While Seabrook participated in the negrophilia common among his fellow writers at the time, his simultaneous disavowal of the

⁶¹⁷ Michael Bell, 'Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. by Peter Brooker and others (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 355.

⁶¹⁸ Roger Luckhurst, *Zombies: A Cultural History* (Reaktion Books, 2015), p. 27.

⁶¹⁹ Susan Zieger, 'The Case of Seabrook: Documents, Haiti, and the Working Dead', *Modernism/Modernity*, 19.4 (2012), p. 739.

American occupation of Haiti and reinscription of white superiority reveal how ultimately *The Magic Island* was one of many texts that criticized the horrors of slavery and colonialism yet continued to perpetuate white power.⁶²⁰ As a text that is largely (sometimes emphatically) pro-Haitian, *The Magic Island* is unavoidably from an outsider perspective that details a perceived exoticism which is packaged for consumption in the U.S. and Europe. However, it is with this proviso that Seabrook's work becomes more important. Seabrook offers a perspective on Haiti from the U.S., producing a work that Others Haiti whilst showing the far reaches of U.S. conglomerates. Despite problems concerning Seabrook's identity as a U.S./Eurocentric white emissary, *The Magic Island* nonetheless brings Haitian history, customs, and culture into the modernist literary canon surrounding the Atlantic. Concerning the production and consumption of commodities, the text draws focus to the source of sugar as a western staple, highlighting its roots in colonial exploitation.

Unlike Roumain, Seabrook explicitly positions himself as an outsider to Haitian customs in his work. It is worth noting that, although James was also not Haitian, as a black writer from the West Indies his relationship to Haiti differs significantly from that of Seabrook, whose perspective remains inevitably shaped by his identity as a white southerner from the U.S.. McGehee and Taylor note that

This sympathy for the Europeans that created and perpetuated the plantation economy system (incorrectly attributing the act of making Saint-Domingue, the wealthiest colony,

⁶²⁰ Margaret T. McGehee and Emily Taylor, 'Mr. Seabrook Goes to Haiti, or Southern (Self-)Mastery in *The Magic Island* (1929)', *The Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South*, 55.4 (2018), pp. 53-54.

to the slave owners and not the slaves themselves, whose labor created the wealth) aligns Seabrook with the white elites he had left behind in Georgia.⁶²¹

This clearly distances Seabrook from the position later posited by James, focusing instead upon the revolutionary politics that sought to free Haiti from plantation slavery.

In *The Magic Island*, Seabrook gives life to the Haitian zombie. Born of subversive spiritual practices, as opposed to a pandemic-virus, Seabrook's Haitian zombies are described as 'neither a ghost, nor yet a person who had been raised like Lazarus from the dead' but rather a corporeal body without the agency of the living.⁶²² The cultural anxiety reflected here is that, after death, the bodies of Haitians continue to be participants in enforced labour on the plantations. In this way the fears of Haitian labourers come to the fore, showing the long-lasting cultural impact of enslavement on the Haitian population. Zeiger writes that 'Seabrook's zombie traced a black history of alienated labor and loss of national and individual sovereignty from the past to the present' with the reanimated dead continuing in the service of commodity production.⁶²³ This provides a mirror to James's conception of the Haitian proletariat freeing themselves from colonial domination. In Seabrook's text, this continuing domination is embodied in the figure of the zombie. Formerly free individuals are re-enslaved upon death, symbolising the legacy of commodity-related oppression. While ostensibly in support of Haitian advancement Seabrook's depiction of Haitians in *The Magic Island* poses difficulties in their representation. Zeiger

⁶²¹ McGehee and Taylor, 'Mr. Seabrook Goes to Haiti, or Southern (Self-)Mastery in *The Magic Island* (1929)', p. 61.

⁶²² Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, p. 93.

⁶²³ Zeiger, 'The Case of Seabrook: Documents, Haiti, and the Working Dead', p. 740.

addresses this, writing that ‘The dissident Surrealists’ fetishization of blackness and primitive ritual led them to overlook the way *The Magic Island* also documented a distinctively Haitian modernity’ highlighting the contradictory nature of Seabrook’s work.⁶²⁴ The horrors of slavery are juxtaposed with explicit exoticisation of the Haitian experience.

In *Tell My Horse* (1938), Zora Neale Hurston offers a different literary account of Haitian zombies, free from the black fetishisation to which Seabrook is susceptible. Hurston writes that the superstition surrounding zombies reaches into the upper class of Haitian society:

Think of the fiendishness of the thing. It is not good for a person who has lived all his life surrounded by a degree of fastidious culture, loved to his last breath by family and friends, to contemplate the probability of his resurrected body being dragged from the vault⁶²⁵

There is a distinct fear transmitted here of helplessness at the hands of a sinister force. The peace offered by death is upturned by the continued spectre of slavery. Just as Haitian corpses are resurrected after their deaths, so too are the plantations continuing on in their own strange afterlife, despite their post-revolution dissolution. In Hurston’s narrative, the zombie appears to be an extension of plantation culture, from which there is little hope of rescue. Hurston writes that

Family and friends cannot rescue the victim because they do not know. They think the loved one is sleeping peacefully in his grave. They may motor past the plantation where the Zombie who was once dear to them is held captive often and again and its soulless eyes

⁶²⁴ Zieger, ‘The Case of Seabrook: Documents, Haiti, and the Working Dead’, p. 748.

⁶²⁵ Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (Tingle Books, 2022), p. 174.

may have fallen upon them without thought or recognition.⁶²⁶

As Hurston exemplifies here, the terror of the plantation is expressed through horror in Haitian literary texts, with the memory of slavery translated into an enduring supernatural torture. The legacy of plantation slavery leaves its mark across Haitian literature in this way, emerging in Haitians' corporeal enslavement after death. Hurston's passage shows the distinct fear surrounding autonomy and identity loss within a postcolonial context.

Supporting the idea that zombies communicate cultural fears of estrangement and enslavement, Glover writes that 'the zombie functions as a catalyzing metaphor for considering questions of community-building and alienation in an economically, politically, and even psychically fractured society. The zombie figure indeed proves eminently exploitable as a conduit to many of the broader socioaesthetic concerns prevalent in modern Haitian literature'.⁶²⁷ The zombie represents an individual that is distanced from their community, condemned to an afterlife of enslavement. Furthermore, Glover notes that the presence of the zombie 'has been well commented on by theorists of Francophone literature, the United States' occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and the corresponding rise of *indigénisme* inspired a renewed interest in and appreciation for Haiti's tradition'.⁶²⁸ The zombie not only symbolises enslavement in Haiti, but also the expression of Haitian culture via vodou. As supernatural beings, zombies articulate a foundational fear of outside control, and of a loss of bodily autonomy. The degradation of slavery

⁶²⁶ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 174.

⁶²⁷ Kaiama L. Glover, 'Exploiting the Undead: The Usefulness of the Zombie in Haitian Literature', *Journal of Haitian Studies*, 11.2 (2005), p. 121.

⁶²⁸ Glover, 'Exploiting the Undead', p. 105.

is shown to both continue the drudgery of plantation work as well as the destruction of personal relationships with family and friends. Beyond Seabrook's fascination and embellishment, Hurston reveals the zombie to embody genuine fears of historical oppression, capturing a profound anxiety that haunts Haitian identity and literature in the twentieth century.

"... Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields" and HASCO

Although the mechanism for Haitian zombification is, within the mythology, spiritual, it is instead a terrestrial force that brings the idea into the material world. The fields of the Haitian American Sugar Company (HASCO) link the horrific supernatural figure of the zombie to international corporate exploitation of agricultural resources and human labour. Seabrook addresses the seeming incongruous pairing within the narrative:

If you ride with me tomorrow night, yes, I will show you dead men working in the cane fields. Close even to the cities, there are sometimes zombies. Perhaps you have already heard of those that were at Hasco.

"What about Hasco?" I interrupted him, for in the whole of Haiti, Hasco is perhaps the last name anybody would think of connecting with either sorcery or superstition.

The word is American-commercial-synthetic, like Nabisco, Delco, Socony. It stands for the Haitian-American Sugar Company—an immense factory plant, dominated by a huge chimney, with clanging machinery, steam whistles, freight cars.⁶²⁹

Superstition is blended with reality, suggesting the power held by U.S. companies over Haiti in

⁶²⁹ Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, pp. 94-95.

the twentieth century is not merely economic, but over life and death. Deceased Haitians are transformed into Mintz's 'false [commodities]' returning them to a state of slavery, for the benefit of an unseen consumer, and with a corporate power as an intermediary.⁶³⁰ The zombie is marked as a horror unique to the plantation, rooted in working the cane fields while feeding the complex machinery needed for processing. As Luckhurst writes, 'What Seabrook thinks he sees as a savage survival is actually a product of the very industrial modernity he believes he is leaving behind'.⁶³¹ The zombie becomes a means of automating work that could otherwise only be done by the application of human labour, combined with the fear of a return to slavery.

With the zombie, sugar production is given a new avatar that communicates fears of renewed foreign domination in Haiti. Referring to the U.S. occupation of Haiti in relation to Seabrook's narrative, Roger Luckhurst writes that

[Seabrook's] trip is made possible by the occupation of Haiti by American forces in the period between 1915 and 1934. His impressions of Haiti are entirely dictated by this act of colonization, and this context is central to understanding how the Caribbean zombi made the leap to become the American zombie.⁶³²

In *The Magic Island*, HASCO serves as a reminder that contemporary Haiti is not free. Although the topic is largely avoided by Seabrook, U.S. influence over Haiti directly stokes fears surrounding re-enslavement and exploitation by a foreign power. Luckhurst describes HASCO as

⁶³⁰ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 43.

⁶³¹ Luckhurst, *Zombies*, p. 36.

⁶³² Luckhurst, *Zombies*, p. 33.

‘an American enterprise then faltering at trying to reintroduce largescale plantation farming back into Haiti’ which links ‘a native superstition to the machinery of modern American industrialism’.⁶³³ Primitivism and capitalism are combined in Seabrook’s narrative to show the deleterious effects of U.S. foreign policy on Haiti, making the Haitian zombi a symbol of U.S. neocolonialism via international conglomerates, such as HASCO.

Through the operation of international corporate power, Haitian labourers are reduced to parts of an industrial machine geared towards commodity production. McAlister notes the strange blending of the supernatural with international capitalism, writing that the spiritual zombie represents

A living nightmare of modern capitalism, this kind of zonbi [sic] with all the secrecy, rumors, and mystification of power that surround it, remembers and reperforms the history of enslavement, as well as the capitalist consumption and cannibalism of human bodies and spirits in contemporary Haiti.⁶³⁴

McAlister’s analysis corresponds with Zeiger’s, who writes that ‘read as a figure of injury, the zombie, with its signature tottering gait, made the relevance of slavery to black history, culture, and politics newly legible—to middle-brow readers and cinema-goers.’⁶³⁵ In Seabrook’s text, zombies signify the deep cultural memory of enslavement in Haiti, combined with the religious practices of vodou. As a white American author, Haitian cultural and religious practices are treated

⁶³³ Luckhurst, *Zombies*, p. 33.

⁶³⁴ Elizabeth McAlister, ‘Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 85.2 (2012), p. 472.

⁶³⁵ Susan Zieger, ‘The Case of Seabrook’, p. 740.

as curiosities by Seabrook. However, this is complicated by Seabrook's acknowledgement of the enduring scars left by the plantations in Haiti, and their subsequent communication to an Anglophone readership. As noted by McGehee and Taylor, 'although [the zombies] labor for an American-owned sugar company, there is no sense of white culpability in Seabrook's description of the miserable labor the zombified workers are forced to perform' with white overseers absent from the narrative.⁶³⁶ However, this largely depends on the extent to which Seabrook's work is considered fictional. At the time of writing, few white overseers would have remained on the island of Hispaniola; Seabrook's interpretation may have simply been faithful to the environment in which he was writing. Within the context of the narrative, another interpretation arises: Seabrook places his fictionalised self in the guise of the white overseer. McGehee and Taylor write that 'Once in Haiti, Seabrook at first assumes a white planter identity. He does not claim a plantation space, but rather is guided to it by Louis' suggesting that Seabrook's true role is not that of the curious white interloper, but rather an emissary of white supremacy that exoticises the Haitians.⁶³⁷ Seabrook's reluctance to criticise white power in Haiti's history 'recreates the position of whites on Southern plantations', thus transplanting the social values held in the southern U.S. onto the Caribbean.⁶³⁸ Despite a self-asserted sympathetic portrayal of Haitians and Haiti, Seabrook is nonetheless a product of his own background, as reflected in his exoticisation of the island and its people.

It is sweetness for which the dead men have been enslaved, but it is another granular

⁶³⁶ McGehee and Taylor, 'Mr. Seabrook Goes to Haiti', p. 62.

⁶³⁷ McGehee and Taylor, 'Mr. Seabrook Goes to Haiti', pp. 62-63.

⁶³⁸ McGehee and Taylor, 'Mr. Seabrook Goes to Haiti', p. 62.

consumable that revives their sense of self: salt. Hurston writes of one of the zombies in *Tell My Horse* that ‘He can never speak again, unless he is given salt. “We have examples of a man who gave salt to a demon by mistake and he come man again and can write the name of the man who gave him to the loa”’.⁶³⁹ Salt symbolically counteracts the sugar that the zombies are forced to produce, awakening them to their condition. In *The Magic Island*, although it is salt that rouses the zombies from their stupor, the vehicle for that salt is in a small sweet treat—a pistachio tablette. For Seabrook, it is significant that the catalyst for their awakening should be the sugar that maintains their enslavement:

As Croyance sat with her savory dried herring and biscuit baked with salt and soda, and provision of clairin in the tin cup by her side, she pitied the zombies who had worked so faithfully for Joseph in the cane fields, and who now had nothing, while all the other groups around were feasting, and as she pitied them, a woman passed, crying,

“*Tablettes! Tablettes pistaches! T’ois pour dix cobs!*” *Tablettes* are a sort of candy, in shape and size like cookies, made of brown cane sugar (*rapadou*); sometimes with *pistaches*, which in Haiti are peanuts, or with coriander seed.

And Croyance thought, “These *tablettes* are not salted or seasoned, they are sweet, and can do no harm to the zombies just this once.”⁶⁴⁰

The scene directly juxtaposes consumers with those who produce the sugar. Consumption is presented as the act that ultimately provides a modicum of freedom to the enslaved zombies,

⁶³⁹ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, pp. 176-177.

⁶⁴⁰ Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, p. 98.

releasing them from the curse that keeps them tied to the cane fields. Within the scene, Croyance's consumption of clairin symbolises her status as a consumer, rather than a producer, and distinguishes her from the zombies. Symbolically kept away from the activities of the living, the zombies' consumption is tightly controlled. Consumption therefore becomes a mark of freedom and a broader experience of humanity.

Jacques Roumain's *Masters of the Dew* and the socialist response to the plantation

Published in 1947, Roumain's *Masters of the Dew* reflects on Haiti's anti-imperial history, and serves as a parable for the economic, social, and cultural damage that can be caused by commodity demand. Despite the end of formal U.S. influence over Haiti, the lasting effects of foreign ownership of land and extractive agricultural practices are reflected in Roumain's writing. While sugar is not the focus of *The Masters of the Dew*, much like in Seabrook's *The Magic Island*, the structures created by sugar commodity production form the backdrop to the novel. Furthermore, Roumain serves as an important foil to the approach to Seabrook, choosing to represent Haitians in a more favourable, and less exoticised, state. Using the novel's French language title, Kaussen writes that '*Gouverneurs de la rosée* is considered a masterpiece of Haitian *indigenisme*, negritude, and international modernism. It has been extolled by critics for its realism, its literary language—a *kreyolized* French that captures the rhythm of Haitian popular speech-and its mythopoetic imagery'.⁶⁴¹ Through his work, Roumain seeks to showcase a Caribbean modernity that is incorporated within, yet distinct from, more traditional conceptions of the term. Although

⁶⁴¹ Valerie Kaussen, 'Slaves, "Viejos", and the "Internationale": Modernity and Global Contact in Jacques Roumain's "Gouverneurs de La Rosée"', *Research in African Literatures*, 35.4 (2004), p. 122.

plantations are absent from both the text and the island, the diversion of resources—particularly the diversion of water for commodity production—as the legacy of sugar production leads directly to the dire environmental state discovered by Manuel at the beginning of the novel. The community is scarred by an extractive economy which does not prioritise the prosperity of Haitian citizens. In his exploration of black world literature, Dixon posits that *Masters of the Dew* ‘questions the black man's relationship to Western Civilization, exposes the destruction of African and New World societies by imperial Europe or America, and posits some alternative whereby blacks may find themselves again in a community of free men’.⁶⁴²

The environment plays a crucial role in *Masters of the Dew* as the source of the locals’ misery, their possible salvation, and leveraged as the economic motive for enslavement. Roumain begins the novel by invoking the localised environmental devastation on the island of Haiti:

“WE’RE ALL GOING TO DIE,” said the old woman. Plunging her hands into the dust, Délira Délivrance said, “We’re all going to die. Animals, plants, every living soul! Oh, Jesus! Mary, Mother of God!”⁶⁴³

Deforestation, a direct consequence of industrial monocropping within the plantation system, has undermined the basis for society within Roumain’s Haiti. Casey emphasises the devastation caused by the Haitian sugar plantations built to satisfy the international demand for refined sugar:

Expansion profoundly altered the physical and social landscape as sugar was sowed in land

⁶⁴² Melvin Dixon, ‘Toward a World Black Literature & Community’, *The Massachusetts Review*, 18.4 (1977), pp. 751-752.

⁶⁴³ Jacques Roumain, *Masters of the Dew* trans. by Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook (Caribbean Studies Press, 2017), p. 1.

previously devoted to other crops. Forests were cleared to provide wood for new company buildings and space for more canefields. Water sources were diverted to supply the needs of the sugar economy, and railroads were built to connect distant *colonias* (cane farms) with *centrales*.⁶⁴⁴

The result is similar to that explored by Rêgo, transforming an otherwise lush and thriving landscape into a barren grassland. Contrasting with James's approach in exploring Haiti's violent history of emancipation in relation to the plantations, Roumain instead draws out the social effects of environmental degradation. Just as trade in commodities was the end that justified political oppression within the colony of Saint Domingue, it also led to the exhaustion of Haiti's environment. Imperial exploitation of the West Indies perversely brought these regions into the fabric of modern trade while maintaining a state of impoverishment. With the failure of the sugar crop, and without water to grow subsistence crops, the dust at the opening of *Masters of the Dew* symbolises a once fertile land destroyed for the interests of capital extraction.

Through Manuel's tireless work to ecologically repair his community, *Masters of the Dew* displays both Haitian internationalism and a way forward beyond the plantation economy. In Manuel, Roumain chooses to represent the experience of Haitian migrant workers, demonstrating the fluidity of national borders during the twentieth century—in this case the movement of itinerant workers between Haiti and Cuba. This is tied to the international commodity-based economy and the associated conception of modernity. Casey writes that

⁶⁴⁴ Matthew Casey, *Empire's Guestworkers: Haitian Migrants in Cuba During the Age of US Occupation*, Afro-Latin America (Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 106-107.

The ideal plantation labor hierarchy, on which Haitians were said to inhabit the lowest rung, holds strong parallels with slavery in Cuban society. Despite the technological and organizational transformations in the Cuban sugar industry in the period after abolition, the task of cane cutting did not change noticeably.⁶⁴⁵

Manuel returns to Haiti from his manual fieldwork in Cuba, bringing with him expertise not only in irrigation, but also in proletarian organisation. As one of the ‘Guestworkers’ of Casey’s analysis, Manuel embodies proletarian resistance to exploitation on the sugar plantations. Returning to Haiti, Manuel works to bring about a new Eden in the nation of his birth, with a communitarian vision for a different Haitian economy in which sugar does not feature.

Besides, if he found water, everyone’s help would be needed. It wouldn’t be a small matter to bring it down to the plain. They would have to organize a great *coumbite* of all the peasants. Thus the water would bring them together again. Its cool breath would dispel the evil odor of spite and hatred. With the new plants, with the fruit- and corn-laden fields, the earth overflowing with simple fecund life, a brotherly community would be reborn. Yes, he’d go and find them, and talk with them. They had good sense, they would understand.⁶⁴⁶

Manuel’s pastoral vision recalls the pastorals of Virgil and Milton, leveraging the natural world as a solution to rampant industrialisation on Haiti’s plantations. Roumain combines this with communist theory to present Haiti’s beleaguered place in the world and offer a literary solution. Dying for the cause of agricultural plenty, Manuel serves as a martyr to his community, defeating

⁶⁴⁵ Casey, *Empire’s Guestworkers*, p. 109.

⁶⁴⁶ Roumain, *Masters of the Dew*, pp. 55-56.

the industrial capitalism that has failed to supply the village. This martyrdom also recalls Haiti's history, in which cash crops like sugar were prioritised over sustenance. Kaussen notes that Aimé Césaire, Richard Wright, C. L. R. James, and later Frantz Fanon all saw in communism a genuine universalism that insisted that modernity make good on its philosophical premises and promises—in this context the abundant necessities of life.⁶⁴⁷ *Masters of the Dew* stands as Roumain's proposal for both a move beyond the sugar plantation economy that dominated the Caribbean, and for cultural prominence in the literary sphere as an integral part of modernity.

The devastation wrought by the plantations is observed by Manuel on returning to his home to find it in a state of deterioration:

Manuel found the hut faithful to his memory: the little porch with its railing, the earthen floor paved with pebbles, the decayed walls through which one could see the wicker laths. Far back into the past he looked, and as he looked a wave of bitterness receded across those cane fields where the endless fatigue of broken bodies measured each day's toil. He sat down—at home with his folks, back with his own—this rebellious soil, this thirsty ravine, these devastated fields and, on his own hill, that rough mane of vegetation standing out against the sky like a fractious horse.⁶⁴⁸

The same crop that Manuel works to produce in Cuba destroys the community of his Haitian village. The resources of the villagers, labour and water, are used solely for the production of sugar for export. This recalls Ortiz's analysis of sugar as an arbiter of time and labour, 'signaling the

⁶⁴⁷ Kaussen, 'Slaves, "Viejos", and the "Internationale"', p. 122.

⁶⁴⁸ Roumain, *Masters of the Dew*, p. 18.

beginning and end of work for the slaves on the sugar plantations' and the advancement of an industrialised, colonised, sugar exporting economy.⁶⁴⁹ Communities in both *Cuban Counterpoint* and *Masters of the Dew* must reckon with the legacies of sugar exploitation. Both are, in different forms, about emancipation from these legacies through direct acknowledgement of the influence of the plantations in literary texts. Literature allows Roumain and Ortiz to recontextualise the past and its effects to plant the seeds of a more hopeful future for Haiti and Cuba.

The plantations of Haiti reveal a conception of plantation modernity that situates it within the planetary by rooting Haitian modernity within the context of its initial liberation and continued struggles for national freedom. As shown by C.L.R James, Haiti was dominated by the U.S. for much of the twentieth century. This domination draws clear parallels between the global decolonial movement gathering pace in the 1930s, and Haiti's revolutionary moment in the 1790s and 1800s. Haitian literature advances the view that Haitian modernity is distinct from but in conversation with other regional modernities from around the Atlantic. Representations of sugar production and its legacies link each of the texts I have explored in this section so far. Plantations in literature reveal unique perspectives on foreign domination that attended the cultivation of sugar, whilst also demonstrating the association between commodity production and modernity. In particular, the history of Haiti is inextricably intertwined with the forces that produced consumable commodities, of which sugar was the most visible and prominent. All three of James, Seabrook, and Roumain show differing perspectives on an occupied country that has its culture and economy enmeshed with commodity production, demonstrating at once Haiti's unique

⁶⁴⁹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 36.

conception of modernity and its interaction with other national literatures.

6 Sweet Temptations: The Role of Confectionery in Modernist Literature

An analysis of sugar consumption in literature presents a greater challenge than its production. Unlike tobacco, sugar is not typically consumed raw but instead forms an integral component of a multitude of luxury confections. Part of my inspiration for this chapter stems from Lévi-Strauss's 'The Culinary Triangle' in *The Raw and the Cooked*, which broadly uses binary oppositions to discern meaning from the process of transforming raw food into cooked. Lévi-Strauss writes that 'we can hope to discover for each specific case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure—or else resigns itself, still unconsciously, to revealing its contradictions'.⁶⁵⁰ Once refined, and in its most commodified form, sugar is only consumed in combination with other ingredients, via the process of cooking. Building upon Levi-Strauss's work, I will evaluate the literary signification of sugar and the confections it is used to form. In the emerging twentieth century, consumption of luxury goods was an important way of displaying wealth and power, with sugar a key component in creating sweet treats that signified, in different contexts, opulence, comfort, and enjoyment. This final chapter focusses on the consumption of confectionery in modernist texts written in Europe and the U.S.. Rather than returning to a binary conception of literary modernism, I will instead show how sugar is represented in texts that are distanced from commodity production. This is intended to complete a holistic understanding of Commodity Modernism, rather than reassert an explicit binary. Both production and consumption

⁶⁵⁰ Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Culinary Triangle', in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2013), p. 47.

should be considered as integral parts of modernity.

Less conspicuous than the consumption of cured tobacco, sugar consumption is typically hidden, requiring further processing through cooking to reach its edible form. Its consumption also links the structures of sugar production that I have explored in previous chapters—in the Caribbean, South America, and the U.S. South—with the Old World. In contrast with earlier chapters examining literature that foregrounds plantation production, this analysis focuses on texts where the production processes are significantly obscured or absent, emphasizing instead the cultural meanings embedded in sugar's refined and transformed state.

Protean by nature, sugar's collaborations can be found across modernist literature, whether it is the famous madeleines of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913), Tommaso Marinetti's formalist recipes in *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932), or Patrick Hamilton's sexually-charged Turkish Delight in *20,000 Streets Under the Sky* (1935). Unlike the often brash, obvious, even obnoxious consumption of tobacco, eating sugar is more subtle. Divorced from the modes of its production, sugar is refined, bleaching its memory in the process. The effect this produces is that, at the moment of consumption, sugar is effectively removed from its history. As an amnesiac commodity, sugar creates a blank slate which adopts new meanings through the process of cookery.

The transformation of sugar through combination with other ingredients imbues the resulting product with a sweetness that becomes critical to the attachment of specific meanings. Mintz explores the significance of sugar, writing that '[Meanings] are historically acquired—they arise, grow, change, and die—and they are culture-specific as well as arbitrary, for all are

symbols'.⁶⁵¹ Through transformation and elasticity in symbolism, products containing sugar take on a multitude of different meanings heavily dependent on cultural and historical context. Mintz writes further on the importance of context that

Usually these foods were new to those who consumed them, supplanting more familiar items, or they were novelties, gradually transformed from exotic treats into ordinary, everyday consumables. As these changes took place, the foods acquired new meanings, but those meanings—what the foods meant to people, and what people signaled by consuming them—were associated with social differences of all sorts, including those of age, gender, class, and occupation.⁶⁵²

The meanings associated with sugar change depending on the social status of the consumer and their relationship with the final product. Unlike tobacco, which remains in a recognisable form at the point of its consumption, sugar physically disappears into new guises. The application of heat to both products, a naked flame for tobacco and the process of cooking for sugar, transforms them. Lévi-Strauss writes that 'The raw/cooked axis is characteristic of culture; the fresh/decayed one of nature, since cooking brings about the cultural transformation of the raw, just as putrefaction is its natural transformation'.⁶⁵³ While tobacco retains its link to its raw form—it is still recognisably a plant, merely cured—sugar adopts new identities. Through cooking, sugar is imbued with meaning

⁶⁵¹ Sidney W. Mintz, 'Sweetness and Meaning', in *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, ed. by Carolyn Korsmeyer, Sensory Formations, English ed. (Berg, 2005), p. 115.

⁶⁵² Mintz, 'Sweetness and Meaning', p. 113.

⁶⁵³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York, Harper & Row, 1969), p. 142.

and becomes a crucial part of culturally significant products, removed from the context of the sugar cane plantation.

Metamorphosed into confections, sugar is processed into an almost endless array of products before it is consumed as a sweet treat. Mintz constructs an idea that reflects the importance of consumable commodities in the modern world, writing that ‘Tobacco, sugar, and tea were the first objects within capitalism that conveyed with their use the complex idea that one could become different by consuming differently’.⁶⁵⁴ The act of consumption not only changes the state of the object that is consumed—in this case, eaten—but also the state of the consumer. Echoing Marx, Violaris examines the contradictory nature of commodity consumption, writing that ‘Rather than consuming confectionery, confectionery is consuming the consumer, using up their resources physically, economically and imaginatively’.⁶⁵⁵ Referring to the logic of supply and demand, it is only through continued consumption that more of a brand or product will be produced. Therefore, it is through the cessation of consumption that supply is weakened. In the act of consumption, sugar as a product is strengthened. Emphasising this point Violaris writes that ‘Rather than producing something that exists apart from the producer, the consumer ingests, taking in the object. Consumption is a mode of combining rather than dividing’.⁶⁵⁶ In relation to sugar, the product must be combined with other ingredients before it reaches a state in which it is pleasing to consume; true whether relating to a spoonful of sugar in a cup of tea, or as a key ingredient in a sweet cake or confection. Contrasted with the less processed tobacco, sugar instead hides,

⁶⁵⁴ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 185.

⁶⁵⁵ Elena Violaris, ‘The Sweet Shop and the Toy Shop: Consumption, Sign and Play in the Confectionery Industry’, *Critical Quarterly*, 64.3 (2022), p. 121.

⁶⁵⁶ Violaris, ‘The Sweet Shop and the Toy Shop’, p. 122.

disappearing into new forms and allowing it to quietly insert itself into the fabric of twentieth-century life.

The colonial impact of sugar on England was best articulated by Stuart Hall, writing ‘I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children’s teeth’.⁶⁵⁷ Hall points to the centrality of commodity consumption not only to imperialistic practices, but also exclusion regarding national identity. This idea—that producing areas were an essential part of the structures of modernity, yet were unremarked—has been complicated over the course of my research in this area. The lines dividing producer and consumer; colony and metropole, are blurred. The significance of sugar in modernist literature, serving as one of the pillars that upheld the international system of transatlantic trade, therefore becomes nebulous. The processed product, refined sugar, is further processed into an endless cornucopia of confection. Through use, sugar is divorced from its place and method of production. As I noted at the beginning of this section, Ortiz writes of sugar that ‘As the taste of all refined sugars taste the same, they always have to be taken with something that will give them flavor’.⁶⁵⁸ Initially a luxury product, sugar becomes an accepted staple of Old World cuisine by the early twentieth century, consumed chiefly in combination with other products and as part of recipes. These recipes are often specific according to nationality and social class in literature, signifying aspects of shared experience and heritage.

Before mass production, scarcity meant that sugar consumption held a strong

⁶⁵⁷ Stuart Hall and David Morley, *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2019), p. 70.

⁶⁵⁸ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 23.

association with wealth and power. Abbott writes that, during the British Renaissance period, the “void” was the name given to ‘the brief stretch between courses, or after a meal, when servants cleared, or “voided” the table, and enterprising hosts filled up that void with ornate sugar molds and flower, nut, spice and fruit confections, washed down with sweet wine’.⁶⁵⁹ The void would move from the domain of the courtly elite to ‘the merely very rich’, evolving into the dessert course.⁶⁶⁰ The popularisation of sugar consumption continued and ‘[by] the mid-sixteenth century, sugar was trickling down to the middle classes’ aided by cookbooks which promised emulation of ‘the envied upper classes’.⁶⁶¹ Abbott provides figures, writing that ‘[in] France between 1651 and 1789 [...] 230 cookbook editions appeared. Continental cookbooks targeted male cooks, but England’s male authors dedicated theirs to women’ demonstrating growing class consciousness and improving literacy. Referring predominantly to class differences in Britain, Mintz shows sugar’s use as an important signifier of wealth through conspicuous consumption on the cusp of the seventeenth century:

The rich and powerful [...] derived an intense pleasure from their access to sugar—the purchase, display, consumption, and waste of sucrose in various forms which involved social validation, affiliation, and distinction.⁶⁶²

To compound this, sugar was also combined with ‘other rare and precious spices in the preparation

⁶⁵⁹ Elizabeth Abbott, *Sugar: A Bittersweet History* (Duckworth Overlook, 2009), p. 46.

⁶⁶⁰ Abbott, *Sugar: A Bittersweet History*, p. 46.

⁶⁶¹ Abbott, *Sugar: A Bittersweet History*, p. 46.

⁶⁶² Mintz, ‘Sweetness and Meaning’, p. 116.

of food', including crushed pearls and gold.⁶⁶³ Although mostly hidden within recipes and in combination with other ingredients, the confections that contain sugar were often centrepieces to wealthy consumers. Sugar's value was compounded by the fact that '[before] the end of the seventeenth century, while sugar was a precious and rare substance, it had little meaning for most English people', in stark contrast to later centuries.⁶⁶⁴ It is not only sugar's ability to add sweetness to dishes that demonstrates its value, but also its inherent malleability. With sugar's decline in price, it became more accessible to the masses but retained its inherent value to all sections of society. Mintz notes that 'sugar, tea, and like products represented the growing freedom of ordinary folks, their opportunity to participate in the elevation of their own standards of living'.⁶⁶⁵ With a free trade doctrine in Britain, the price of sugar fell dramatically, allowing for widespread adoption. Sugar became a symbol of modernity, as well as a representation of increasing living standards as luxuries became ever more available to the working class.

Contrasting with Mintz's focus on the class differences shown in sugar consumption, Lupton explores the meaning of sugar consumption in relation to femininity:

sugar and sweet foods are depicted as indulgences, easy to eat and digest, as decorative and pretty, pale coloured, the foods of childhood. So too, women are often represented as decorative, anodyne, delicate, less intelligent and far more childlike than men. There is, however, a darker side to sugar and sweet foods; that which associates their pleasures with addiction, guilt and furtiveness, with losing control over one's desires, and even to irrational

⁶⁶³ Mintz, 'Sweetness and Meaning', p. 116.

⁶⁶⁴ Mintz, 'Sweetness and Meaning', p. 115.

⁶⁶⁵ Mintz, 'Sweetness and Meaning', p. 119.

behaviour as a result of the 'sugar high' induced from eating sweet foods. This may be linked to the contradictory cultural meanings around femininity in western societies.⁶⁶⁶

Perhaps one of the most common symbolic meanings of sugared food in literature is the product's association with desire and, by extension, femininity—a point I will explore separately in the works of Proust, Marinetti, and Hamilton. Like tobacco, sugar becomes a socially acceptable drug food which caters to pleasure-seeking and ritual behaviour, treated as a means of reaching altered states of mind and perception.⁶⁶⁷ The addictive nature of sugar fuels the demand for the product while simultaneously distancing the consumer from the means of the product's production.

Although the distinction between producers and consumers of sugar is blurred in texts such as *The Magic Island*, there remains a profound difference between producers and consumers in U.S.-European texts featuring sugar. The divide between the enslaved African producers and the working-class English is noted by Mintz, writing that

the creation of a commodity that would permit taste and the symbolic faculty to be exercised was far beyond the reach of both the enslaved Africans who produced the sugar, on the one hand, and of the proletarianized English people who consumed it, on the other. Slave and proletarian together powered the imperial economic system that kept the one supplied with manacles and the other with sugar and rum; but neither had more than minimal influence over it. The growing freedom of the consumer to choose was one kind

⁶⁶⁶ Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body, and the Self* (Sage Publications, 1996), p. 109.

⁶⁶⁷ Trentmann includes sugar as a 'drug food' in *Empire of Things* along with tea, coffee, tobacco, and cocoa.

of freedom, but not another...⁶⁶⁸

The creation of commodities with sugar separates the consumers from the producers. Despite the growing accessibility of sugar in the early twentieth century, the power of the sugar industry remained in the hands of the wealthy capital-owning class. The operation of empire and global trade was powered by sugar's appeal as an addictive commodity and essential ingredient in traditional confectionery. Arriving in the metropolises of the Old World, sugar both maintained empire through the process of wealth extraction, facilitating and maintaining its own creation. The need for release and respite from the pressures of the modern world only accentuated the demand for sugar, justifying the means of its production.

Proust's madeleine and memory

Proust's madeleine presents us with a confection which defines the central theme of *In Search of Lost Time*: Marcel's initial interaction with the sweet cake introduces the idea of involuntary memory, providing a path to experiences otherwise long forgotten. Both taste and smell are evoked in the eating of the madeleine, showing the cake's semi-mystical qualities. Diverging from a philosophical or neurological interpretation—much has been said on Proust's madeleine from these perspectives already—I will look at the madeleine as an end point in the transformation of sugar from cane to confection.⁶⁶⁹ Defining the madeleine, Davidson and Jaine write that 'The true

⁶⁶⁸ Mintz, 'Sweetness and Meaning', p. 119.

⁶⁶⁹ For a thorough philosophical/neuroscientific interpretation of Proust's madeleine see *Time and Sense* by Julia Kristeva, *Self, Deception, and Knowledge in Proust* by Joshua Landy, and 'Forgetting the Madeleine: Proust and the Neurosciences' in *Progress in Brain Research* by Patrick M. Bray.

madeleines de Commercy are made from egg yolks creamed with sugar and lemon zest, with flour, noisette butter, and stiffly beaten egg whites folded in before baking in little shell-shaped moulds' earning their literary immortality through Proust.⁶⁷⁰ Consumed in a private setting, the madeleine represents an object without exchange value, escaping the classification as a 'commodity' (although the sugar used in its creation is). The value in Proust's madeleine is found in the inter-familial relationship that it signifies, directly relating to maternal relationships in the context of the home. The madeleine that triggers Marcel's memory, given to him by his mother, reminds him 'of the little crumb of madeleine' with his aunt Léonie 'on Sunday mornings at Combray'.⁶⁷¹ The two moments of maternal care—with Marcel's mother and with his aunt Léonie—are linked by sugar prepared in a culturally and personally specific way. The madeleines represent a long French culinary tradition, combining ingredients to form delicious consumables. Proust describes the cakes as "petites madeleines," which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell'.⁶⁷² These moulded cakes represent just one of the many ways sugar is consumed, adopting protean forms. Combining sugar with other ingredients in this way leads to confections that represent a range of meanings: from gluttony to comfort. Wilson notes that 'The most universal purpose of food in literature is as a character device, to convey not just greed but

⁶⁷⁰ Alan Davidson and Tom Jaine, 'Madeleine', in *The Oxford Companion to Food* (Oxford University Press, 2006)

<<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780192806819.001.0001/acref-9780192806819-e-1475>> [accessed 8 April 2024].

⁶⁷¹ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, Kindle edition (KTHTK, 2024), p. 60.

⁶⁷² Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, p. 57.

all manner of traits, from social climbing to lasciviousness, from anorexia to anxiety'.⁶⁷³ Contrasting with this point, in *In Search of Lost Time*, Proust creates a cake that precipitates introspection and philosophical inquiry, acting as the fulcrum upon which the novel turns. Rather than an association with vice, Proust links the madeleine with memory, comfort, and nostalgia.

Having tasted the madeleine, Marcel's memories associated with the sweet cake are, at first, elusive. Instead, there is a feeling of 'pleasure' attached to an as yet missing interpretation of the past. The madeleine, as a sugar-based confection, acts at first as a drug capable of altering Marcel's mental state. However, it is worth noting that the madeleines' effects have more to do with Marcel's personal associations with the cake, rather than the specific powers of sugar. Sugar in another form—a boiled sweet, Turkish Delight, or even another cake—would not have the same effect. However, it is the protean and malleable qualities of sugar that make it a valuable commodity, with the potential to be transformed into a multitude of confections via the process of cooking. Marcel's experience with the madeleine is shown to be scarcely different from a hallucination or revelation:

Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind. But its struggles are too far off, too much confused; scarcely can I perceive the colourless reflection in which are blended the uncapturable whirling medley of radiant

⁶⁷³ Bee Wilson, 'Literature and Food', in *The Oxford Companion to Food* (Oxford University Press, 2006)
<<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780192806819.001.0001/acref-9780192806819-e-1427>> [accessed 8 April 2024].

hues, and I cannot distinguish its form, cannot invite it, as the one possible interpreter, to translate to me the evidence of its contemporary, its inseparable paramour, the taste of cake soaked in tea; cannot ask it to inform me what special circumstance is in question, of what period in my past life.⁶⁷⁴

Although the madeleine links Marcel to his past, the link is imperfect. The memory lies just out of reach, on the edges of Marcel's conscious mind. However, the memory of a unique combination of scents and flavours, including sweetness, is enough to awaken the same feelings from a long forgotten time. Memory is presented as fragile and ethereal. With no external stimulus other than the madeleine, the memory returns gradually, emerging from the unconscious through the cake as a guide. Crucially, the madeleine relies on consistency in order to achieve this effect, linking the madeleine consumed in the present moment with Marcel's past. The consistency in the madeleine triggers Marcel's intense recollection, ensured in part through the use of refined sugar as a homogeneous ingredient.

Despite the potency of the cake in triggering memories, Marcel experiences diminishing returns with the satisfaction found in consumption declining after his initial bite: 'I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third, which gives me rather less than the second. It is time to stop; the potion is losing its magic. It is plain that the object of my quest, the truth, lies not in the cup but in myself'.⁶⁷⁵ Wadhera notes the circular nature of Proust's work, underscoring the idea that

⁶⁷⁴ Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, p. 59.

⁶⁷⁵ Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, p. 58.

[Dipping the madeleine in tea] triggers numerous memories and gives rise to the very book the reader is holding at the end of which Marcel, the narrator, decides to become a writer. The passage both highlights the sensorial pleasure food provides and demonstrates how inanimate things can conjure memories, underscoring the powerful role of involuntary memory.⁶⁷⁶

The madeleine transports Proust's narrator to his childhood, therefore providing the subject for the novel. Through the involuntary memories triggered by consumption, Marcel is freed of linearity. Instead, time itself is conceptually interrogated with links between otherwise distinct moments forged by the consumption of confectionery.

Returning to Marcel gradually, the memory of the madeleine eventually rushes in. The passage links two distinct instances of madeleine consumption:

And suddenly the memory returns. The taste was that of the little crumb of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before church-time), when I went to say good day to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of real or of lime-flower tea.⁶⁷⁷

The memory proves to be intense and intimate, evoking a half-forgotten experience from childhood through touch, taste and smell. Reineke writes that 'Times—past and present—are evoked. Spaces—an intimate and archaic maternal space and a stable, provincial space of an aunt's

⁶⁷⁶ Priya Wadhera, 'Food Fears: From Proust to Perec, Madeleine to Anti-Madeleine: Romanic Review', *Romanic Review*, 112.2 (2021), p. 322.

⁶⁷⁷ Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, pp. 60-61.

home—are experienced. Cake that crumbles on the tongue becomes a sensation that, imprinted in signs, creates a metamorphosis'.⁶⁷⁸ A regressive metamorphosis, Marcel is transported back into childhood to the time and place of his memory. Through his consumption of the madeleine he becomes different, transported to a moment long lost in the past. Van Campen adds clarification to the predominance of Proust's madeleine, writing that

The experience described by Proust was already known in French literature as 'odour memory'. However, it is worth noting that the Proustian example of the madeleine cakes actually describes a flavour memory, whereas we often think of an odour memory today when speaking of the Proust effect.⁶⁷⁹

This points to the evocative power of sweetness in literary confection, with the act of remembering stimulated unbidden. Marcel is guided into a state of intense reflection by the madeleine, suggesting the potentially enlightening experience of consumption. Van Campen develops this, writing that

At that moment, Marcel becomes aware that a simple taste stimulus is able to evoke an aesthetic experience which goes far beyond the pleasant taste of the cake. The special qualities lie not in the cake, but in what it has awakened in him. The aesthetic experience is not limited to the moment itself, but extends far back into his past, calling up memories

⁶⁷⁸ Martha J. Reineke, 'Of Madeleines, Mothers, and Montjouvain', in *Intimate Domain, Desire, Trauma, and Mimetic Theory* (Michigan State University Press, 2014), p. 32.

⁶⁷⁹ Crétien van Campen and Julian Ross, *The Proust Effect: The Senses as Doorways to Lost Memories*, First edition. (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 19.

from long ago.⁶⁸⁰

Confection in Proust acts as a powerful tool for introspection, facilitating the exploration of the mind's perception of time and the function of memory. Smell and taste are utilised to develop these themes, creating a path via which Marcel is able to uncover forgotten moments. In contrast with Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption, Proust shows commodities can form part of the fabric of a keenly private internal perception. The commodities created with sugar, by virtue of being both intensely pleasurable and highly consumable, provide a path to access previous experiences. However, sugar itself is not the trigger for Marcel's reflections. Transformed into the specific shape, size, flavour, and form of the madeleine inserts sugar into a modern culinary tradition. The sweetness provided by sugar is removed from nature, the cane being heavily processed and becoming unrecognisable from its original form. Consumed far from the site of its production, sugar becomes a European commodity, becoming an integral part of cultural production in both cooking and literature.

Wilson notes the additional steps taken to make sugar palatable, writing that sugar had to be 'double refined', i.e. processed by hand, in order to be used in recipes.⁶⁸¹ Technology played a crucial role in sugar's development from luxury to staple with the innovation of ready ground sugar. Wilson further notes that

Ready ground sugar is a far more labour-saving invention than sliced bread. Traditionally,

⁶⁸⁰ Van Campen and Ross, *The Proust Effect*, p. 13.

⁶⁸¹ Bee Wilson and Annabel Lee, *Consider the Fork: A History of How We Cook and Eat* (Penguin Books, 2013), p. 215.

sugar came in a lump or loaf, conical blocks ranging in size from 5 lb to 40 lb. It was ‘nipped’ into smaller pieces using sugar nippers. In order to be converted into something used in cooking, it needed to be pounded [...] and refined through a series of ever-finer sieves.⁶⁸²

Requiring intensive processing even at the point of use, sugar’s value as an ingredient—easily adding sweetness to recipes—was such that it justified the effort. Once sugar is eventually consumed, it has been entirely removed from both the context of its production and its history. There is therefore irony in the madeleine’s ability to uncover Marcel’s own personal memories associated with the sweetness of the cake.

The madeleine not only connects Marcel with a heightened sense of time and memory, but also a religious connection through Proust’s reference to Saint James’ scallop shells. The madeleine transforms into a sacrament, with the act of consumption linking Marcel with the religious teachings of his childhood at Combray. Reineke notes that

Mary Magdalene, around whom the Christian tradition has conflated three Marys of the Bible—the sinning woman who anoints Jesus, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, and the Mary who is the first to see the risen Christ—is metamorphosed in the text and in the narrator’s mouth. The madeleine, now a small cake, is a complex mix of saintliness and sin.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸² Wilson and Lee, *Consider the Fork*, p. 216.

⁶⁸³ Martha J. Reineke, ‘Of Madeleines, Mothers, and Montjouvain’, in *Intimate Domain, Desire, Trauma, and Mimetic Theory* (Michigan State University Press, 2014), p. 31.

As the ingredient that provides the madeleine's sweetness, sugar is effectively transubstantiated to signify spiritual connection. The link with spirituality also complicates the relationship between Marcel and his maternal relatives, straddling spiritual and domestic meaning. The cake is simultaneously a religious symbol and a food to provide corporeal nourishment.

The madeleine paradoxically provides the inspiration for the novel in which it is featured, provoking deep introspection directly related to the recognisable taste of a madeleine soaked in tea. The importance of the madeleine in *In Search of Lost Time* is touched on by Kristeva:

Already in these first pages, the *naturalness of the sensation* is brought into question. The sense of taste is applied to tea and cake: taste is thus firmly rooted in the objects of our world. Taste *is* of the world, and because of taste and the other sensations, so is the very experience that restores them to us.⁶⁸⁴

Kristeva's analysis here can be compared to Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle and the notion that the process of cooking places nature and culture in opposition to one another, with the final creation serving as an expression of culture. The process of cooking the madeleine—the combination of ingredients, including sugar—demonstrates the expression of culture through food and the importance of taste in both expressing culture and recalling memories. Not commonly packaged and sold in its raw state—sugarcane quickly rots and ferments when left unprocessed—sugar must undergo a transformation for it to reach its most consumable form. Once part of a confection, sugar acts as a stimulant for memory. As Kristeva notes, taste is attributed to worldly

⁶⁸⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Time & Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature*, European Perspectives (Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 17.

objects which, in turn, are capable of triggering the involuntary memory of past experiences.⁶⁸⁵ A homage to the power of the sense of taste, sugar, in combination with the other ingredients that comprise the madeleine, activates a cascade of associations far beyond a single memory of tea and cake. Proust details the strong effect that the madeleine's associations have on Marcel: 'blended the uncapturable whirling medley of radiant hues, and I cannot distinguish its form, cannot invite it, as the one possible interpreter, to translate to me the evidence of its contemporary, its inseparable paramour, the taste of cake soaked in tea'.⁶⁸⁶ Physical input, the cake dipped in tea, precipitates a visceral emotional response which is not immediately defined. Clarity comes with the realisation that the two madeleines—one past, and one present—are inseparably linked by their similarity. This is, in part, only possible due to the consistency of sugar as a commodity, providing reliable sweetness even with a separation of decades.

Beyond natural recollection, there is also the suggestion that the madeleine brings about spiritual associations. Proust further explores the madeleine's importance as a transformative object through its association with a Celtic version of re-incarnation:

The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁵ Kristeva, *Time & Sense*, p. 17.

⁶⁸⁶ Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁸⁷ Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, p. 57.

This further complicates the symbolism of the shell-shaped cake. The madeleine, moulded with associations to the Catholic faith, serves a role similar to that of Seabrook's zombies in *The Magic Island*. Just as commodities allow the zombies to realise their condition, so too do they lead Marcel to significant enlightenment, setting in motion the metaphysical threads of *In Search of Lost Time*. The sweet *pistaches* that serve as the carrier for the enlightening salt of *The Magic Island* hold a parallel with the madeleines that awaken Marcel's recollections. Both treats trigger memory with spiritual connotations, transforming the outlook of their consumers. For Proust, the sugary madeleine is the trigger for a dream-like state, providing a path to recollection and reflection. Seabrook similarly uses the sugared *pistache* as a means to change mental states, awakening his zombies to contemporary reality (although it is the salt in the *pistache* that causes them to realise their condition). The zombie troupe are enslaved by the sugar cane, but freed by the cooked confection.

Although the cake triggers Marcel's dream-like state of remembrance, the madeleine itself is not a particularly remarkable trigger for involuntary memory. Kristeva assumes a provocative position concerning the madeleine, writing that

Flavoursome, incestuous, bland, indeterminate [...] the madeleine is a cliché which gets in the way of the cathedral: it becomes fixed in a flat image, loses its friability, and extends a veil of *ennui* over those endless sentences swarming with scents, sounds, colours and forms, with delicacies for the taste and delights for the touch, all unceremoniously soaked

up by this notorious madeleine.⁶⁸⁸

Despite this strong critique of the symbolism of Proust's madeleine, the cake provides a powerful example of the importance of consumable forms of sugar to connecting the contemporary physical world with the more ethereal mental world of the past. Further, the sweet madeleine demonstrates the power of confection and sweetness more broadly. While the madeleine has become cliché, it shows how sweetness can connect us with the past, particularly, as in Marcel's case, moments in childhood. Rather than an ostentatious display of conspicuous consumption, this form of sugar leads to intensely private reflection. The madeleine brings otherwise forgotten events into view, even when the sugar is transformed and hidden within the cake, and the link with sugar's past, and its production, is thereby largely buried. Through Proust's madeleine, the need for, and the importance of, moments of sweetness is on full display.

Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* and M. F. K. Fisher's *How to Cook a Wolf*: sugar, fascism and wartime scarcity

I now turn towards an overshadowed form of twentieth-century writing: the cookbook. I use the term loosely: Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* contains no functional recipes, and Fisher's *How to Cook a Wolf* blurs the lines between practical non-fiction and fiction. The cookbook was influenced by the rise of 'food science' in the twentieth century, reflecting renewed interest in how people eat and why they eat the things they do. Marinetti and Fisher together act as an oppositional pair, publishing on different ends of the Second World War and working on opposing sides of the

⁶⁸⁸ Kristeva, *Time & Sense*, p. 29.

conflict. Their approaches to cooking reflect not only changes in the literary landscape, but also a change in societal values throughout Europe. Regarding sweetness, both authors feature sweet recipes that incorporate refined sugar, though with vastly different perspectives on the consumable.

The Futurist Cookbook is positioned within the Futurist movement as a culinary, philosophical, political, and cultural manifesto, but not a cookbook in the regular sense. Partially a narrative text, partially a non-fiction selection of essays, and partially a collection of (mostly) un-workable recipes, *The Futurist Cookbook* acts as a theatrical provocation to advance Futurist aims. According to Ialongo, the text ‘was a response to Italy’s economic needs during the Depression, the fascist drive for autarchy, and part of the ongoing Futurist and fascist project of making Italians faster, tougher, and stronger’.⁶⁸⁹ Most scandalously is the claim made by Marinetti that Italians should forgo pasta in favour of rice. Generating outrage upon publication—Birnbaum notes that ‘Coauthored by the young Turin-based "aeropainter" Filila (Luigi Colombo) [...] the provocative text met with massive protests’⁶⁹⁰—the text has continued to divide scholars. Ialongo notes that ‘Some historians recognize *La cucina futurista* as a serious attempt on the part of Marinetti to strengthen the Italian “race.”’⁶⁹¹ While still others ‘have been dismissive of the whole project, echoing the remarks of some of Marinetti’s own colleagues who felt food and cooking were “silly” places to spread the Futurist revolution, and that this latest venture was further proof of Marinetti’s increasing loss of direction’.⁶⁹² Nonetheless, despite its satirical nature, *The Futurist*

⁶⁸⁹ Ernest Ialongo, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: The Artist and His Politics*, The Fairleigh Dickinson University Press Series in Italian Studies (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), p. 214.

⁶⁹⁰ Charlotte Birnbaum, ‘Eleven Culinary Steps Toward The New Human’, *Log*, 34, 2015, p. 85.

⁶⁹¹ Ialongo, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 214.

⁶⁹² Ialongo, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 214.

Cookbook promoted many of the aims of the Italian fascists. Comparing the text to Marinetti's earlier 1909 Futurist manifesto, Carruth writes that '*The Futurist Cookbook* simultaneously promotes new technologies and regressive politics. Ultimately, the book's formulas advocate for reengineering Italian cuisine around the fusion of edible ingredients and industrial materials in order to jettison cosmopolitan cultures in favor of white, steel-powered nationalism'.⁶⁹³ Food is therefore presented in innovative ways to make broader philosophical and political points, with Marinetti garnering attention for the Futurist movement while advancing fascist ideals.

Marinetti's text begins with a short story 'The Dinner that Stopped a Suicide' which is presented as a factual report centring Marinetti and his fellow Futurists as characters:

On 11 May 1930 the poet Marinetti left for Lake Trasimeno by car in response to this strange, mysterious and unnerving telegram: 'Dearest friend since She departed forever have been wracked with tormenting anguish Stop immense sadness prevents my survival Stop beg you come immediately before arrival of the one who resembles her too much but not enough' GIULIO.⁶⁹⁴

Beginning as a cry for help, the story develops into the artists' attempts to save their friend—and, by extension, Italian culture—through a series of erotic culinary sugar sculptures. Marinetti's text becomes a selection of recipes that reflect Futurist ideals. Applied to cooking, Futurism's

⁶⁹³ Allison Carruth, 'Modernism and Gastronomy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food*, ed. by J. Michelle Coghlan, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 94.

⁶⁹⁴ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, ed. by Lesley Chamberlain, trans. by Suzanne Brill (Penguin, 2014), p. 15.

preoccupation with speed, dynamism, and technology is expressed as artistic innovation, contrasting directly with Proust's traditional madeleines experienced in childhood and adulthood. For Marinetti, food is elevated to high art, a means of bringing forth a future that discards tradition in favour of a cuisine that appeals to all of the senses—taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing.

‘The Dinner that Stopped a Suicide’ centres the power of confection in Marinetti's text. In an effort to prevent his friend from committing suicide, the group of Futurist artists work to forge female statues out of sweet ingredients. The sugar sculptures that Marinetti includes hold a distinct place in the history of opulence and the demonstration of wealth. According to White, ‘Serving sweet delicacies acted as a status symbol and became a fixture of royal audiences and diplomacy. No ceremonial entrance or departure of a grand magistrate in Persia could occur without involving sweets’ with particular esteem reserved for sugar sculpture.⁶⁹⁵ This form of sugared treat has a strong basis in history, with White noting further that ‘In Egypt, the caliphs and their successors, the Mamluk sultans, had sugar sculptures adorning their banquets during Islamic festive days. A Fatimid caliph, for example, organized a procession with a diorama of 152 cast sugar figures and seven castles through the streets of Cairo at the end of Ramadan’.⁶⁹⁶ With the tradition passed on, first to the Ottomans, then to kingdoms across the north and west of Europe. By Henry III of France's visit to Venice in 1574, ‘Atlantic sugar production had begun and the art of making sugar sculptures spread to the north as well as to the west of Europe’.⁶⁹⁷ Marinetti's fictional statues, though entirely edible within the narrative, are sculpted to be aesthetically

⁶⁹⁵ Ulbe Bosma, *The World of Sugar: How the Sweet Stuff Transformed Our Politics, Health, and Environment over 2,000 Years* (Harvard University Press, 2023), p. 35.

⁶⁹⁶ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 35.

⁶⁹⁷ Bosma, *The World of Sugar*, p. 36.

pleasing and with artistic merit. The first creation emphasises the sugar used in its creation:

The screens vanished and there appeared the mysterious soft trembling sculptured complex which was her. Edible. In fact the flesh of the curve signifying the synthesis of every movement of her hips was even appetizing. And she shone with a sugary down peculiar to her which excited the very enamel on the teeth in the attentive mouths of his two companions. Higher up, the spherical sweetnesses of all ideal breasts spoke from a geometric distance to the dome of the stomach, supported by the force-lines of dynamic thighs. ‘Don’t come near!’ He cried to Marinetti and Fillia. ‘Don’t smell her. Go away. You have evil, voracious mouths. You would eat her away from me without stopping for breath.’⁶⁹⁸

Confection is elevated to new heights of aestheticism, blending sensory delights with sexual desire. There is a deep irony in Prampolini’s impassioned defence of his creation, preventing the act of consumption, suggesting that the artists have elevated the act of cooking to the point of fine art. The satire is evident: ‘With the mouths of friendly cannibals, Giulio Onesti, Marinetti, Prampolini and Fillia restored themselves with a tasty morsel of statue every now and again’.⁶⁹⁹ The artists demonstrate some of the principles of Futurism—speed, innovation, and dynamism—while implicitly ridiculing traditional forms of sculpture, literature, and art. Rohdie writes that ‘The story itself is a parody of literarity, in particular, a form of gothic melodrama romance writing, while its

⁶⁹⁸ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 18.

⁶⁹⁹ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 19.

sense is that of a polemic for a futurist cuisine—a most unlikely juxtaposition’.⁷⁰⁰ Rohdie’s statement highlights the peculiarity of *The Futurist Cookbook*, with the lines between satire and manifesto often blurred. The artists’ sugar sculpting in combination suggests that they are returning a sense of joy to their art, becoming both producer and consumer. The art produced in Marinetti’s text is figuratively and literally consumed, providing a nutritious sugar rush to the group and, by extension, Italian art as a whole. Marinetti is therefore suggesting that the only solution to the perceived decline of Italian culture is to re-orient that culture through Futurism, embracing advances in technology and cuisine.

Marinetti’s sugar sculptures go beyond satire of traditional art forms and into satire of genre. In ‘The Dinner that Stopped a Suicide’ Giulio Onesti is saved (as a character) through the breaking of literary form. The use of food for purposes other than nourishment is presented as absurd, therefore leading to the breakdown of literary convention within the gothic melodrama genre. Rohdie further writes that

The break is achieved simultaneously by literary parody and by the irruption into the scene of futurist food and futurist rhetoric. It is a double break with convention, one which privileges the cuisine and gives to it a radical aesthetic function. The text of *La cucina futurista* is futurist, artistic, about aesthetics, largely because it is “about” food, and not in spite of the fact.⁷⁰¹

⁷⁰⁰ Sam Rohdie, ‘An Introduction to Marinetti’s Futurist Cooking’, *Salmagundi*, 28, 1975, p. 127.

⁷⁰¹ Rohdie, ‘An Introduction to Marinetti’s Futurist Cooking’, p. 127.

As a malleable and delicious commodity, sugar is used in Marinetti's sculptures to arrest Onesti's fatal depression. The ingredient matches the speed and malleability demanded by Futurist discourse while the sweetness of sugar serves as a humorous substitute for sexual and romantic desire. Sugar provides Marinetti with a new marble for the creation of modern statues.

The artists' creations succeed in saving Onesti from his suicidal impulse. Blending lasciviousness with a hunger for sweetness, Marinetti shows the restorative impact of sugar consumption as Onesti deconstructs 'The Curves of the World and their Secrets': 'Kneeling before it he began like a lover to adore it with his lips, tongue and teeth. Searching and overturning the pretty little sugar palm tree like a ravenous tiger, he bit off and ate a sweet little foot skating on a cloud'.⁷⁰² Onesti is saved by, quite literally, consuming art. In following the twin doctrines of speed and innovation, Futurism saves the artist through the creation of works designed to be temporary while satisfying a sweet tooth. However, the excess shown in the text simultaneously satirises forms considered passé. Notaker notes that

the designs in two of Carême's books, *Le pâtissier royal parisien* and *Le pâtissier pittoresque*, inspired a new style of so called decorative cuisine that went on to dominate upper-class buffets and tables until the onset of the World War I. Big constructions of marzipan, sugar, and other materials that were put on tables as centerpieces were called *pièces montées* in French⁷⁰³

⁷⁰² Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, pp. 24-25.

⁷⁰³ Henry Notaker, *A History of Cookbooks: From Kitchen to Page Over Seven Centuries*, California Studies in Food and Culture: 64 (University of California Press, 2017), p. 271.

This innovative mode of cooking from the early nineteenth century is repurposed by Marinetti. Sugar sculptures are quickly assembled in ‘The Dinner that Stopped a Suicide’, demonstrating the mock-superiority of the Futurist artists. Within the framework of Futurism, excess is returned to the masses and celebrated.

According to Berghaus, formed in 1909 following Marinetti’s publication of the *Futurist Political Manifesto*, ‘Futurism became a catchphrase for a broadly felt desire for cultural renewal’.⁷⁰⁴ The desire for renewal stretched across swathes of life in the early twentieth century, incorporating arts, sculpture, literature, and politics. Marinetti himself held a wide range of artistic interests, Berghaus writing that he ‘was a consummate musician and published many reviews of opera performances; he was friends with painters and sculptors and possessed a sound knowledge of the latest trends in the fine arts’.⁷⁰⁵ The movement itself was as broad as Marinetti’s associations, and grew in impact throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Berghaus further writes that

it was in [Futurism’s] second phase, in the 1920s and early 1930s, that it translated its key aesthetic principles into fields as diverse as ceramics, cuisine, dance, fashion, furniture, graphic design, interior design, mural décor, photography, radio and so on. This creative activity was given a theoretical foundation in more than five hundred manifestos.⁷⁰⁶

Marinetti combines a handful of these fields into *The Futurist Cookbook*, presenting recipes with

⁷⁰⁴ Günter Berghaus and Selena Daly, ‘Preface’, in *Handbook of International Futurism*, ed. by Günter Berghaus, De Gruyter Reference (De Gruyter, 2019), p. xi.

⁷⁰⁵ Berghaus and Daly, ‘Preface’, p. xi.

⁷⁰⁶ Berghaus and Daly, ‘Preface’, p. xiv.

little or no nutritional value but which would satirise both broader fascist politics and simultaneously the notion of food-as-art. Futurist recipes are unworkable and not intended to be practicable. Novero writes that ‘the Futurists were acutely aware of the etymological links between revolution and revolt-ing, or the ‘disgusting’ and the rebellious’.⁷⁰⁷ The effect of *The Futurist Cookbook* was to provoke outrage and offence to advance philosophical and aesthetic aims. As Novero notes, ‘the Futurists focussed on cuisine as an essential component of their programme of civilizational renewal’ looking ahead to a technologically advanced future with tradition largely cast aside.⁷⁰⁸

Through Futurism, consumption became viewed as an artistic act, one that bore little relation to nutrition or nourishment. Notaker explains the Futurist approach to cooking in the early twentieth century, writing that ‘The futurists elaborated a theory of culinary art that had the same concepts and categories as poetry, sculpture, painting, and other arts’ with appreciation for form, innovation, and scientific progress.⁷⁰⁹ With the problem of nutrition theoretically solved by science, food was therefore considered an object of artistic value, freed from the need to be nutritious. Defining Marinetti’s relationship with Futurism and food, Roudot writes

Marinetti denied that food had any nutritional value whatsoever. Nutrition, he felt, should be taken care of by chemistry in the form of pills and powders, while food should serve

⁷⁰⁷ Cecelia Novero, ‘Cuisine’, in *Handbook of International Futurism*, ed. by Günter Berghaus, De Gruyter Reference (De Gruyter, 2019), p. 116.

⁷⁰⁸ Novero, ‘Cuisine’, p. 117.

⁷⁰⁹ Notaker, *A History of Cookbooks*, p. 285.

only aesthetic or symbolic functions.’⁷¹⁰

In the literary sphere—as with Proust’s madeleine—food serves only symbolic functions; this is developed in *The Futurist Cookbook* into a satirical point on the functional use of food. Roudot furthers his point, writing that

The Futurist project was the last systematic attempt to reorient food science strictly toward the enjoyment of food; the work of food scientists in the second half of the twentieth century supported the primacy of science over consumer desire.⁷¹¹

Paradoxically, by removing the nutritious impetus from the culinary sphere, Marinetti shows food to be more enjoyable. Cuisine as an art form is liberated from the strictures of tradition and the maintenance of health. Instead, consumption itself becomes art, signifying a shift in culture towards consumption that is only conspicuous—in an interesting reversal to how sugar consumption is typically shown. Marinetti shows how sugar is integrated into Italian food culture, aided by its malleability. Traditional sugar sculptures are subsumed, albeit satirically, into a new vision for art and culture that celebrates speed, innovation, and creation. The bold future for Italian art, as envisioned by the Italian Futurist, casts sugar as a modern commodity that communicates excess and grandeur. Protean sugar is removed from its plantation history and is literally re-formed for nationalist ends. Finally, in combining sugar with satire, Marinetti shows how food cultures can be used to critique or ridicule cultural traditions, advancing the case for art without restraint.

⁷¹⁰ Alain-Claude Roudot, ‘Food Science and Consumer Taste’, *Gastronomica*, 4.1 (2004), p. 44.

⁷¹¹ Roudot, ‘Food Science and Consumer Taste’, p. 44.

M. F. K. Fisher: sweetness and rationing

Contrasting directly with Marinetti's philosophical, political and aesthetic approach, M. F. K. Fisher's work instead celebrates necessity and nutrition. One of the most influential American food writers of the twentieth century, Fisher mixes memoir, travel writing, and culinary criticism into texts that present a blend of traditional and modern ways of eating. Fisher's work explores the meaning of food, specified in the preface to *Serve It Forth* as 'about eating and about what to eat and about people who eat. And I shall do gymnastics by trying to fall between these three fires, or by straddling them all'.⁷¹² Fisher's work contrasts with Marinetti's, often showing relatively private acts of consumption. On *Serve It Forth*, Reardon writes that:

Ostensibly the book is about hunger, and the various ways people have, for the most part, dignified the satisfaction of hunger. The form she adopted for it is as immediate and lively as good conversation. It lightly mixes fact and fancy, incorporating vignettes of culinary history from the oldest extant cookbook, the *Honzo*, written in Egypt in 2800 B.C., and from cookbooks written by women in nineteenth-century England and America.⁷¹³

The points at which sugar is written about give insights into how sweet dessert recipes could become the triggers for memory and nostalgia. Although Fisher's approach to food contrasts deeply with the Futurist vision posited by Marinetti, the movement is acknowledged by Fisher, writing that 'Literature tiptoed gingerly toward steel-and-glass construction, and sculptors and

⁷¹² M. F. K. Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, Reissue edition (North Point Press, 2002), p. 6.

⁷¹³ Joan Reardon, *Poet of the Appetites: The Lives And Loves of M.F.K. Fisher*, First edition (North Point Press, 2005), p. 105.

writers used tin cans, matches, and dream sequences with symbolic seriousness'.⁷¹⁴ Referring directly to Marinetti, Fisher dubs him 'the Italian prophet' who 'would abolish the very common delusion that weight and volume are factors in the appreciation of food', denigrating perceived gluttony and instead favouring morsels of exquisitely crafted food.⁷¹⁵ Through her work, Fisher details the consuming habits that became common in the first half of the twentieth century, combining introspection with fragmented narratives. Though prolific, here I will include *Serve It Forth* (1937), Fisher's first book, and *How to Cook a Wolf* (1942), a text offering philosophical and culinary assistance with wartime scarcity.

In a similarly surreal vision of eating to Marinetti, *Serve It Forth*'s 'On Dining Alone' chapter features a diner eating avocado with powdered sugar:

An avocado was brought to him, cradled in a napkin. He felt of it delicately, smelled it, usually nodded yes. It was cut in two with a silver knife. Then he himself detached the stone-skin from each half, placed one part of the fruit gently on a large plate before him, and sent the other back to the kitchen. Powdered sugar was brought, and the old man pressed it into the hollow of the fruit. He spent some time over this, making it firm and even.⁷¹⁶

The sugar, mixed with kummel, is then incorporated into the avocado before 'the old man ate a small spoonful of the smooth green fruit-flesh, then another. Sometimes he stopped, sometimes he

⁷¹⁴ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 129.

⁷¹⁵ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 129.

⁷¹⁶ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 118.

finished it. Then he drank a mouthful of coffee and left'.⁷¹⁷ As with Marinetti, sugar is used here to symbolise a greater meaning, that pleasure can be found in unusual acts of consumption. Where they differ is that the diner's sweet avocado appears to be relatively private, in contrast to the more conspicuous sugar sculptures created by Marinetti's artists. By dining alone, the old man is able to find absolute satisfaction, undisturbed by companions.

The opening chapter of *Serve It Forth*, 'When a Man Is Small', charts the culinary life of a man, beginning with the consumption of a sweet confection. Regarding childhood, Fisher shows a connection explored previously on the opposite side of the Atlantic—Proust's madeleine—but with a cookie:

Perhaps there are little chocolate cookies as a special treat, two apiece. He eats his, all two, with an intense but delicate avidity. His small sister Judy puts one of hers in her pocket, the smug thing. But Aunt Gwen takes a bite from each of her cookies and gives what is left of one to Judy, what is left of the other to him. She is quite calm about it. He looks at her with dreadful wonder. How can she bear to do it? He could not, *could* not have given more than a crumb of his cookie to anyone. Perhaps even a crumb would be too big.⁷¹⁸

Though narratively different to *In Search of Lost Time*, Fisher shows sweet cookies to be a window to an earlier time. Both innocence and a primal urge for sweetness are shown here, but also maternal links between the boy and his aunt. Lupton asserts that 'Food beliefs and behaviours are developed from earliest childhood, and are closely tied to the family unit. They are an integral

⁷¹⁷ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 118.

⁷¹⁸ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 6.

dimension of the first relationship an infant has with its caregivers, and of the acculturation of children into adult society'.⁷¹⁹ Foods containing sugar therefore become a civilising influence when consumed, associated with caregiving as well as the development of impulse control. In the passage, the boy's aunt demonstrates generosity, serving as an important developmental milestone. Furthermore, as a child, a sugared treat is of immense value, contrasted with the more measured actions of the aunt. Lupton writes that mothers, or in this case another familial female caregiver 'domesticate children, propelling them from the creature of pure instinct and uncontrolled wildness of infancy into the civility and self-regulation of adulthood'.⁷²⁰ For Fisher, the cookie therefore becomes a signifier of gendered care-giving roles, similar to those demonstrated by Proust, while demonstrating the links that sugar forges between adulthood and childhood.

Distancing itself from the impractical and aesthetic recipes that define Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*, *How to Cook a Wolf* focusses on the economics of scarcity which Reardon describes as 'a book about survival, both physical and spiritual, during the ghastly business of war'.⁷²¹ Unlike Marinetti, speed and violence are not glorified; rather, the recipes found in the text are for practical uses against the threat of modern weaponry and the global conditions of scarcity created by war. Both the Atlantic Ocean and the Second World War separate Fisher and Marinetti, with Fisher showing the effects of the ideology that Marinetti formulated and promulgated. Carruth writes that

⁷¹⁹ Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body, and the Self* (Sage Publications, 1996), p. 37.

⁷²⁰ Lupton, *Food, the Body, and the Self*, p. 39.

⁷²¹ Joan Reardon, *Poet of the Appetites: The Lives And Loves of M.F.K. Fisher*, First edition (North Point Press, 2005), p. 143.

Both *How to Cook a Wolf* and Fisher's 1943 memoir *The Gastronomical Me* adapt literary modernism to apprehend the entwined relationships of cuisine and famine. These books take inspiration from the modernist form of fragmented narrative and collage, yet ultimately do so to discover in individual acts and modes of eating the American nation's growing appetite for power.⁷²²

While Marinetti seeks to satirise the contemporary artistic and political scene through *The Futurist Cookbook*—glorifying speed, violence, and autarchy—Fisher reflects the economic reality of life before, during, and after the war in *How to Cook a Wolf*. Amidst the final months, weeks, and days of the Second World War, the U.S. was rising swiftly to a position of increasing global influence, whilst also experiencing chronic food insecurity. Carruth notes that, as the 'Author of both cookbooks and travel memoirs, Fisher juxtaposes the creeds of gastronomy with observations of scarcity and violence specific to the period' while highlighting the extreme inequality in the food system.⁷²³ The supply chain for sugar and other commodities, disrupted by war, forced consumers to economise in their cooking.

Despite scarcity, Fisher writes on the need to economise while nonetheless satisfying the urge for sweetness, emphasising the importance of cooked confections in wartime. Although written in the U.S., far from the front line in Europe, scarcity in the global market nonetheless dictated what was consumed, and how much. As Fisher writes,

⁷²² Allison Carruth, 'Modernism and Gastronomy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food*, ed. by J. Michelle Coghlan, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 97.

⁷²³ Carruth, 'Modernism and Gastronomy', p. 96.

Once during the last war [...] when rationing of sugar and butter had been in effect just long enough to throw all the earnest young housewives into a proper tizzy, my grandmother sat knitting and listening to a small excited group of them discuss with proper pride their various ways of making cake economically. Each felt that her own discovery was the best, of course, and insisted that brown sugar or molasses-with-soda was much better than white, or that if you used enough spices you could substitute bacon fat for butter, or that eggs were quite unnecessary.⁷²⁴

In total contrast to Marinetti's Futurist aestheticism, Fisher concerns herself with the practical realities of creating food with limited resources. Rather than food-as-art, Fisher promotes an 'eat to live' philosophy born of necessity.⁷²⁵ Further, in contrast with Marinetti's evocation of violence and female objectification, Fisher centres the role of women during the period in economising and innovating through cookery. Gone are the baroque confectionery statues in the mould of Greek paramours, replaced by cakes made with molasses or bacon fat. *How to Cook a Wolf* prizes industriousness over innovation and speed, elevating the small pleasure of a cake over aesthetically-pleasing conceptual sculpture. Consumption here is not conspicuous, but intimately tied to survival. The simple pleasure of a cake becomes a luxury in times of scarcity while highlighting the impacts of globalised supply chains.

'The Pale Yellow Glove' chapter of *Serve It Forth* dips into similar notions of taste, emotion, and memory to Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. The two texts both demonstrate the

⁷²⁴ M. F. K. Fisher, *How to Cook a Wolf*, Kindle edition (Daunt Books, 2020), p. 10.

⁷²⁵ Fisher, *How to Cook a Wolf*, p. 20.

powerful ability of a sweet product to bring forth nostalgic yet largely forgotten memories of a particular time and place. The chapter also touches on similar ground to Marinetti concerning the fulfilment of desire—albeit, with far more modesty than the former’s sexualised sugar sculptures. Fisher begins stating that ‘Once at least in the life of every human, whether he be brute or trembling daffodil, comes a moment of complete gastronomic satisfaction’.⁷²⁶ Food here is intimately tied to memory, with Fisher acknowledging that ‘Oddly enough, it is hard for people to describe these moments. They have sunk beatifically into the past, or have been ignored or forgotten in the harsh rush of the present’.⁷²⁷ However, food, particularly confection, is presented as a means of recall. The memory itself is made clearer by the consumption of sweet chocolate combined with bread. Fisher’s gastronomic memory relates to her time the Alpine Club of the Cote d’Or, ‘looking down into the valley where Vercingetorix had fought so splendidly’.⁷²⁸ Though simple, the food, ‘a piece of chocolate, pale brown with cold’, given to her by an ‘old general, who stood, shaggy and immense’, represents half of the moment of complete gastronomic satisfaction.⁷²⁹ The other half, bread given to her at the insistence of a doctor, completes the recipe: ‘And in two minutes my mouth was full of fresh bread, and melting chocolate, and as we sat gingerly, the three of us, on the frozen hill’.⁷³⁰ Far from a complicated recipe befitting a gourmand, it is the simplicity of the scene that makes it memorable. It is the combination of ingredients and a specific experience that leads to Fisher’s assertion that it is ‘one of the most satisfying things I have ever eaten. I thought

⁷²⁶ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 99.

⁷²⁷ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 99.

⁷²⁸ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 105.

⁷²⁹ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 105.

⁷³⁰ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 105.

vaguely of the metamorphosis of wine and bread—'.⁷³¹ The chapter cannot escape religious allusions, suggesting that food, in particular combinations, has a direct relationship with a feeling of spirituality. The wine of the sacrament is wryly replaced with melting chocolate, the wafer with fresh French bread. Hidden within the chocolate, sugar provides the sweetness that makes the memory particularly palatable. In this moment of consumption, satisfaction is invoked with the fulfilment of a simple desire.

Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky and the renouncement of pleasure

Proust's madeleine shows a sweet cake triggering personal memories. Marinetti and Fisher—through sugar sculptures and morsels of chocolate, respectively—show how sugar is considered a necessary luxury imbued with desire. Patrick Hamilton's representations of Turkish Delight and Italian cream display both elements in the context of London's busy bars and streets. Hamilton's London trilogy, *20,000 Streets Under the Sky* (1935), presents a vision of interwar London that lays bare both the inner lives of his characters and the broader cultural scene in the city. The trilogy is comprised of three novels: *The Midnight Bell* (1929), *The Siege of Pleasure* (1932), and *The Plains of Cement* (1934), with each novel written from the perspective of a different character—Bob, Jenny, and Ella, respectively. In each novel, Hamilton features uses of sweetness, specifically Turkish Delight and Italian Cream, which provide an insight into the desires and motivations of each of his characters. Confection in Hamilton's work does not only signify hunger, but the more libidinal desires of London's denizens. In this sense, *20,000 Streets Under the Sky* relates to the sugary desires shown by Marinetti, allowing Hamilton to explore the more carnal aspects of his

⁷³¹ Fisher, *Serve It Forth*, p. 105.

characters.

Within the context of the relationship between Bob and Jenny, Hamilton uses a popular sweet to represent the complicated libidinous feelings between them: Turkish Delight. Having over-imbibed and fallen into a drunken stupor, Bob craves the exotic sweet snack. Hamilton writes

How hungry he was! The false hunger of the drunkard. He could eat and eat. Turkish Delight. He could eat pounds and pounds of Turkish Delight. A blind soul, surrounded by the darkness of the infinity of the cosmos, lay throbbing with orgiastic desire for Turkish Delight! What a life! Or bread and cheese. A white loaf, crust, butter, cheese. He couldn't go to sleep unless he ate. Why not creep downstairs and find some? He would.⁷³²

Bob, ravenous for Turkish Delight as a substitute for sexual pleasure, desires the same sweetness largely withheld by Jenny. In this context, confection is partially disconnected from the human need for nourishment. Instead, Turkish Delight fills the space between hunger and libido, providing pleasure and a calorific hit. Frost dubs the passage 'one of the most libidinally charged, yet comical, passages in Hamilton's work', representing Bob's romantic and sexual frustration.⁷³³ Frost expands on this, writing that 'Bob sublimates his sexual desire in a fantasy of gorging himself on the sweet, sticky, exotic treat'.⁷³⁴ The physical confection stands in for the metaphorical 'sweet'

⁷³² Patrick Hamilton, 'The Midnight Bell' in *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*, Kindle edition (Abacus, 2017), p. 133.

⁷³³ Laura Frost, 'The Impasse of Pleasure: Patrick Hamilton and Jean Rhys', in *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and Its Discontents*, ed. by Laura Frost (Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 175.

⁷³⁴ Frost, 'The Impasse of Pleasure', p. 175.

that Bob desires: romantic and sexual attention from Jenny. The bread and cheese satirically undercuts Bob's own desire and his failed ambitions. Rather than the sugary Turkish Delight, he decides to settle for a meagre meal of bread and cheese foraged from the landlord's pantry. The humour in the passage is highlighted through Bob's romantic fecklessness. Frost writes that 'Having had this vision of an absurdly banal sublime that he isn't even able to execute, Bob instead settles for a spartan meal of bread, butter, and cheese foraged from the bar downstairs before he passes out in his lonely bed, the prelude to yet another hangover'.⁷³⁵ The passage is darkly funny in its reflection of the loneliness of modern London. Hamilton presents consumption as a poor substitute to the real human connection for which Bob should be striving.

Self-destructive, brooding, and obsessive, Bob develops an absolute fixation with Jenny which eventually leads to his financial ruin. Hamilton's initial use of sweetness is used in the context of the warped relationship between Bob and Jenny, with Bob displaying a childlike need for recognition. Following their first date, Bob demands a metaphorical 'sweet' as a token of Jenny's (non-existent) love for him:

They were nearing Leicester Square. Like the child being banished to bed, he tried to get a sweet before going. He would regard a sweet as full compensation. He asked for it. 'So you haven't had a very bright time since I saw you last?' he asked, in a sympathetic voice, endeavouring, in the little time he had, to beat up their original tender understanding. But there were no sweets for him.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁵ Frost, 'The Impasse of Pleasure', p. 175.

⁷³⁶ Hamilton, 'The Midnight Bell', pp. 78-79.

Bob's desire for sweetness leads to Jenny's strengthening hold over him. The relationship has parallels with sugar and its consumption, with moments of excitement (a sugar rush), followed by cravings for more. It is here that Hamilton makes the association between sweetness and sexual desire clear. Knowing Bob's desire and his need for attention, Jenny leverages Bob's emotions to improve her financial situation:

‘Yes,’ he said, making it clear that she had hurt him. ‘But I only wanted to know.’ She relented. ‘Well, anyway,’ she said, ‘you’re quite right. I’ve never had such a rotten time.’ He put his sweet in his mouth and relished it. ‘Oh well, it’s a funny life,’ he tried...⁷³⁷

Craving the sweetness of private information, Bob shows his need for attention and recognition. Bob's saviour complex leads to a swiftly declining financial situation that he proves unable, or unwilling, to prevent. Here, the craving for sweetness is presented as a near-addiction. Sweetness is further expanded upon by the confections consumed by Bob, Jenny, and Ella, revealing aspects of their characters and states of mind.

Jenny's journey into sex work is charted in *The Siege of Pleasure*, developing aspects to her character that are explored previously from Bob's perspective. Bob's analogue in the second novel of the trilogy can be found in Tom, ‘a young, pale electrician, with thin features and a consumptive look’ who similarly obsesses over Jenny.⁷³⁸ In their date at the cinema—preceded by Jenny eliciting a free meal from Tom—Turkish Delight features as a bribe for greater intimacy.

⁷³⁷ Hamilton, ‘The Midnight Bell’, p. 79.

⁷³⁸ Hamilton, ‘The Siege of Pleasure’ in *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*, Kindle edition (Abacus, 2017), p. 241.

In their journey from the table to the door Jenny said nothing about Turkish Delight. In fact, she was scrupulously careful not even to look Turkish Delight—possibly too careful. At any rate, in Tom’s imagination, it seemed that if he did not get Turkish Delight the entire evening was endangered.⁷³⁹

Turkish Delight acts again as a placeholder for sexual desire, although the position is now partially reversed, with Jenny as both the object of desire and the one wanting to consume. Frost writes that

The sweets and the trip to the cinema are not pleasures freely given but rather the price of attaining sensual contact: a transaction that echoes the structure of the profession into which Jenny soon falls. Her compulsive consumption of Turkish Delight illustrates her selfishness (she is “faithful” to nothing but her own desires) and her incipient whorishness: her joyless, obligatory giving of as little of herself as she can to Tom in return for spending his money.⁷⁴⁰

However, in contrast Bob experiences Turkish Delight as ‘a fantasy consolation for otherwise unattainable delights’.⁷⁴¹ Both men fall victim to their own unsatisfied desires, unwilling to realise their hopeless positions in feeling unrequited love. Jenny’s consumption of the Turkish Delight shows her own desires being fulfilled, though at the expense of her lovers’ frustration.

Ella’s narration in *Plains of Cement* contrasts with both Bob and Jenny’s experience of confection. Once Ella learns that Bob has departed London, she decides to ‘buy herself some

⁷³⁹ Hamilton, ‘The Siege of Pleasure’, p. 245.

⁷⁴⁰ Frost, ‘The Impasse of Pleasure’, pp. 177-178.

⁷⁴¹ Frost, ‘The Impasse of Pleasure’, pp. 177-178.

sweets and go by herself to the pictures and sit in the gloom, to hide from the roaring world, and try to divert her mind from its aching preoccupations by looking at the shadows'.⁷⁴² The scene reflects the grim reality of the London streets, with confection and cinema combined as salves for an otherwise painful reality. Ella, abandoned and in a state of unrequited love, finds solace in the silent community of the cinema:

You will sometimes see such lonely figures, eating their sweets and gazing gravely at the screen in the flickering darkness of picture theatres, and it may well be that they are merely other Ellas, with just such problems and sorrows in their grey lives as hers. It is the sweets which give the tragedy to the spectacle. To have reached such an age, to have fought so strenuously all along the line of life, and yet to have come to a stage of hopelessness and isolation wherein the sole remaining consolation is to be found in sweets!⁷⁴³

The passage recalls the child-like demand from Bob for his metaphorical 'sweet', re-purposed to reflect a need for comfort and distraction. Frost notes that Ella 'seeks distraction: the classic modernist description of mass culture's effect'.⁷⁴⁴ However, although the sweets have a welcome soothing effect, they are ultimately a mere distraction from Ella's unfortunate reality. Rather than Turkish Delight, Ella buys 'four ounces of Italian Cream (for which she had a passion dating from childhood)'.⁷⁴⁵ Ella's choice of sweet treat distances herself from Bob and Jenny's cravings for

⁷⁴² Hamilton, 'The Plains of Cement' in *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*, Kindle edition (Abacus, 2017), p. 502.

⁷⁴³ Hamilton, 'The Plains of Cement', p. 502.

⁷⁴⁴ Frost, 'The Impasse of Pleasure', p. 178.

⁷⁴⁵ Hamilton, 'The Plains of Cement', p. 502.

the libidinally-charged Turkish Delight and shows her to hold a more innocent perspective. In contrast to the Turkish Delights symbolisation of future-focussed desire, the Italian Cream suggests nostalgia-seeking comfort. Used in a similar manner to Proust's madeleine, Ella seeks sweetness to access memories of easier times. Sugared confection provides a distraction by taking the consumer away from the present moment and into previous moments of pleasure—heightened by Ella's spatial retreat to the cinema.

Sugar and literary modernism

From the plantation to the sweet shop, sugar holds an important place within the Commodity Modernism concept that I have constructed in this thesis. Twentieth-century representations of sugar production on the plantations of the New World reveal the brutal history of the commodity and its impact on modern culture. The authors I have included from the Caribbean and the Americas show that areas of production are engaged in a conversation about what it means to be a part of the modern world. Integrated into the histories of former colonies, and transculturated across the world, sugar comes to adopt different meanings depending on its status: either raw, or cooked. At either end of the production-consumption axis, sugar as a commodity indicates various regional and national concepts of modernity.

Taken together, *Cuban Counterpoint*, *The Sugar Cane Cycle*, and *Cane* reveal the legacies of the sugar plantations in their respective regions and how these structures played a crucial role in the development of the modern world. The systems of oppression that accompanied sugar cultivation had lasting cultural impacts. Contrasting with the more positive cultural role played by tobacco, Ortiz shows that sugar represents the perceived and actual domination of Cuba by outside forces. In making the mirror journey of tobacco—from the Old World to the New—sugar brings with it industrialised agricultural processes that demand enslaved human labour.

Furthermore, sugar production seeded a Cuban conception of modernity. The commodity brought industrial processes to the island along with a multitude of different cultures that would result in the transcultural formation of modern Cuba. *Cuban Counterpoint* provides a literary and cultural perspective on the creation of Cuba, providing a better understanding than historical accounts alone.

The oppressive nature of sugar production is explored in alternative forms in *The Sugar Cane Cycle* and *Cane*. Through a first person narrative and a diverse series of vignettes respectively, the texts offer literary commentary on the legacies of sugar production in the structures of a rural and regional conception of modernity. Rêgo, weaving elements of his personal experience through his work, demonstrates how the legacies of commodity production long outlive emancipation in Brazil through an internalised class structure and economic system. Likewise taking inspiration from the sugar plantations, Toomer reveals a rural modernity that underpins the urban conception of the term, demonstrating the centrality of sugar cultivation to the Southern experience in the twentieth century. All three texts show a modernity that transcends national boundaries, united by a shared experience of the sugar plantation.

Literary output on Haiti provides a national view of how sugar production impacts culture, with different perspectives provided by James, Seabrook, and Roumain. Respectively exploring the history, contemporary present, and future of Haiti, each of the authors reckons with how sugar has shaped its cultural, social, and economic landscape. James's dual exploration of Toussaint Louverture as a tragic hero places sugar and its cultivation in the centre of Haitian modernity and national independence. The fear surrounding foreign domination is likewise shown in Seabrook's representation of the Haitian zombie, showing the echoes of plantation slavery that continued to haunt Haitian culture. Roumain, through his protagonist martyr Manuel, points to a

hopeful future in which the industrial sugar plantations are replaced by community and abundance. The theme that unites the texts in this chapter is the notion that Haiti can only be a truly independent nation without sugar and the systems required to produce it.

Finally, the commodities represented by Proust, Marinetti, Fisher, and Hamilton reveal sugar's protean nature. Following its cultivation and processing on the plantations, sugar becomes a commodity with international and global significance. Transformed into a multitude of forms, sugar consumption has a small yet defined niche in modernist literature, as shown by the text I have explored. Although the production of sugar as a commodity proves to be far more conspicuous than its consumption in the form of cooked confectionery, sugar's rapid ascension as a mass-market necessity finds its way into literature with unique and varied significance. Used in moments of philosophical inquiry, ideological exploration and moments of escape, confection in literature presents a door to altered states of consciousness. However, hidden from the consumer is the process of production, sugar's own memory. Through continued change and reformulation, sugar is hidden in innocent consumables with seemingly little link to the commodity's past. Instead, the substance is used as a blank slate with which to imbue new meaning.

Conclusion

The intersection between commodities, capitalism, and imperialism had a profound impact on global modernist literatures. With this acknowledged, a fundamental question arises: given the diverse experiences of modernity and capitalism in the early twentieth century, how do we form a cogent idea of global, regional, or (inter)national literatures? The route I have proposed is through commodities. As I showed throughout my textual analyses, both production and consumption are used in twentieth-century literature to revise contested conceptions of modernity. In applying subjectivity, or in the creation of narratives that support alternative points of view, modernist literature from the Americas and the Caribbean forge a fresh perspective on the twentieth century. This perspective engages with the same commodities that are found on the other side of the Atlantic but function predominantly through the lens of production, rather than consumption. Tobacco and sugar prove to be important within the boundaries of the Americas and the Caribbean, as well as in the link they provide with the cities of Europe through trade. By engaging with the commodity cultures of modernism I have demonstrated the distinctive yet significant ways in which cultures of production interact with cultures of consumption via two of the world's most prominent drug foods. More work is yet to be done, literary analysis linked to other commodities—such as tea, coffee, or cotton—could be explored in relation to twentieth-century literary output. While this analysis has focussed exclusively on the Atlantic sphere, other regions could benefit from an analysis of their globally traded commodities. Functioning as a means of relating otherwise diverse texts of a global modernism, commodities make clear the distinct national and regional modernisms found around the Atlantic.

Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint* forms the fulcrum of this thesis, inspiring the larger conceptual idea of Commodity Modernism and in providing the opposition between tobacco

and sugar. Ortiz's work expresses an entire national mythology around the production and consumption of tobacco and sugar, conceptualising a new Cuban identity around the founding commodities of Cuba. The national identity shown in *Cuban Counterpoint* forms the basis for the idea that Cuba is a profoundly modern nation willing to free itself from an imperial past. As I examined in Chapter One, Ortiz's work is, in part, about 'The native versus the foreigner. National sovereignty as against colonial status. The proud cigar against the lowly sack'.⁷⁴⁶ It is an idea that applies to other tobacco and sugar-producing areas, such as those discussed in relation to *Night Rider*, *Ulysses*, and *Plantation Boy*. Commodity production is intimately tied to place, encouraging discourse on regionalism and nationhood, while simultaneously providing a connection with places of consumption. Here I have opened new avenues to understanding early twentieth-century literature on multiple different spatial levels: that of the individual, the national, regional, and international. These are all united by a shared experience of commodities, either in their production or consumption. With this comparative framework, commodities create a bridge between otherwise very separate texts. More narrowly, it allows us to see how authors with very different experiences of the early twentieth century experienced modernity. Further, this comparative literary analysis shows us how they expressed their national cultures and in conjunction with a more regional experience of the plantation. On the side of production, plantations provide a thread through which these texts are united—true of my texts from outside the metropolitan zones of modernist literature. On the side of consumption, tobacco and sugar represent a wide array of significations and meanings, merging with their adopted cultures with varying degrees of historical

⁷⁴⁶ Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 7.

amnesia.

As a commodity with a past in spiritual ritual, tobacco is replete with meaning. My chapters on Ortiz, Warren, and Svevo and Joyce show how tobacco is involved in some of the debates that help to define twentieth-century literature. Of these, ideas surrounding nationhood, post-colonialism, and psychoanalysis are the most prominent. Tobacco proves to be a pathway to access these ideas and ideals, whether the ignited passions of Warren's fiction, or the almost inescapable addiction satirised by Svevo. Though largely divorced from its ancient use as a spiritual aid, tobacco nonetheless has significant cultural impact as a modern commodity with exchange value. However, as Ortiz shows in *Cuban Counterpoint*, tobacco also follows the process of transculturation, gaining fresh meaning as it merges with new cultures whilst also bringing with it some of the spiritual significance of its original New World context. Crucial in providing moments of meditation and reflection, tobacco serves as a source of inspiration or enlightenment. Addictive and subversive, tobacco forms part of the fabric of the early twentieth century in urban and rural settings, showing that the areas that produced modern commodities were woven into a web of trade. Consumed for pleasure, holding no nutritional value, tobacco consumption comes to reflect the perceived decadence of the nascent twentieth century whilst becoming emblematic in conversations surrounding independence. In contrast, it is sugar's production that most firmly situates it in the sphere of modernity. Twentieth-century literary representations of sugar plantations demonstrate the intensive processes and cultures intrinsically intertwined with sugar production. The plantation led to the establishment of distinct and interrelated conceptions of modernity which work across and within national and regional boundaries.

Although typically grown in the same subtropical regions as tobacco, representations of sugar reflect its very different character, and differing cultures of both production and

consumption. Sweetness is intimately tied to sensations of pleasure. Part Two of this thesis seeks to juxtapose the pleasurable consumption of sugar with the bitterness of its production. In contrast with tobacco, a distinct challenge posed by representations of sugar is in finding consistent examples of its consumption where it is conspicuous. To paraphrase Ortiz's oppositional pairs: tobacco is ostentatious and brash, sugar is subversive and quiet. Hidden within recipes, almost always functioning as an additive, sugar's impact in the world and on literature is, figuratively and literally, whitewashed. Rarely consumed in its raw form, representations of confections containing sugar lead us to reflect on the qualities of those cooked items. The texts I have explored have shown the devastating and enduring impact of sugar production, yet the Atlantic intervenes to distance the commodity from its point of consumption. This is partially true of tobacco but, as I have shown in Chapter Two, the violence related to tobacco production in the early twentieth century is in fighting the Trust, rather than the systematised and racialised oppression of the plantation. Concerning the production of sugar, the authors of Chapter Five show the foundational importance that plantations hold for Haiti, and the resulting economic, social, and cultural power of sugar. As the end that justifies the means of the plantation system, the legacies of sugar are indelibly imprinted on Caribbean and American authors where the plantations once stood.

Beyond their thematic significance, the influence of commodities also extends into the formal and aesthetic dimensions of modernist texts. The production and consumption of tobacco and sugar inform the narrative rhythm of texts, as well as structures of repetition, fragmentation, and symbolism. Examples of these aesthetic features can be found most prominently in the work of Toomer and Joyce, displayed in their fragmentary and diverse interpretations of commodity culture. Ortiz uses tobacco and sugar to set up an opposition in *Cuban Counterpoint* that helps to define modern Cuban identity in the text. Meanwhile, the work of

Warren, Svevo, James, Rêgo, Proust, and Fisher all, in diverse ways, explore the relationship between commodities, memory, and history—leading to narratives that contain introspection, blurring between fact and fiction, and conflicts of perception. In this way, the material qualities of commodities subtly shape the formal innovations associated with modernist texts, revealing Commodity Modernism as not only a thematic category, but a formal and aesthetic grouping integral to comparisons between international interpretations of modernism.

Tobacco and sugar are in continual dialogue. By foregrounding these two commodities, I have demonstrated the diverse expression of Commodity Modernism, providing a window into how both commodities have come to dominate cultures across the Atlantic. Commodity Modernism works to bridge the gaps between areas of production and consumption, opening a cultural dialogue. The form of modernism found in the plantation regions are not merely frontiers of modernity, but integral parts of a greater international system of interrelated national and regional modernities. Furthermore, these modernisms operate on global, regional, national and individual levels. Commodities—their histories, their legacies, and their representations in literature—helped to shape thought in the early twentieth century. Supplying the cities of modernism are the plantations that provided capital and luxuries which quickly became necessities. Having analysed a range of texts on tobacco and sugar, there is the tantalising possibility that other commodities point to further avenues for exploration, revealing the commercial links between far-flung international modernisms. Mintz states ‘the complex idea that one could become different by consuming differently’.⁷⁴⁷ By looking at literary modernism via commodities, it becomes clear

⁷⁴⁷ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 185.

that the producers were no less transformed.

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