

## Leprosy and Living Ruins in Lawrence Scott's *Night Calypso*

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Declaring that, “[a]llegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things” (178), Walter Benjamin alluded to an aesthetic hermeneutic of allegory and ruins premised on a capacity for multiple meanings. Like allegory, ruins are often associated with hidden, parallel narratives and are meaning-full beyond the sum of their individual parts. This capacity for meaning, however, hinges on acts of aesthetic enquiry that ascribe cultural significance to states of decay, dereliction and fragmentation. Often evoked metaphorically, as “history [that] has physically merged into the setting” (Benjamin 177-178), ruins can inspire nostalgic narratives of past achievement or render visible the passage and traumas of time.

Images of ruins recur in *Night Calypso* as part of the novel's criticism of colonial institutions. These ruins, however, are deployed in relation to Caribbean peoples and societies in the aftermath of plantation slavery, indentureship, and other colonial experiments and do not inspire nostalgic reverie. Indeed, in *Night Calypso* images of infrastructural ruins on the island leprosarium at El Caracol<sup>1</sup> conceptually intersect with metaphorical ideas of ruins.<sup>2</sup> The ruins of the leprosarium in the novel's opening vignette, for example, mark the decline of a colonial medical experiment, under the banner of Christian missionary care, whose project was to order, discipline, and regulate individuals infected with leprosy.<sup>3</sup>

Functioning as a framing device,<sup>4</sup> these ruins delineate the ideological parameters of the rest the novel. On one hand, in the novel's 1983, the leprosarium is in ruin. On the other, from the late 1930s to the late 1940s, the novel's main temporal setting, the leprosarium is intact and fully operational. By framing the story in the remains of the leprosarium, Lawrence Scott ensures the ruins perform an allegorical func-

tion: as an edifice that will be destroyed by fire, its regulatory power is undercut by the knowledge that its destiny is ruin.

In addition to more conventional images of infrastructural ruins, *Night Calypso* presents images of damaged, scarred and disabled bodies as part of its sustained critique of colonial politics and cultures. While such images of damage are sometimes connected to the narrative's larger messages of hope and empowerment, the novel's depictions of the leper maroons,<sup>5</sup> among the most destitute and deformed of all individuals on the island, tend to replicate ablest narratives that associate agency with able-bodied potential. In this article I argue for a contrapuntal reading of such images of human dereliction and propose the metaphor of living ruins as a means of interrogating the narrative's implicit assumptions about postcolonial agency as associated with able-bodied potential. This reading engages differently with the complex identities of colonial subjects who have been variously identified in relation to images of sickness and disability in Caribbean literature.

In deploying the culturally charged signifier 'ruins' I evoke traditional cultural conceptions of the leper's body as fragment and as tragic remnant of a previously intact biological frame that hinges on cultural associations of leprosy with living death. Such narratives metaphorically invoke lepers as ruins of their former selves, in the sense that their bodies have disintegrated considerably often rendering them either unrecognizable and/or associated with abject horror.<sup>6</sup> The adjective 'living', however, interrupts this deficit discourse by underpinning a latent agency and hope for survival and by troubling traditional invocations of ruins as static objects to be viewed. Instead, my insertion of 'living' is intended to disturb the debilitating and homogenizing cultural discourses that superimpose the socially constructed group identity 'leper' over the nuanced identity of the individual by alluding to the organic body.

Through my metaphor of living ruins, I interrogate the relationship between lepers and colonial medical authorities (physicians and Catholic medical missionaries), as presented in the novel, and trouble dominant ablest discourses that associate particular manifestations of sickness and disability with irreparable tragic loss. I end with a brief discussion of the

implications of my analysis in the context of Wilson Harris' metaphor of fossilization and its philosophy of rhythmic regeneration relevant to Caribbean peoples and cultures.

### I. Leper Maroons

The image of disease-deformed people "hiding in the hills like maroons" (79) away from the leprosarium is the novel's clearest presentation of living ruins and an indictment of colonial medical authorities. Having left the leprosarium the leper maroons live secluded in the hills, many of them in advanced stages of the disease. Reaching out to Dr. Metivier and Sr. Thérèse "with what was left of their arms" (80) one individual, we are told, was "only a torso in a bundle of rags" (81). The narrator notes: "These people had retreated here out of shame. It was a shame which had started in some village when they were first detected with the disease" (80).

This image of human ruins facilitates one of the novel's central motifs, namely, that the Dominican Sisters continue to perpetuate traditional cultural narratives that are connected to the leper maroons' feelings of intense shame. A contrapuntal reading of this image, however, implicates Dr. Metivier—whom the narrator often invokes as heroic and subversive in his relationship with Mother Superior—in other debilitating discourses that uncritically promote ideas associated with able-bodied potential even in his efforts to challenge the dominant Catholic missionary culture at El Caracol.

The West Indian maroon prototype, as Trinidadian writer and theorist Cynthia James notes, is that of the "African slaves who harried the British during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from forested enclaves, eventually securing autonomous existence in territories such as Dominica and Jamaica" (8). Often fleeing the horrors and confinement of the sugar plantation, maroon fugitives eked out a precarious existence as hunted freemen in the hills rather than submit to slavery on the plantations. Evoking the maroon slaves of the West Indian colonies, the novel's simile of lepers "hiding in the hills like maroons" (79) likens the leprosarium to a pre-emancipation sugar plantation, and the lepers to those who flee abuse and injustice.

On one hand, the term maroon is often associated with those who live in the cracks of the system: the pre-emancipation maroons existed in a dialogic, though antagonistic, relationship with the plantation system that they left behind, with the maroons often raiding the plantation for supplies. The leper maroons also exist in the cracks of the system: in a similar way to their pre-emancipation namesakes, the leper maroons survive by stealing rations from the leprosarium stores. Such acts of subterfuge and strategies of survival recall the earlier, enslaved West Indians and point to the agency of even the most infirm to articulate the terms of their survival. At this point, however, the novel departs from the more traditional heroic image of the pre-emancipation maroon. Retreating to the hills out of shame, the leper maroons are the most destitute of lepers and are not depicted as a heroic contingent of rebels: for the leper maroons, maroonage is the final step in their internalization of a self-defeatist discourse in which they do not deem themselves worthy of a better life. Retreating to the hills in shame, only pain, suffering, and death remain.

In the novel, the Dominican Sisters are complicit in creating a culture at the leprosarium that rests upon debilitating stereotypes, including ideas of Christian suffering that associate the lepers' bodies with ruin and sin. By focusing on the disease through the lens of mystical suffering the nuns adopt an attitude of "pious resignation," as Dr. Metivier calls it, choosing "prayer and faith" (58) over advocating for better medicines or teaching the lepers about the biological reality of the disease. As Mother Superior notes: "They [the lepers] know more than any of us, how to suffer and to accept the cross Christ has given them to carry. We can assist in that" (73).

Invoked in the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament, leprosy is identified as an unclean disease (*T'sarath*) and as punishment for sin. Unlike Dr. Metivier's insistence on medically appropriate practices of hygiene, the Levitic preoccupation with 'unclean' refers to a metaphorical association of images of physical perfection with spiritual purity, as Mary Douglas has argued (64–65). The lepers' blemished and corroded bodies marked them, metaphorically, as impure and unclean, in other words, as the embodiment of abomination and disorder in the community. When

the afflicted are sent into exile, the abomination is also ritualistically and metaphorically expelled from the community. In the New Testament, the leper is depicted as experiencing the grace of Christ and is healed of his affliction (Matt. 8.2-4; Mark 1.40-45). From the Old Testament, where leprosy is associated with sin, to the New Testament, where its cure is evidence of divine grace, the figure of the leper is appropriated in relation to Biblical ideas about imperfection and disorder.

The nuns' allegory of Christian suffering and grace emerge out of these larger Biblical discourses of leprosy. On the island of El Caracol, it is Mother Superior and her cohort of nuns who determine that the lepers must 'bear their cross' by learning to live with the physical, psychological, and cultural implications of the disease. While the nuns are not responsible for the infection itself (leprosy is, after all, a biological disease) the nuns consent to and assist in the perpetuation of the stigma of the disease (leprosy as Biblical allegory) at the same time that they assist the afflicted in dressing the lepers' wounds and providing them with their daily rations.

The institution makes the lepers dependent on the care of the nuns by restricting knowledge about the disease to the nuns alone, thereby keeping the lepers themselves in ignorance about their own bodies. These conditions of knowing and not-knowing place the nuns and their patients in an asymmetrical relationship by which the former construct themselves as indispensable to the survival of the latter. By teaching the lepers how to bear their suffering quietly the nuns, in effect, teach them to accept their station in life and co-opt them to maintain the status quo. In such a paradigm lepers are poor, helpless sufferers in need of saving grace while the religious, performing their Christian duty, teach them how to acquire this grace.

Such a trope was common in the leprosy memoirs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as British writer Kate Marsden's *On Sledge and Horseback to Outcast Siberian Lepers* (1892). Envisioning her journey to Siberia as a quest, Marsden's task is dual: caring for the Siberian lepers and converting them to Christianity (Marsden 5-6). Even more suggestive is Trinidadian physician Dr. de Verteuil's summary of the Dominican Sisters' work among the lepers on

Chacachacare Island, the leper colony on which Scott's novel is based. Cited in Dominican Nun Sr. Marie Retout's *Called to Serve: A History of the Dominican Sisters in Trinidad and Tobago 1868–1988*,<sup>7</sup> de Verteuil likens the nuns' work at the leprosarium to a divine mission:

For six months I had the opportunity of working at the Asylum with my father, Dr. F. A. de Verteuil, the Medical Superintendent (for 15 years). I have seen these ladies day after day, without a word of complaint, with cheerful smiling countenances, dressing foetid ulcers, fleshy stumps—remains of what were once hands and feet—work from which even the most stout hearted would recoil in horror... They shun publicity, are reluctant to an extreme degree of allowing anything to be said or published in praise of their glorious, I should almost say divine, mission. (cited in Retout 58)

Dr. de Verteuil's evocation of a divine mission translates the Sisters' work into an already existing New Testament Biblical discourse with its ideal model of Christ among the lepers. Invoking the nuns as missionaries of Christ whose work include "dressing foetid ulcers" and "fleshy stumps," Dr. de Verteuil's emphasis is on the nuns' courage, not the people who experience the debilitating effects of the disease. The lepers are written out of the narrative: only diseased limbs and other remnants of previously intact bodies remain.

This particular invocation of the lepers' bodies suggests that these individuals are somehow incomplete in their present state, in relation to what is invoked as an unspoken standard of human wholeness. In other words, Dr. de Verteuil narrates the lepers as ruins, as physically derelict individuals who are reduced, in essence, to the sum of their physical condition. The juxtaposition of the nuns' agency (they dress wounds, smile and shun publicity) with the passivity of the "fleshy stumps" (whose wounds are dressed) is highly evocative, particularly in light of recent theories of disability which criticize medical models that define disability in terms of "an individual defect lodged in the person, a defect that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity as a human being" (Siebers 3). By invoking the agency of the nuns in

relation to the passive, almost vegetative state of the lepers (the “fleshy stumps”), Dr. de Verteuil invokes a conventional medical disability narrative that conflates the disability itself with the individual who has the disability. In this particular case, the individuals with leprosy are identified, in essence, with the effects of the disease while the able-bodied nuns occupy the narrative’s centre cast as heroic figures caring for the less-than-human lepers.

Such a narrative resonates with the novel’s evocation of the nuns at El Caracol who also envision their work as acts of charity and good will and the lepers as those who require such charity in order to survive. While it is true that many lepers require assistance, Mother Superior opposes Dr. Metivier who seeks to teach the lepers about their disease and how to take care of themselves. Such opposition, already suspicious in its motives, enacts a disabling Manichean binary that constructs the nuns as medical and spiritual caretakers and the lepers as disempowered and helpless victims of their disease.

Historically, such propaganda helped to mystify the disease making it especially malleable to cultural interpretations beyond its biological effects, including the notion that the disease was a shameful burden that must be hidden away. While prayers and faith might help the lepers to accept their condition such recourse does little to change the perception of the disease as a shameful burden. On the contrary, Mother Superior’s advocacy of prayer and faith calls for fatalistic but virtuous resignation to suffering and does not challenge the debilitating cultural legacy of the disease which associates leprosy with sin and shame. This view perpetuates the idea that lepers are defective human beings on account of their physical disability, in a similar manner to Dr. de Verteuil’s narrative about the historic Dominican Sisters on Chacachacare Island.

In *Night Calypso*, the nuns encounter the lepers as the disease personified, in other words, as ruins of human beings and not as individuals with hopes, dreams and living potential. By continuing to approach the disease through their Christian lens and by imposing a paradigm of holy suffering upon the infirm, the nuns are complicit in the creation and perpetuation of what I call the living ruin, a metaphorical evocation of dereliction, based on cultural perceptions of the disease. The leper

maroons emerge out of such stereotypes, which align physical disability with human imperfection. As ruined peoples they are without further use in themselves, though the nuns find use in this idea of human dereliction to further their own missionary agenda.

This narrative of containment through illness and disability, however, is not restricted to the novel's presentation of the Dominican sisters. Dr. Metivier is also implicated in another debilitating cultural narrative that appears to associate images of disability with ideas about unredeemable damage. In the novel, such a narrative emerges as an encounter between the able-bodied—Dr. Metivier and Sr. Thérèse—and the leper maroons whose disease-ridden bodies render visible the passage and trauma of time and disease.

In introducing the leper maroons, the narrator's language is similar to Dr. de Verteuil's invocation of the lepers' bodies as ruined fragments. The able-bodied doctor and his assistant, for example, encounter parts of arms and bodies (80–81) rather than full human beings. We are told that Dr. Metivier did not know how many people were present in the small, dark room, or even which bodies were male or female (80). Instead, the narrator's description focuses on an agglomeration of partial body parts, largely as a comment on the injustice that precipitates such conditions, but, in effect, de-emphasizing the humanity and individuality of the persons within the room.

The narrator's depiction of the leper maroons, as presented in the encounter with the Doctor and his assistant, promotes the novel's agenda in several ways: in addition to embodying the worst effects of leprosy and its cultural stigmas, the leper maroons provide opportunities for demonstrating Dr. Metivier's compassion for his patients and for differentiating his philosophy of medical treatment from the nuns' ideas. Such a narrative stance, however, replicates the worst features of ablest discourses of illness and disability even as it seeks to reappropriate the image of the leper from Christian discourses about sin, disease and redemption.

Indeed, the language of the encounter is reminiscent of the language of colonial exploration narratives. Writing about Dr. Metivier and Sr. Thérèse the narrator notes: "There was still much of the island that they



both had to explore, and there were stories that some patients had escaped from the compound, and were hiding in the hills like maroons” (79). Dr. Metivier’s will to explore, his physical mobility, and his access to all parts of the grounds lead to the ‘discovery’ of the leper maroons and the subsequent narration of an encounter with an ‘other’: “Vincent [Metivier] noticed several figures that had retreated far into the corners of the hut, covering themselves, hiding in the gloom, not wanting to show themselves” (80). He attempts to reassure them: “‘There’s no need to be afraid. I want to help you.’ He repeated this phrase. ‘Help you, help you’” (80).

Reminiscent of traditional narratives of colonial exploration and first contact, the doctor’s meeting with the leper maroons is narrated as an encounter with abject difference. The lepers are “hiding in the gloom” and they are afraid: like cowering natives they react to the doctor/explorer’s invasion of their space. In this episode, the acts of physical exploration, discovery, and even the offer of assistance oddly evoke colonial narratives of exploration that precede narratives of conquest. These narrative elements, however, are never interrogated in the space of the novel.

One of the first acts of the leper maroons, we are told, is to extend “what was left of their arms” to the doctor and his assistant, and those “who still had fingers clasped them in a prayer” (80). While these acts point to the leper maroons’ desire and relief that others have come to help them, another reading is also plausible: the lepers’ outstretched and clasped hands help to fulfil the narrative’s fantasy of the doctor as saviour, whose willingness to ‘save’ is conveniently matched by the leper maroons’ desire to be saved. By focusing on body fragments the narrator constructs the leper maroons as ruins of human beings in a similar manner to Dr. de Verteuil’s narrative. The implication is that these are mere fragments of people who need to be saved. Moreover, the leper maroons are never important to the development of the narrative except to reinforce the idea that Dr. Metivier cares for his patients. From this perspective the narrative appears to accept uncritically traditional associations of disability and disease with ideas of human dereliction while promoting traditional and even colonialist representations of able-bodied agency associated primarily with Dr. Metivier.<sup>8</sup>

This ablest heroic discourse is replicated in other areas of the novel, such as in Dr. Metivier's involvement with the political movement for change at El Caracol. Once again, the narrative constructs lepers as passive entities who largely rely on others, like the doctor, to advocate on their behalf. The doctor, the pharmacist, and the boatman are the doers who are separated from the masses on account of their political fervour and plans for change. Coincidentally, these leaders are among the few healthy, able-bodied figures on the island, apart from the nuns. The lepers are depicted as reactionary followers who cannot control their emotions and who commit heinous acts, such as murder, in fits of uncontrollable rage (116–117). Such narrative constructions continue to align agency and appropriate conduct with those characters such as Dr. Metivier, whose role of tending to the sick masses, it seems, naturally extends to his advocating for political change on behalf of his patients.

## II. The Doctor and the Living Ruins

The role of Dr. Metivier in the novel is complex. As one who opposes Mother Superior's philosophy and as the chief proponent of an education drive to teach the lepers about their disease and how to take care of themselves, Dr. Metivier is juxtaposed with Mother Superior and also functions as the novel's ethical centre. This dual role is evident throughout the novel and is demonstrated by the doctor's kindness and patience with Theo, his troubled ward, as well as by his posture of humility and service to the peoples of El Caracol. Moreover, Dr. Metivier's stance of encouraging his patients to engage in regular activities potentially dismantles the ideas of ruin that encapsulate their identity.

By treating the lepers as ordinary people infected with an illness rather than as the embodiment of the illness itself, Dr. Metivier encourages them to participate in events beyond the day-to-day treatment of their disease. In so doing, he refuses to treat his patients as ruins, in the manner of Mother Superior, and recognizes their right to articulate the terms of their residency on the island. In this sense, Dr. Metivier is an atypical character in the novel: as a white French Creole, he chooses to forgo his political and cultural privilege, opting instead to serve the

people at the leprosarium, a job held in contempt by other members of his profession.

Juxtaposed with these positive attributes, however, are several tropes that implicate Dr. Metivier in other types of hegemonic relationships and which call into question his place in the novel's ethical centre. Chief among these tropes is the image of Dr. Metivier as a heroic, priest/Christ-like figure who walks among the lepers in El Caracol and which is related to narrator's representation of the doctor's encounter with the leper maroons.

Early in the novel we are told:

After a priest in the [Metivier] family, he was the next best thing, a doctor. If not the consecrated fingers to bring Christ down upon their altars, at least a physician, to keep them in good health, to do some good for *these* people. (90)

Theo's introduction of the events at El Caracol goes further and evokes Dr. Metivier as a Christ figure and the lepers as the people of Galilee. Speaking to his therapist about the events of the past Theo notes: "There are those [stories] about Krishna Singh, Jonah the boatman, the other boy, Ti-Jean, and the crowd from Galilee congregating under the almond tree, waiting to be healed" (18). Close to the novel's end the priest-like image becomes even more explicit. In a tender moment that precipitates a breakthrough in Theo's process of psychological recovery, Dr. Metivier echoes the Catholic priest's invitation to the faithful to partake of the consecrated host:

Then Vincent came close and touched Theo's back saying, 'Theo, Theo, come, drink some water, eat this bread.' Theo leapt up from his bending-over position and knelt in front of Vincent. He knelt with his mouth open like a child, waiting for the priest to place the host on his tongue at Holy Communion. (363)

These sustained images create a consistent discourse throughout the novel that is problematic (and contradictory) with respect to other messages about leprosy.

Such an invocation of the physician as priest, already critiqued by Michel Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic*, aligns the medical professional with wisdom and powers to the extent that the doctor is envisioned as an elevated human being. According to Foucault, “[t]he years preceding and immediately following the [French] Revolution saw the birth of two great myths” one of them being, “the myth of a nationalized medical profession, organized like the clergy, and invested, at the level of man’s bodily health, with powers similar to those exercised by the clergy over men’s souls” (36). Foucault explains that this myth involved “the strict, militant, dogmatic medicalisation of society, by way of a quasi-religious conversion ...” (36). Such a myth helped to ingrain the stark separation of the categories of ‘doctor’ and ‘patient,’ and, over time, helped to systemize and normalize the asymmetric hierarchy of power that privileged the physician and helped to construct him as a necessary and even indispensable figure.

By continuing to perpetuate the myth of the doctor as an elevated, ablest individual and his patients as the disabled faithful in need of his healing touch, such a discourse potentially mythologizes the role of the doctor as healer in a manner that is uneasily reminiscent of the discourse of the white man’s burden, whereby the white colonizer and his missionaries were envisioned (and often envisioned themselves) as saviour figures among the savage populations of the colonial hinterlands.

Another problem, of course, is the nature of the religious imagery itself. While the novel criticizes Mother Superior’s faith-based care of those in her charge, the image of Dr. Metivier as a secular Jesus-figure among the lepers continues to associate leprosy and lepers with Biblical discourse. This has implications for our reading of the novel as a whole. Dr. Metivier, the self-professed atheist, cast as saviour/priest-figure is juxtaposed with Mother Superior, the Catholic nun, suggesting that the former’s secular philosophy and code of ethics are, in essence, more faithful to principles of social justice than the latter’s performance of her Catholic spirituality. It is an easy juxtaposition to make, especially in light of the doctor’s good works and his opposition to what is clearly a hegemonic system under Mother’s Superior’s regime. But by using the trope of Dr. Metivier as saviour/priest, the novel also invokes the

dominant Biblical discourse associated with leprosy and is at odds with Dr. Metivier's own profession that the disease must be met with science and not religion. This contradiction problematizes the novel's criticism of Mother Superior's policies in relation to its characterisation of Dr. Metivier as a secular man of science opposed to spiritual interpretations of illness and suffering.

These tensions are not the only problem with Vincent Metivier's role in the novel. Dr. Metivier claims to be interested in helping the lepers to help themselves arguing that the lepers should be educated about their disease and how to take care of themselves: "It is more a question about education in hygiene, awareness of their conditions and truth about their disease" (58). Dr. Metivier's action, however, undermines this message, as is demonstrated in the issue of the painful Chaulmoogra Oil injections, an ineffective but popular leprosy medicine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The nuns still encouraged these injections as a placebo, arguing, in the words of Sr. Thérèse, that the patients "think it does them good" (71).

Dr. Metivier protests, however, that the injections unacceptably contributed to the patients' suffering without tangible medical benefit (71). Yet, he continues to administer these injections to his patients, despite the knowledge that they do not work, citing the excuse, articulated by the narrator that "it was the common treatment of the time. In the absence of the new Sulfa drugs they had heard about, it was all they had" (71). In other words, Dr. Metivier continues to use a procedure that he knows to be ineffective and painful because there is no substitute. The difference between Sr. Thérèse and Dr. Metivier's logic for continuing the injections is negligible: both parties assume that they know what is best for the patient whose consent and knowledge of the procedure are never taken into account.

*Night Calypso's* presentation of Dr. Metivier as hero and saviour implicates the novel in the replication of stereotypes associated with the disease as well as in the substitution of one form of hegemony (missionary colonialism) for another (colonial medicine). While these flaws do not necessarily diminish Dr. Metivier's good works among his patients, they trouble any attempt at neatly juxtaposing Mother Superior with

the doctor. More than this, however, these flaws trouble the narrative's uncritical representation of the doctor as a model of ethical leadership.

### III. Living Ruins and Fossil Identities

The implications of my analysis of living ruins is indebted, in part, to Wilson Harris' metaphor of fossilization in which he offers a nuanced vision of the enmeshment of past and present moments. Described by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin as a metaphor evoking a palimpsestic motif (*Post-Colonial Studies* 175),<sup>9</sup> Harris's notion of fossilization "invoke[s] a rhythmic capacity to re-sense contrasting spaces and to suggest that a curious rapport exists between ruin and origin as latent to arts of genesis" (*Fossil* 1). For Harris, individuals are living fossils, in the sense that they carry within them living traces of antecedent experience that have the capacity to deepen and revitalize the present. This potential, however, is not automatic: psychic regeneration will come when physical (material) forces recede "to erase a build-up of suffocating 'exterior' limits" (*Fossil* 3) and allow rich alternatives in the present moment to emerge. It is in this space of infinite potential that I focus my own interrogation of the metaphor of living ruin, with the argument that a contrapuntal reading of the novel presents opportunities for profoundly deepening present engagements with woundedness and disability in Caribbean discourse.

While 'ruins' and 'fossil' technically refer to different concepts—ruins, for example, are more easily recognizable in relation to what is deemed to be a prior state of integrity while fossil invokes a more complete enmeshment of past and present forces—Harris's metaphor of fossil identities is meaningful to my metaphor of living ruins in its philosophy that the traumatic present (or past) is always incomplete in itself.<sup>10</sup> In Harris's philosophy, fossilization evokes a state of being that is associated with hopeful and creative possibilities beyond the damaged state of ruins as evoked in *Night Calypso*. In this context, the fossil does not refer to obsolescence, but to a latent dynamic potential that resonates with my own invocation of living ruins.

The leper maroons' damaged and debilitated bodies are among the novel's most poignant images of living ruin. But there are also other

living ruins such as Theo, Dr. Metivier's ward, whose body bears the scars of years of abuse and whose emotional withdrawal points to the trauma of a past that still lingers. Just as the ruined buildings of the leprosarium metaphorically allude to the ruin of the colonial experiment at El Caracol, Theo's damaged body is evidence of the trauma that continues to debilitate him for most of the novel. In other words, Theo's physical scars point to deep psychological damage wrought by enduring years of abuse.

By confronting his past through his night calypsoes—his dramatic and eerie narrations of the stories of his abuse—Theo summons the past in the novel's present in acts of empowerment and creative reclamation that precipitate his healing.<sup>11</sup> Such exemplary personal victory may be read allegorically as his willingness to build a meaningful life both in spite of and out of the ruins of the past. As living ruin, however, Theo's body continues to bear the scars of past wounds for, as the novel insists, we embody our histories. In Harris's terminology, we are the sum of our fossil identities. In *Night Calypso*, there is no getting over the past: as living ruins, we must build over, among, and with the fragments that remain.

Other manifestations of living ruins include Ti-Jean, a young boy resident at the leprosarium and whose body bears the effects of advanced stage leprosy but who also demonstrates the possibility for overcoming debilitating conditions to make meaningful contributions to the community. Despite Ti-Jean's gradual physical deterioration he is known to be cheerful, helpful and is referred to as "the wonder child who gave them all hope" (376). By associating other living ruins with heartening acts of agency and personal and communal encouragement the novel articulates its postcolonial message in terms of a desire to move forward in spite of the horrific legacies of the past.

This message of hope and empowerment, however, does not extend to the novel's presentation of the leper maroons, who remain literally and metaphorically on the margins of the community and the narrative. Unlike Theo and Ti-Jean, whom the novel associates with acts of creativity, the narrative seems to construct the leper maroons as irreparably damaged. In the remainder of this article I point to ways in which the

leper maroons might also be read differently, taking as my starting point their permanent physical impairment, as well as the cultural burdens of their disease that connect to their shame and self-exile. It is in this double emphasis on physical disability as biological reality and on cultural and psychological burdens that the leper maroons are potentially important figures for deepening ongoing conversations about empowerment and agency in Caribbean discourse.

Given the frequently invoked trope of colonialism as trauma, it is not surprising that many Caribbean narratives engage with disability and illness as metaphors for the lingering and incapacitating effects of colonial experience. Ideas of colonialism as pathogenic are prevalent in West Indian literature in forms such as phantom pregnancy (Erna Brodber's *Myal*), mysterious and debilitating illness (Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*), festering wounds (Derek Walcott's *Omeros*) and fevered hallucinations (Edgar Mittelholzer's *My Bones and My Flute*). In these and other examples illness and disability are temporary and gesture towards a hope that West Indians might also be healed, metaphorically, from the wounds and damage of the colonial past that still linger in the present.

In seeking to find a language with which to critically engage with the unwanted effects of colonial enterprise such discourses appropriate images of sickness and disability as a backdrop for more immediate concerns with Caribbean identity formation. Recovery, in this model, is often connected to some form of enlightenment, as in *Myal* or *Annie John*, that precipitates a choice to embrace or reject one's Caribbean heritage. In *Night Calypso*, while some forms of illness and disability are associated with acts of self-empowerment the most extreme cases are invoked as secondary to the novel's more pressing concern with endorsing Dr. Metivier as a new Caribbean leader capable of initiating great change. I propose that the leper maroons' illness and disability are meaningful for what they teach about different experiences of colonialism.

Like the open wounds of Theo and Ti-Jean, the bodies of the leper maroons render visible past and present traumas. Unlike Theo and Ti-Jean, however, who are fully integrated in the community in which they find purpose and some comfort the leper maroons retreat to the hills, situating themselves as marginal beings. On one hand the novel's presentation



of this marginality opens a space for criticizing colonial authorities, as I demonstrated in my analysis of the nuns. On the other, however, the novel is also guilty of marginalizing these individuals whom the narrator invokes primarily in relation to a troubling discourse of heroic medicine associated with Dr. Metivier.

Clearly, the novel does not romanticize the courage and endurance of the leper maroons: while they are able to survive, their choice to forgo medical care at the leprosarium facilitates the rapid deterioration of their bodies. That a choice had to be made to go without medical care and community in order to retain a sense of human dignity is an indictment, not only of the administration under whose jurisdiction the leper maroons fall, but also of the other inmates at El Caracol. Leper maroons exist, because they are marginalized both by their own people and those agents of colonialism responsible for their care. Such an indictment admonishes Caribbean peoples to recognize their own complicity in ongoing acts of injustice and marginalization even as they continue to come to terms with a long history of colonial exploitation.

Defining disability in relation to social and infrastructural environments Tobin Siebers suggests that disability is not “an individual defect” but “the product of social injustice” which “requires not the cure or elimination of the defective person but significant changes in the social and built environment” (3). This articulation of disability as the product of socio-cultural institutions is useful for reading the leper maroons’ self-exile. Indeed, their decision to leave the leprosarium is connected to the burdens of the “social and built environment” in the larger community. Rather than live in perpetual shame the leper maroons choose a precarious existence in the hills.

On first reading, such an act of self-inflicted exile is pitiable, especially given their advanced disease. But the choice to leave might also be read as an act of empowerment in the sense that they have chosen survival on their own terms. Ideally, no one should be forced to choose between dignity and community. However, perhaps the state of maroonage is what is required for survival in lieu of more appropriate accommodations in a “social and built environment” controlled by others. Like the pre-emancipation maroons, the leper maroons prefer flight and precari-

ous existence rather than submitting to other people's terms. While the narrator and Dr. Metivier suggest that the leper maroons leave the lepro-sarium primarily because of shame, the narrative's tendency to collapse on itself, especially in its presentation of Dr. Metivier, leaves a space for readers to imagine such self-exile differently even as it also points to defeat. Perhaps such ambiguity leaves room for recognizing organic potential even in states of ruin.

The survival of the leper maroons in the cracks of the system requires fortitude and ingenuity, characteristics celebrated in Caribbean figures such as Brer Anansi, the trickster, whose creativity helps him to survive. *Calypso Nights* even evokes Anansi as part of a heroic discourse associated with Ti-Jean, whose dying act is to strap stilts to his badly damaged feet in his performance of the Moko Jumbie, a traditional character of the Trinidad carnival. By the end of his performance the reality of Ti-Jean's illness takes its toll and he collapses and dies. By presenting Ti-Jean's last act in the exaggerated legs of the Moko Jumbie costume with its "nimble Anansi spider dance" (377) the novel seems to connect creative potential with the ability to overcome physical disability. Furthermore, the trium- phalist narrative associated with Ti-Jean's remarkable last dance is trou- bling in its suggestion that individuals with disability could overcome impediments, if only they tried.

The survival of the leper maroons, however, lacking the easy mobility that is key to Anansi's survival, and choosing to live on their own terms, troubles conventional maroon narratives and other narratives of survival, such as Anansi stories, and even *Night Calypso's* triumphalist discourse as- sociated with disability. These leper maroons provide an alternate image of survival under extreme conditions that takes physical disability as its starting point and not as a temporary impediment that must be over- come. And it is this image of survival that potentially opens a space for engaging with disability differently and in more just ways by pointing to the manner in which stakeholders in the "social and built environment" (Siebers 3) valorize conformity ('model' individuals like Ti-Jean who learn to live in an environment that only cursorily accommodates their disability) and consent to marginalization ('deviant' individuals like the leper maroons who do not conform to this environment).

#### IV. Conclusion

The metaphor of the leper as living ruin serves as a poignant example of the experience of disability as transphenomenal, evolving and enduring within and across multiply-embedded cultural discourses that implicates many groups in acts of injustice and hegemony. The enmeshed identities of the leper maroons as colonized subjects and as individuals with disabilities are especially appropriate for interrogating ideas related to the lingering effects of colonial experience on the minds and bodies of colonial subjects. At the same time, they draw attention to the complicity of other colonized subjects, such as Dr. Metivier, in inadvertently creating abject others even as they seek to challenge oppressive institutions.

The study of discourses of ability and disability, as I have demonstrated in this paper, has the potential to invigorate and deepen present critical discussions related to issues of postcolonial identity. It might also begin to clear a space from which individuals with disabilities can articulate their identities differently from what is otherwise considered to be the norm. Such a critical move opens up the possibility that writers and theorists might move beyond “whitewashing” of disability and sickness as metaphors pointing to the trauma of colonial experience and embrace a more nuanced approach that recognizes sickness and disability as states of being in and of themselves. It is a hopeful beginning that Dr. Metivier brings medical treatment to the leper maroons in their huts, away from the leprosarium, though the novel does not satisfactorily address the conditions that lead to such marginalization in the first place, including Dr. Metivier’s imperialist positioning as colonial physician.

#### Notes

1 Leper quarantine was deemed to be medically unnecessary from as early as 1893 when the leprosy commission to India reported that leprosy was minimally contagious. Yet, the practice of leper segregation continued in the early twentieth century with the world-wide drive to incarcerate lepers, emerging out of the international leprosy conference in Berlin, 1897. While the Berlin conference reiterated that the disease was not hereditary, contagionists continued to push for segregation citing new cases of the disease as evidence of its high degree of transmissibility. The decision to segregate lepers, by no means a

consensus, remained the dominant policy for the first half of the twentieth century. The transmission of leprosy is now known to be bacterial, passed by respiration. The first effective treatment was available in 1943. See Edmond, *Leprosy*, for an engaging cultural analysis of the late nineteenth-century leprosy panic in Europe and the colonies.

- 2 This association of infrastructural ruins with colonial degeneration is a conventional trope in West Indian literature. Walcott's dilapidated Great House and Mittelholtzer's ruined Dutch plantation, for example, associate infrastructural decay with the decline of colonial hegemony. Cliff's concept of "ruination" in *No Telephone* functions in a similar way though the term references overgrown landscapes, such as cane fields, instead of infrastructural ruins. Using the concept of "ruination" Cliff attempts to recuperate pejorative colonial ideas of the Caribbean as a savage and wild place by associating "ruinate" landscapes with the gradual decline of colonial authority and the reclamation of the land from those forces associated with the trauma of slavery ("Caliban's Daughter" 40).
- 3 Historically, island leprosaria provided unique opportunities to enact an imperial fantasy articulated through the discourses of colonial medicine and missionary colonialism, as Edmond notes in his cultural study of leper colonies:

Within the leper settlement the truly powerless native subject could be isolated, reconstructed and incorporated into a community whose authority structure was a model of the ideal colony. This figure of the leper was doubly colonized, disfigured and disempowered by disease, and controlled through the dispensation of medical, material and spiritual aid. By learning to be 'a leper' and accepting the loss of other identities, the patient became an ideal type of the colonial subject: marooned and dependent. ("Abject Bodies" 138)

Set apart from the community proper and under the stewardship of Christian missions and medical professionals, island leprosaria were, in theory, ideal colonies for producing submissive, dependent colonial subjects and for enacting the colonial mission of attending to sick natives in need of the white man's cure. The ruins of the leprosarium in *Night Calypso*, however, are a poignant reminder of the failure of this experiment.

- 4 This idea of the ruin as a framing device is indebted to Ginsberg's notion of the aesthetic value of ruins. He notes:

A great formal resource of ruins is their unintended self-framing. A hole in the wall may select a striking feature to be isolated for its formal qualities.... The frame, itself jagged, may contribute its shape to the seen. We stop at the right point for this framing to occur, so you might say that we are using the ruin for our aesthetic framing. In this case, are the forms within us or are they out there, in the ruin? Both. The ruin frames itself in our experience. (20)

Using this literal idea of framing I evoke the ruins of the leprosarium metaphorically, as a framing device through which we experience the rest of the novel.

- 5 In this paper, I follow Edmond's lead in using the terms 'leper' and 'leprosy' instead of more politically correct terms, for "the basic reason [of] historical veracity" that relates to the manner in which "the disease and its victims were seen and referred to" (Edmond *Leprosy* 17). A second, related reason, however, concerns the stigma itself as associated with the words and their referents. By using the terms 'leper' and 'leprosy' I wish to evoke that stigma since the process by which the person afflicted with leprosy came to be marked as a leper is part of a larger discourse that I critique in this paper.
- 6 Kristeva's discussions of the abject are relevant here. According to Kristeva, the abject exists in between subject and object status and occasions "revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1). For Kristeva, the abject is that "something rejected from which one does not part" and "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). In this context the entire body of the leper demonstrates the potential for abjection as the living embodiment of death.
- 7 In the history of leprosy in Trinidad, on which the events of the novel are loosely based, the French Dominican Sisters were invited by the British Colonial Government in Trinidad to care for the lepers. Retout's text, *Called to Serve*, based on the journals of the Dominican Sisters in colonial Trinidad, includes some stories of their experiences among the lepers, some of which closely resemble events in Scott's fictional narrative. While Scott acknowledges this text at the end of *Night Calypso*, he includes the disclaimer that "the leprosarium and convent of this novel, with all its characters, is entirely fictional" ("Acknowledgements" *Night Calypso* 417).
- 8 While Dr. Metivier expresses amazement at these people's ability to survive away from the community, the images of the leper maroons seem designed to elicit pity (they don't even have arms to reach out) and horror that the human body could be so reduced. Such constructions of physical disability as lack take as the norm the body in its imagined state of physical perfection and align individuals with disabilities with proverbial freaks and monsters, or objects to be pitied.
- 9 The layers of the palimpsest and the metaphor of fossilisation seem to be the points of reference in this comparison. Unlike the metaphor of the palimpsest, however, in which the image of overwritten text is important, Harris's metaphor of fossilization does not privilege a linguistic-based understanding of colonial experience and points towards a more complex and complete enmeshment of past and present traces such that it is impossible to identify a single point of origin.
- 10 For Harris this is because it is the future, not the past, which is the parent of time; "When the future parents the past—as the ancient Maya may have perceived it in my understanding of their *stelae* or milestones that are *not* milestones in a progressive or linear sense—then fiction acquires new, creative roots in time and the past presents itself as ceaselessly partial and unfinished" (Interview 195)

This idea troubles notions of linear progressions of time emanating from the past, envisioned as hermetically sealed from present and future time. Instead, Harris suggests that history itself can never be fixed since it is always already being reborn.

- 11 Not surprisingly, the narrative hints that it is Theo who sets fire to the leprosarium. This act of destruction connects to Theo's personal breakthroughs in the novel. It is as if Theo confronts this emblem of colonial authority in the place of his own human abuser and is able to move forward from the traumas of his own past by destroying the power of the leprosarium to regulate, discipline and punish. The novel, though, is careful not to present this as a heroic act despite the welcome concessions that follow for all inmates of the leprosarium, including outpatient treatment.

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