

Donna-Marie Tuck

Donna-Marie Tuck is a final year Ph.D candidate at The University of Nottingham. Her thesis is entitled: 'The Literary Writings of Herbert G. deLisser 1878-1944'. This research seeks to examine and investigate the intellectual significance of Jamaican born conservative black writer Herbert G. deLisser through a critical analysis of his novels. To date, there has been no biography or widespread scholarly research completed on de Lisser and therefore the thesis aims at recovery, for while his politics may be uncomfortable, his significance remains undiminished.

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The (Re)presentations and (Re)negotiations of Heroism in *Revenge* and *Anacanoa*

Donna-Marie Tuck

What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality.¹

While many an anthology of West Indian literature will mention Herbert de Lisser and some may even dedicate a paragraph or two to his work, few attempts have been made to discuss his work in detail. Although recognition has been afforded to de Lisser in his treatment of the emerging independent female in his early novels, *Jane's Career* and *Susan Proudleigh*, little has been done to consider his other twenty-four novels. This paper will explore the representation of heroism and the search for a national identity in two of his novels, *Revenge* and *Anacanoa* through the lens of the historical novel; examining the way the novels' (re)negotiation of the representations of heroism is explored within individual characters. I will suggest that the marginalisation of the conventional male heroes and the foregrounding of Rachel and Anacanoa as female heroes not only destabilises the traditional representations of heroism but further complicates the traditional notions of nationhood, thus enabling the reader to accept Rachel and Anacanoa as the 'true' hero of the novels. Parallels will also be

drawn with Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, so as to clarify and interrogate Herbert de Lisser's representations of the relationship between heroism, identity and belonging.

Revenge and *Anacanoa* investigate the relationship between female heroism, identity and belonging. The female characters in both books, through their central positions as the main heroic figures within the texts raise gendered questions in relation to heroism, nationalism and cultural identity. de Lisser brings these questions to the foreground by creating female heroes within his historical novels that challenge the traditional gender hierarchy which sought to exclude women from the patriarchal order. As a male narrator crossing the 'gender' divide, albeit it from a third person narrative, he is able to gain an advantage. Through the ambiguities of temporal space and gender, de Lisser is able not only to turn these traditional representations of heroism inside out, but also to get beyond the potential socio-political censure of colonialism.

de Lisser's political historical novel *Revenge* (1919) examines representations of heroism through a revisioning of history, which investigates the conflict between cultural duality and the need to belong. Covering the weeks before and immediately after the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, *Revenge* juxtaposes the provocative and highly emotive political situation with the destabilisation and disintegration of an intra-racial family, in this case, Rachel and her father Paul Bogle. Brown skinned Rachel is the daughter of the black leader of the peasantry, Paul Bogle - Deacon of a local Baptist church and follower of the activist George William Gordon. When her father raises a call to arms for the local peasantry to confront the political assembly in Morant Bay, against her father's wishes, Rachel warns Dick Carlton, a member of the white plantocracy, and a sympathiser to the black struggle. Beset with enemies on either side of the divide, Carlton is unable to prevent the uprising, or save Rachel from death. Bogle, aware of who betrayed Rachel, avenges her death, before being hanged by Governor Eyre, for his involvement in the Morant Bay Rebellion.

de Lisser's later fantastical and mythical historical novel, *Anacanoa* (1936-1937) (re)negotiates the traditional heroic framework through a re-imagined literary history and the deconstruction of the traditional associations of women with nationhood. Focusing upon the year that Columbus was marooned on the island of Jamaica, *Anacanoa* re-creates a complete history of the indigenous Arawak population and re-writes the effects of colonialism from the colonised's point of view. The beautiful chief's daughter of a local tribe, Anacanoa falls in

love with Columbus's nephew Diego who departs the island in order to bring about a rescue for Columbus and his mariners. In his absence, half of the crew mutiny and after a failed attempt to reach Haiti, begin to bring death and destruction to the Arawak people. Anacanoa together with Columbus's brother Bartholomew, raise up arms against the mutineers, which ends in tragedy.

To my knowledge, de Lisser was the first West Indian author to provide a literary representation of the Morant Bay Rebellion, which is the historical event that frames *Revenge*.²³ Published in 1919, de Lisser palimpsests *Revenge* over the quintessential historical novel *Ivanhoe*, which allows for a thorough analysis of the interconnected agency of the author, reader and fictional characters. He parallels a variety of thematic and characteristic concepts of the structural framework of *Ivanhoe* and its literary representations of heroism, utilising the predictable plot of two women and two men: Rebecca and Rowena in *Ivanhoe* and Rachel and Joyce in *Revenge*; Ivanhoe and De Bracy in *Ivanhoe* and Carlton and Solway in *Revenge*. Both contain kidnap scenes, masculine rivalries and the concept of 'othered' or 'outsiders': Robin of Loxley, Rebecca and Isaac/Bogle and Stoney Gut, Rachel and George William Gordon. There are even characters who exhibit the same names: King Richard and King John in *Ivanhoe* as against Richard 'Dick' Carlton and John Solway in *Revenge*. Through this interconnectedness of author, reader and fictional characters he is creating a sense of familiarity to the reader, which in turn supports the reader's assumptions that *Revenge* is a simple re-working of *Ivanhoe*. de Lisser continuously utilises the elaborately descriptive set pieces of many of his historical novels as narrative devices, employing convincing detailed descriptions of social and architectural structures.

de Lisser continues to work within the limitations of the conventional historical novel through his traditional representations of nationhood and heroism, which were constructed around gender. From a literary perspective, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while women were seen as the symbols of nation within a geographical landscape, notions of Englishness and heroism were tied to ideas of masculinity and nationhood.⁴ Although there was a co-existence between nationhood and womanhood it was in demographic terms and women were excluded from the patriarchal order. In support of this gender hierarchy, popular literature focused on empirical tales of discovery and conquest. Heroic qualities were associated with gendered notions of masculinity and nationhood and representations of heroism were bound up with all that was good and noble in the originating

culture, in this case, England. The heroes of these novels were young adventurers, courageous, daring, fearless, white and male. In contrast to these archetypal masculine heroes, Amy Kaplan suggests that traditionally heroines of historical fiction served two purposes “to be the damsel in distress to be rescued and to examine through her eyes, the performance of masculinity.”⁵ It is through Joyce that the masculine performances of Dick and John are brought to the reader’s attention as well as those of Paul Bogle. Significantly, it is Joyce who describes the female hero of the novel, Rachel Bogle “She looked a strong young woman physically, and healthy; her voice...had taken on a ring of determination that showed she was strong in character...she wore shoes...and her clothes were neat and clean.”⁶

While de Lisser presents these traditional heroes and heroines within an established literary framework, he also(re)presents and problematises these tropes with the inclusion of black Jamaican heroes, who would otherwise have been marginalised in the popular literature of the day. Paul Bogle and George William Gordon display the same heroic qualities as their white masculine counterparts, and share equal positioning within *Revenge*. de Lisser may not have been the first writer to write these heroes into existence but he does portray them in a positive light, as opposed to their traditional representations of agitators and ‘rabble rousers’. de Lisser writes in a subtle subversive literary style which enables him to represent historical events, heroes or folk legends. By combining local heroes into a local literature, alternative histories can be explored within the same framework.

Having anchored *Revenge* and *Anacanoa* within this conventional framework, de Lisser then unpacks and challenges these literary frameworks through the use of historiography and imaginative re-discovery. By locating *Revenge* in the history of nineteenth century Jamaica, and returning the reader to a time before the land had been scarred with exploitation and colonisation in *Anacanoa*, he is able to raise issues of cultural duality without compromising his literary colonial bonds, thereby offering an opportunity for Jamaicans to formulate an identity that is ‘rooted’ within and ‘originates’ from *their* island. This ambivalence in de Lisser’s intentions, encourage the reader to interpret that the ‘true’ hero of his historical novels are in fact the main female protagonist, i.e. the female hero.

Recurring representations of female heroes in de Lisser’s historical novels seek to deconstruct these established literary hegemonies set out in the popular literature of the period. From the Byronic female heroes of Elizabeth in *Morgan’s Daughter* and, to a lesser degree, Annie

Palmer in *The White Witch of Rosehall*, through to the tragic female heroes of Rachel in *Revenge*, Anacanoa in *Anacanoa* and Psyche in *Psyche* and finally the traditional female heroes and anti-female heroes of Bridget and Maria in *Conquest* and *The White Maroon*, without exception, all his main female protagonists exhibit heroic characteristics.

So what do I mean by female heroes? Surely these central female protagonists can be referred to as heroines? Why is there a need to separate and define them as female *heroes* and therefore complicate and *(re)negotiate* a masculine noun? The answer is simple. These women are not heroines in the traditional sense set out during this period of examination. They are not ‘damsels in distress’. Nor are they the ‘eyes’ through which masculinity is performed. de Lisser’s main female protagonists exhibit the same heroic qualities normally associated with the traditional masculine hero. By *(re)negotiating* the masculine noun, I am creating visually and linguistically what de Lisser is attempting literary and metaphorically. I would suggest that these female heroes, if male, would not only be the ‘true’ heroes of the novel, but they would embody all the gendered connotations that the traditional representations of heroes and heroism implies, i.e. masculinity and nationhood. Therefore, by creating female heroes, that display these ‘masculine’ qualities, I am suggesting that they are not a female equivalent, but a female *equal*. As female heroes, they not only interconnect the relationship between womanhood and nationhood, but they also challenge these gendered hierarchies of nation, by highlighting that they are not necessarily the ‘inferior’ sex. The further implication is that the colonised country is not necessarily any more ‘inferior’ than the dominant country that is controlling it and de Lisser is keen to establish his desire for a national identity. His dedication in *Revenge* refers to ‘*our Island’s Story* (my emphasis). Similarly the original introduction relating to *Anacanoa* in Planter’s Punch refers to ‘A Story of Aboriginal Jamaica,’⁷ thus once again placing the emphasis on Jamaica, i.e. the colonial culture.

Rachel and Anacanoa embody imagined ideologies of nationalism and identity outside of the traditional tropes. In the same way that Rachel’s masculine qualities are observed through Joyce’s eyes, Anacanoa’s intelligence and heroic qualities are represented through de Lisser’s deconstruction of one of the quintessential literary tropes, - the prophetic eclipse. Traditionally an eclipse within historical novels is an allegory to represent the superiority of the white hero and symbolises the advancement of Western industrialisation and scientific

knowledge. However, when de Lisser employs the same literary device, his outcome is somewhat different. Anacanoa's reaction to the eclipse, de Lisser informs us is as follows:

If the moon died, would it not die for the white men as well...if set upon now, if attacked and slain, surely his power over the moon would end and light would return...Her questioning restored her courage. She had taken a grip upon herself again...She rose to her feet, the one erect figure in that vast crowd that night... 'If you had killed him in the darkness the light would have returned...but you only begged. (A76-78)

By investigating Anacanoa's consciousness, the reader is aware that she is not Columbus's inferior, but in fact his equal: 'The erstwhile ingenuous savage had been rapidly transformed into a woman with a subtle, calculating mind'(A67). Although Anacanoa may biologically remain a woman, she exhibits the same intelligence as a 'white male hero' and is able to see through Columbus's trickster devices.

Rachel and Anacanoa's names continue to highlight the interconnection between women and nation. In biblical terms, Rachel was referred to as "the somewhat petulant, peevish, and self-willed though beautiful younger daughter" of Laban.⁸ Rachel and her sister Leah are referred to as the women who gave birth to a nation, in that between them they formed the 12 tribes of Israel that Moses frees from Egypt and from which Jesus is descended.⁹ Rachel is the daughter of Paul Bogle who himself can be seen as a metaphorical Moses leading his people to freedom, with references to tabernacles, 'slender wands' and the references relating to 'We are the oppressed'(R40). Rachel is described as 'comely enough', and the characteristics displayed by her throughout the text highlight her to be 'petulant, peevish and self-willed'. Anacanoa's name, in my opinion, is a purposeful miss-spelling of the 15th Century Haitian Queen Anacaona. de Lisser uses this as a literary device to call to the reader's mind the historical Anacaona, while simultaneously creating a Jamaican Anacanoa that symbolises the creation of a Jamaican nation. According to Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink 'The historical Anacaona is a figure that has attained almost legendary status in narratives of anti-colonial resistance in Hispaniola during the early years of Spanish conquest.'¹⁰¹¹

While Anacanoa's ancestry and culture is never challenged, Rachel's is. Rachel is the non-sexual vessel within which both the dominant and suppressed cultures culminate, interlocking the relationship between women, identity and nationhood. Through her interconnection with Rebecca, Rachel is able to explore the position of the 'other' and her need for a cultural

identity and a sense of belonging¹². Her search for a cultural identity and desire to belong are juxtaposed against the ideology of nationalism through her textural representation of *Ivanhoe*. However, as *Ivanhoe*'s equal in *Revenge*, Rachel challenges this gendered discourse of nationalism. Both Rachel and *Ivanhoe* are 'disinherited' and in the same way that *Ivanhoe* is torn between his Saxon blood and his Norman loyalties towards Richard, Rachel is torn between the blood of her people 'blood for blood' (R28) and her loyalties towards Richard 'Dick' Carlton. Although Rachel is educated and fiercely independent she only ever speaks in local dialect. This use of Jamaican dialect in direct opposition to Standard English indicates that de Lisser may have been advocating an emergent Jamaican nationalism.

Rachel and Rebecca have no sense of belonging to the communities that they inhabit. Rachel has rejected her culture in favour of social mobility and is also of mixed race heritage. As a result of not belonging, both Rachel and Rebecca are able to recognise that the dominant culture was economically dependent upon the people that they 'despise and persecute':

These Gentiles, cruel and oppressive as they are, are in some sort dependent on the dispersed children of Zion, whom they despise and persecute. Without the aid of our wealth, they could neither furnish forth their hosts in war, nor their triumphs in peace;¹³

colour for colour; after all, me father is right. Them only want to make use of us; we are to work for them, an' them is to get all the benefit. Because we are black we don't count, an' because them is white them is to have everything an' to do what them like. Any black person that try to help a white one is a fool, as I find out today. We should stick to our own colour, an' have nothing to do wid them. (R62)

By mimicking the same rallying cry of Rebecca, but through Rachel, deLisser can revise the intended meaning, transporting it from a religious context, into a socio-cultural context. These insights, which are expressed with a female voice, but within a non-sexual framework, highlight the hypocritical but accurate dichotomy of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed and openly challenge the established arguments advocating colonial rule. Through the recognition that 'we are like the herb which flourisheth most when it is most trampled'¹⁴, comes the foresight that 'To-day is for her, but to-morrow may be for me!' (R62). suggesting that the population of the masses will continue to grow and flourish even while oppressed and as a consequence, at some time in the future, the culture of the masses will assimilate the dominant culture of the minority.

If Rachel is used as a literary device to unpack the ambiguities of and desire for a cultural identity, Anacanoa is the vessel from which a national identity is explored. It is Anacanoa who recognises that the different tribes within the island are a collective community:

She stared at her people swimming and struggling in the water. She had never thought of them as her people before; they were from another part of the island, strangers, foreigners, to her. But now she had a sense of oneness with them; a feeling that had been growing within her all these weeks came fully to life at last. She and they were one, and these brutal pale-faced men were of another breed altogether. (A62)

This desire for unification also finds expression through her desire to fight back against the mutineers. When asked who will lead the army, she retorts “I, the man-eating woman, will lead them” (A66). By transposing onto Anacanoa the heroism and leadership qualities usually associated with white males, and referencing her potential past links to the Haitian Anacaona, de Lisser is symbolically creating a Jamaican nation. By coming together as one through their collective struggles and indigenous ancestry, de Lisser is suggesting that a national identity can be created that is organic and independent.

Creating tragic female heroes in both Rachel and Anacanoa is a skilful ploy on deLisser’s part for a number of reasons. Firstly, the trope of the tragic hero as a literary device elicits an emotional and sympathetic response from the reader and leaves the reader dislocated from the happy ending they expected. Although both novels end with a level of closure in that Joyce and Dick sail to England and Diego’s son returns to Jamaica and falls in love with Anacanoa’s daughter, both endings are over-shadowed by the lingering memory of the heroes recent demise. Secondly, this disunity and disharmony with the text, encourages the reader to question their feelings about what has happened in relation to what they expected. Finally, the catharsis effect of tragedy ensures that once ‘the boil has been lanced’ the balance is once more restored, allowing de Lisser to remain within the conventions of the historical novel.

Finally, just as in life, Rachel and Anacanoa’s deaths also seek to (re)negotiate the gendered assumptions of nationhood and invite a comparison with Wilson Harris’s notion of a ‘death of principle’, which he stresses as:

the obscure death of a tribal head, of an identity, an entity, the death of god (in self-conscious terms): the obscure mutilation and sacrifice of something precious out of which grows a new configurative feeling, diversity and unity.¹⁵

In other words, Rachel and Anacanoa's death are both metaphorically and imaginatively a death of the past. But it is through their self-sacrificial and violent deaths, that a sense of identity and belonging can be achieved. By writing historical novels that contested the established hegemonic literary traditions de Lisser was creating a cultural identity that later West Indian (not just Jamaican) nationalist writers would seek to (re)construct in their literary works of the 1940s and onwards.

For de Lisser, historical novels were an opportunity for him to reawaken and investigate Jamaica's rich historical and folkloric past. They were a sphere where he not only entertained, but sought to educate his audience. The classic narrative construction of the historical novel appealed to de Lisser through its acceptance as a more middle-brow literature, its appeal to national independence through its re-awakening of past heroes and its ability to bring the past to life within the framework of historical realism. Therefore, this paper proposes that through this blending of diasporic cultures and (re)gendering of the Jamaican nation as female de Lisser was challenging not only the gender hierarchy of nation and nationhood, but also instilling into the local population a sense of national identity and belonging.

Endnotes:

¹Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, London, Merlin Press Ltd, 1962. p.42.

² V.S. Reid wrote on the Morant Bay Rebellion in his novel *New Day* which was published in 1949.

³ Karina Williamson comments upon two folk songs that reference the 1865 rebellion. While they were published in 1907 by William Jekyll, they are accepted as part of an oral tradition and focus ‘primarily on the suffering inflicted on the people of St Thomas by the punitive campaign ordered by Governor Eyre’ (p.390). For a full reference please see, Karina Williamson, “Re-inventing Jamaican History: Roger Mais and George William Gordon,” *Beyond the Blood, the Beach & the Banana: New Perspectives in Caribbean Studies*, Ed. Sandra Courtman, Jamaica, Ian Randle, 2004. p. 387-406.

⁴ For a cross section of works supporting the position of gender and nation that I have outlined above, see, Belinda Edmondson, *Making Men, Gender, Literary Authority and Women’s Writing in Caribbean Narrative*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1999. Martin Green *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, London, Routledge, 1980. Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the making of US culture*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2002 and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather, Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, New York, Routledge, 1994.

⁵ Amy Kaplan *The Anarchy of Empire in the making of U.S. culture*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2002. p.93

⁶ Herbert de Lisser, *Revenge*, Kingston, The Gleaner Co. Limited, 1919. p.7. All further references to *Revenge* will be made in the body of the text in parenthesis with the abbreviation R.

⁷ Planter’s Punch, Vol. III, No. 5. For the Year 1936-1937. *Anacanoa*, p.1 All further references to *Anacanoa* will be made in the body of the text in parenthesis with the abbreviation A.

⁸ <http://bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Def.show/RTD/Easton/ID/3052>

⁹ Jesus was descended from the Judah tribe. Judah was Leah’s fourth son with Jacob.

¹⁰ <http://www.centrelink.org/anacaonaresources.htm>

¹¹ Anacaona means golden flower in the indigenous language of the Tainos and Anacaona was a Taino queen. She ruled Maguana with her husband until he was kidnapped and killed by the Spanish in 1494. She then returned to her parent’s kingdom Xaragua where she continued to exert her authority over her brother and ruled the kingdom. Xaragua remained the only kingdom within the island (Haiti) not to succumb to Spanish conquest. In 1502 the then Governor invited her and a number of her people to dinner. During the entertainment her people were killed although Anacaona was saved. In 1503 she was hung.

¹² Rebecca is the Jewess in *Ivanhoe*.

¹³ Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, London, Penguin, 2002. p. 97

¹⁴ Scott, *Ivanhoe*, p. 97

¹⁵ Wilson Harris, *Tradition the Writer & Society – Critical Essays*, London, New Beacon, 1967. p.62