COMING OF AGE: THE NARRATIVE OF ADOLESCENCE IN DAVID ALMOND'S *KIT'S WILDERNESS* AND NICK LAKE'S *IN DARKNESS*

by

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ABSTRACT

BROOK BLAYLOCK. Coming of age: The narrative of adolescence in David Almond's *Kit's Wilderness* and Nick Lake's *In Darkness*. (Under the direction of DR. MARK WEST)

The influence of ancient cultural narratives on contemporary reality, and the construction of literature reflecting the tradition of the past while representing modern cultural realities, remains a common feature of literary expression. However, an author's ability to transform the shape of their narrative construction and address the trauma of coming of age through the unique reappropriation of these narratives proves a much more difficult task. Both the young adult novels of David Almond and Nick Lake, *Kit's Wilderness* and *In Darkness,* manage to accomplish this feat while presenting compelling accounts of their adolescent male protagonists' struggle to overcome destructive pasts and embrace the possibility of a better future.

Almond and Lake synthesize aspects of this tradition to construct narratives both figuratively and literally embodying the duality of the coming of age experience. Just as adolescence positions Kit and Shorty in the complicated chasm between childhood and adulthood, dividing their understanding of self and society, the narrative structure of Almond and Lake's texts divides into past and present representations of its protagonists' reality. The purpose of this thesis will be to analyze the ways in which both these novels narratively construct a text marked by the same duality as the adolescent experience while simultaneously actuating a ritualized encounter ultimately enabling its transcendence.

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Significantly, both *Kit's Wilderness* and *In Darkness* received the Michael L. Printz award for excellence in young adult literature. In *Coming of Age with Young Adult Literature through Critical Analysis,* Steven T. Bickmore points out the critical and literary merits of adolescent characters grappling with the coming-of-age experience: "The dominance of the adolescent protagonist…in YA novels always returns the critic, at least in part, to the concerns of adolescence, youth culture, and the fact that adolescence remains a complicated liminal space between childhood and adulthood" (ix). With awards spanning a decade, *Kit's Wilderness* the 2001 winner and *In Darkness* honored in 2013, these works represent the importance of compellingly accessible bildungsroman style novels able to reconnect adolescents, literarily, to the ritualized nature of the "rite of

passage" from childhood to adulthood once viewed as integral to a young male's adult maturation. As Kent Baxter points out in his book, *Coming of Age:*

> coming of age is a literary and cultural construct that is fraught with powerful and often quite contradictory emotions. To come of age is a characteristically difficult process...you must come of age *correctly.* Any attempt to avoid or circumvent the process or cheat is quite simply unnatural and leaves one outside the window of society. (2)

While contemporary society no longer embraces the same ritualized processes formerly marking the coming-of-age experience, it cannot deny the necessity of this transition. As Steven Mintz underscores in *Coming of Age in History:*

> [H]istory makes it clear that the stage of life known as youth has always been a source of anxiety for adults and a period of uncertainty and ambiguity for young people. Coming of age is problematic precisely because young people occupy a profoundly indeterminate and ambiguous state. (57)

As such, young adult literature like *Kit's Wilderness* and *In Darkness* addresses the need for adolescents to "come of age *correctly*" (Baxter 2). These novels employ the traditions of the past to engender their protagonists' effective transitions to adulthood. While the protagonists of Almond's and Lake's novels, Christopher "Kit" Watson and Shorty, undergo very modern coming-of-age experiences, these events are inextricable from, and engendered by, ancient narratives and cultural ritual.

Kit's Wilderness, the 2001 Printz Award-winning novel by David Almond, explores the cultural narratives of the fictional English town of Stoneygate, a village

based in part on Almond's birthplace, Felling-on-Tyne. Almond reflects on this in the afterward to *Kit's Wilderness:*

> 'I grew up in a big family in a small steep town overlooking the River Tyne. It was a place of ancient coal mines, dark terraced streets, strange shops, new estates, and wild heather hills. Our lives were filled with mysterious and unexpected events, and the place and its people have given me many of my stories.' (Almond 236)

Capitalizing on his knowledge of life in a mining town, Almond steeps the plot of *Kit's Wilderness* with "mysterious and unexpected events" (Almond 236) based around mining legends and the ghosts they celebrate.

Initiated into Stoneygate's traditions by his grandfather, a former miner, Kit Watson employs the legends of the Stoneygate mines to help him interpret the complicated events of his adolescent circumstances. This connects Kit to a variety of polymorphic narratives. As Don Latham underscores in *Empowering Adolescent Readers: Intertextuality in Three Novels by David Almond:*

> [B]y foregrounding the ways in which texts are interconnected, Almond is able to convey the almost mystical power of stories. As he noted in his Printz Award acceptance speech, '[T]he mysterious circuits of the human brain, no matter what its age, will always be set to spark by narrative and language.' In [*Kit's Wilderness]*, we see that Askew is transformed by hearing Kit's Story of Lak, just as Kit is transformed through writing it. (Latham 225)

Almond's own appreciation for the rich mining culture of his youth results in his fictional utilization of the collective history of Stoneygate as a means by which to prepare Kit for the task of creating his own narrative, a narrative whose completion is contingent upon Kit's own coming of age. Thus, the intertextual nature of *Kit's Wilderness* functions on multiple levels. Not only does Kit hear the orally transmitted legends of the Stoneygate mines, he appropriates them as a means by which to understand his own experiences. Consequently, Kit's appropriation of these culturally significant stories facilitates a coming-of-age experience culminating in the creation of his own narrative—Lak's tale. However, to write Lak's story Kit must first translate his own. He must interpret himself and his coming of age through the lens of Stoneygate's legends. Thus, through his exposure to Stoneygate's legendary past, Kit finds the means to transcend the trauma of his contemporary reality, come to terms with the process imperative to his coming of age, and transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Nick Lake's *In Darkness,* the 2013 Printz Award winner, highlights the religious and cultural identity of its protagonist, Shorty, while employing tenets of Haitian voodoo as a means to advance the novel's form and character development. Inspired by the scenes of devastation he witnessed following Haiti's 2010 earthquake, Lake developed a novel around the fictional life of a young adolescent rescued after being buried under rubble for three days. From this beginning evolved the character known as Shorty, a 15-year-old gang member trapped beneath a collapsed hospital and haunted by memories of his gang involvement and the disappearance of his twin sister, Marguerite. Pinioned in a space the size of a coffin, Shorty questions both his spiritual and psychological state.

Unsure if he is alive or dead, his memories begin to merge with those of the eighteenth-century Haitian revolutionary, Toussaint L'Ouverture, as the narrative structure alternates between "Then," third-person narration detailing Toussaint's experiences, and "Now," first-person narration by Shorty.

In conducting his background research, Lake explored the connection between Haitian history and the voodoo religion, specifically its African roots. In his analysis of the voodoo pantheon, Lake found the figure of the divine twins, or the marassa lwa, of particular significance. Not only are both the characters Shorty and Toussaint marassa, but narratively Lake's form parallels the identity of this lwa. Critic Florence Bellande-Robertson expounds on the significance of marassa within voodoo religion: "[In] Vodou's cosmogony…the most important characteristic of the 'divine twins' [or marassa] is that they incarnate the notion of segmentation of some original cosmic totality that must regain wholeness" (Bellande-Robertson 108). As a twin, Shorty has inherited this destiny; yet, his inability to recover from his sister's loss prevents its actuation. Nonetheless, Shorty remains spiritually bound to a larger marassa identity. As Bellande-Robertson notes, "in Haiti, where the reality of life is intertwined with religious elements, when this type of birth occurs, mythical, spiritual, and symbolic significance is [also] implied" (Bellande-Robertson 104). This larger spiritual connection both links Shorty to Toussaint and unifies the novel's structure. Lake's research on voodoo's divine twins engendered a novel narratively embodying the marassa lwa. As a result, Shorty's struggle to both come of age and come to terms with loss and violence unfolds as Lake's form defies linear time to embrace a voodoo culture supernaturally "twinning" Shorty with

seemingly antithetical past and future selves. Lake's use of voodoo to facilitate the novel's form not only introduces readers to the religious ethos undergirding Shorty's primary relationships, it develops the cultural lens through which Shorty and his coming of age must be viewed.

Tellingly, both novels develop around a coming-of-age plot that cannot reach completion unless the novel's protagonist employs the legends and stories of the culture of their respective pasts as a means to come of age in contemporary society. Further, both authors use these secondary narrative sources to develop narrative structures reflecting the major stages involved in the coming-of-age process:

> From the standpoint of individual development, characters often come of age by overcoming an external circumstance or an internal character flaw; moving into adulthood in this sense means finding one's place in the world or overcoming a flaw that is holding one back from living a fully effective life. From a narrative standpoint, the coming of age of an individual character…often provides closure to a source of tension or conflict; it is not uncommon for the protagonist to encounter a 'blocking character' who demands evidence that the protagonist has grown up. From a cultural/historical standpoint, these coming-of-age moments are often signified by rites of passage that resonate with the readership of the text…. (Baxter 3)

Notably, the protagonists in both these novels undergo each of these types of transitions, but do so in and through their connections to larger cultural and narrative paradigms.

Almond and Lake synthesize aspects of all these traditions to construct narratives both figuratively and literally embodying the duality of the coming-of-age experience. Just as adolescence positions Kit and Shorty in the complicated chasm between childhood and adulthood, dividing their understanding of self and society, the narrative structure of Almond's and Lake's texts divides into past and present representations of their protagonists' realities. These authors further bifurcate Kit's and Shorty's experiences into encounters with self and collective culture, light and darkness, and life and death. This thesis analyzes the ways in which both novels narratively construct a text marked by the same duality as the adolescent experience as well as how each protagonists' embrace of these dualities functions as a type of ritual enabling their transcendence.

CHAPTER ONE: NARRATIVE DUALITY

Narrative, both its construction and metaphoric function, plays a pivotal role in these novels and their protagonists' coming of age. In these texts, the narrative structure synchronously replicates and symbolizes Kit's and Shorty's adolescent experience. As Almond and Lake include the ancient narratives of Kit's and Shorty's respective cultures as a means by which the two might reach individuation and self-knowledge, the novels themselves function as narratives which reflect and engender the paradoxical merger of personal experience and collective culture facilitating both boys' coming of age. Additionally, the novels' narratives function as the plot of Kit's and Shorty's individual adolescent journeys while simultaneously retelling the story of adolescence in general, imbuing both plots with the same creative power as the ancient narratives Kit and Shorty rely upon to process their own coming-of-age experiences. The complicated performative nature of both the narratives Kit and Shorty assimilate into their respective journeys to come of age coupled with the new narratives this same process produces underscores the essential role narrative plays within adolescent rites of passage.

Both David Almond's young adult novel *Kit's Wilderness* and Nick Lake's *In Darkness* feature protagonists who seek forms of psychic and temporal transcendence.

While imprisoned bodily within their own chronology and culture, psychically both Christopher “Kit” Watson and Shorty possess the means not only to escape these impediments but to address their repercussions. Geographically positioned in areas culturally receptive to commemorating the ethnological history of its people, the songs and stories of the Stoneygate mines and the voodoo rituals and veves conjuring the lwa ancestor gods of Site Soley equip Kit and Shorty with the power to transcend their own entrapment. Juxtaposing the narrative construction of their texts with the internal conflicts of their narrators, Almond and Lake externalize the subconscious realms of imagination, religion, and spirit integral to the epistemology of self. Apparent textual intruders—the narratives of life and death, imagination and reality, linear and nonlinear time, ghost and corporeal entity, self and collective culture—unfold in unison with the narratives of Kit and Shorty.

Struggling to reconcile their present tense identities within the context of seemingly antithetical past and future selves actualized through their almost supernatural encounters with these narratives, Kit and Shorty find themselves seeking a conciliation, or coming-of-age experience, generating the resurrection of distinct narrative voices. Their initial inability to sustain sole control of their story reflects the duality of their adolescent identities as well as the fluid nature of time and self. While Kit and Shorty represent drastically different cultures and face unique obstacles, they both seek to attain an understanding of self, and an individuated identity, surpassing the bounds of temporality and the limitations of the known world by readily embracing the “wilderness” and “darkness” of their own minds.

The confused state of Kit's and Shorty's mind parallels the struggles of adolescences markedly affected by the boys' acute cultural awareness. Both Kit and Shorty must undergo the difficult process of coming of age within and through an exploration of self as positioned in, and formed by, their specific cultural context. As Kent Baxter notes:

> However it is framed, this transition into adulthood is often predicated upon a balance between one of the most prevalent binaries in Western thought: individual and community. ...Individuality is meaningless, of course, if one is not a member of a community that can define one as an individual. (11)

Unique cultural contexts provide Kit and Shorty with paradigms by which to process their developmental struggles while simultaneously representing ideals and communities Kit and Shorty must reject or embrace in adulthood. The boys' interpretations of their struggles and the stages of their maturation process correspond to their understanding of an identity separate from yet influenced by these forces:

> what is essential...whether it is realized or not, is the gesture toward individuation and, for good or ill, some sort of self-knowledge about one's status in society. Individuation and self-knowledge are essential to stories about coming of age, even if these processes...result in a clearer understanding of the status quo one defines one's self against. (Baxter 6)

The narrative construction of each of these novels reflects the cultural conditions upon which the boys' maturation processes are predicated. As such, the narrative construction of both these texts metaphorizes Kit's and Shorty's coming of age while

providing a ritualized structure by and through which this coming of age might be enacted. As Peter Brooks adduces in *Reading for the Plot*:

> Narrative is one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically, in the case of narrative, with the problem of temporality: man's time boundedness, his consciousness of existence within the limits of mortality. And plot is the principal ordering force of those meanings that we try to wrest from human temporality. (xi)

In these novels "man's time boundedness" (Brooks xi) must be overcome to be understood. To transition successfully into adulthood, Kit and Shorty must apprehend their identity on an individual and collective level. To do so requires an analysis of self within the context of the past as a means to interpret present circumstances. From a narrative perspective, this requires novels plotted in defiance of chronological time. Accordingly, Almond and Lake expand their use of narrative not only to negotiate the reality of adolescence but to represent that reality on a metaphoric level more accurately depicting its conditions. Thus, the plot of these novels can be read "as the syntax of a certain way of speaking our understanding of the world" (Brooks 7), in this case, "our understanding" of adolescence and coming of age.

Almond and Lake employ the plots of their novels to convey their understanding of the importance of significant rites of passage during adolescence; consequently, their "plots are not simply organizing structures, they are also intentional structures" (Brooks 12). Citing renowned narrative theorist Roland Barthes, Kent Baxter points out the connections between compelling plot features and coming-of-age rituals:

> From the viewpoint of narration, one of the reasons coming-of-age stories make such good reading is because the journey from pre-adulthood to adulthood is fraught with dramatic tensions that resonate with all readers. In his book *S/Z*, literary theorist Roland Barthes observes that, fundamentally, narration works by making 'expectation...the basic condition for truth: truth, these narratives tell us, is what is at the end of expectation. This design,' Barthes goes on to say, 'brings narrative very close to the rite of initiation.' ...the 'rite of initiation,' the movement from immaturity to maturity, dissolution to coherence, question to answer incites readerly desire and propels the narrative forward. (4)

In representing the psychological dynamics of adolescence by and through the creation of their plots, Almond and Lake inscribe the experience of coming of age upon the form of their narratives so as to allow young adult readers to engage vicariously in the collective nature of this ritual: "Plot...thus comes to appear one central way in which we as readers make sense, first of the text, and then, using the text as an interpretive model, of life" (Brooks 19).

This is a critically important feature of each novel as the plots seek to address one of the modern dilemmas facing coming of age. Historically, the coming-of-age process has been marked by both a communal and personal period of transition. However, as Steven Mintz points out, in contemporary society the experience has become limited to the personal: "some observers...suggest that the difficulty many young people experience in making the transition to adulthood may be related to a deficiency of public rituals that mark off the maturational process" (65). Almond and Lake address this difficulty on

multiple levels. First and foremost, they connect their protagonists' coming of age with ritualized encounters linking each boy to his community. In positioning Kit's and Shorty's maturation process within the context of their understanding of the cultural and religious dynamics of their respective societies, Almond and Lake provide the boys with a more communal rite of passage into adulthood. Additionally, each author compounds the nature of his protagonists' collective coming-of-age experience by embedding the essence of each boys' community within the novels' plot structure.

In *Kit's Wilderness*, the plot functions like and is constructed according to the legends surrounding the Stoneygate mines. Lake, in *In Darkness,* deepens the connections between Shorty and his voodoo religion by effectively making the plot a marassa veve, or an embodiment of the image and import of voodoo's divine twins. Thus, while for most modern adolescents the coming-of-age "process occurs primarily on a personal, not a collective or communal, level" (Mintz 65), Kit and Shorty undergo a maturation process marked by both personal and communal growth and development. Almond and Lake address their young adult readers' need for a communal distillation of their coming-of-age experience by constructing plots which function as coming-of-age rituals inviting young adult readers to undergo their own coming of age in conjunction with the novels' protagonists. Hence, each novel's plot, "the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent of meaning" (Brooks xi), becomes metonymical of the adolescent experience.

Both Almond and Lake compound their use of metonymy by establishing these plots around magical talisman actuating examples of nonlinguistic performativity. As Eve

Sweetser argues in *Blended Spaces and Performativity*, "activities labeled as 'magic' are clearly intended to have a causal effect on the world" (318) and, as such, function in the same fashion as linguistic performatives, "the phenomenon whereby an apparent *description* of a speech act 'counts as' a *performance* of the relevant speech act" (306). Thus, a ritual or magical object might become a "speech act" performatively shaping reality. In the case of these novels, each boy inherits a magical talisman. The magic of each talisman is ascribed by and through its cultural significance. As the mental space of each talisman blends with that of the novels' plots, "structure is transferred from a representing space [the talisman] to the space represented [the plot]" (Sweetser 305).

For Kit, this talisman is fossilized coal from the Stoneygate mines while for Shorty it is a pwen, or a stone believed by the Haitian voodoo religion to possess the spirit of one's lwa ancestor. Both Kit's fossil and Shorty's pwen performatively enable their transcendence of the present and access to events and figures from the past; Kit communes with the ghosts of the Stoneygate mines and Shorty with the spirit of the Haitian revolutionary, Toussaint L'Ouverture. The fossil and pwen not only metonymically represent the past--Kit's fossil reflecting a geological and cultural past and Shorty's pwen the religious and political conditions of a formerly enslaved Haiti--but they enable each protagonist to exist within the very context these talisman depict. Thus, the fossil and pwen provide

> a particular relation of fit between a mental space which is a representation [the talismans' representations of their communities' pasts] and the corresponding represented space [the novels' story worlds as represented by each plot]. ...The act

> of representation, by its performance, constitutes (performs as a causal agent in) the structure of the represented space. (Sweetser 310)

Consequently, the fossil and pwen function performatively to disrupt the chronology of each boy's world. This disruption becomes translated structurally as each novel's plot furthers the boundaries of its mental space; the talisman and the plot are blended only to then blend the fictional space of the story world with the literal space of the adolescence this story world represents:

> in every case of narrative...there must be enactment in order to produce transformation: the plotting out of initial givens [the magical effects of each talisman] so that their uses may be transformed [the effects the talisman produce provide the foundation for the construction of each novels' atemporal plot]. Plot, once again, is the active interpretive work of discourse on story. (Brooks 27)

The boys' talisman function on a dual level as they both symbolize magical ritual and serve to enact the performative magic of the novels' plots, which are themselves embodiments of "the rite[s] of initiation" (qtd. Baxter 4) foundational to a coming-of-age experience. This enables each author to represent a story world projected by and through a talisman's magic, yet to symbolically emblematize more than that world: "much religious ritual seems to be both metaphorical and performative" (Sweetser 314). This duality becomes the foundation from which the performative function of each novel's plot evolves. Thus, the talisman are double metonyms; they represent the past as well as the present condition of each boy's adolescence, and, like the plot itself, they blend these two experiences.

Each talisman dictates the manner by which the novel's plot is constructed. In the mental space of the novels, the talisman become the source domain and the plot the target domain:

> Metaphorical and metonymic representations, then, can be used either depictively or performatively, just like literal representations. A metaphorical mapping automatically brings two mental spaces into play, the source and target domains. Further, one of these (the source domain) is the space of the representation, and the other (the target) is the space of the represented world. (Sweetser 313)

The novels' narratives can defy a representation of adolescence limited to linear time because they include metaphors, magical talisman, by and through which the plots circumvent these representational limitations, creating "a blend wherein the structure of the source-domain input space [the talisman] is used to restructure or add structure to that of the target-domain input space [the plot]" (Sweetser 321). Ultimately, these talisman function as "a *mise-en-abyme* of [each novels'] narrative motor, an explicit statement of the inclusion within the novel of the principle of its movement" (Brooks 45). In explaining the atemporal nature of their protagonists' story worlds through each protagonists' inheritance of a talisman, Almond and Lake make magical performativity the foundation of their narratives: "Nonlinguistic performative examples abound in ritual and magic. Frequently, the link between the depiction and the world it is intended to affect is asserted by metonymic means as well as by purely depictive means" (Sweetser 311).

Almond and Lake appropriate the performative nature of their protagonists' talisman to create plots which also function on a performative level. In manipulating the plot of each story so as to represent the dual nature of each protagonist's struggle and, through the boys' talisman, to evoke the past within the context of the present, Almond and Lake effectively transcend the barriers of time by plotting a story intentionally transgressing these barriers. Almond's and Lake's plots depict the anachronic experiences of Kit and Shorty and in so doing create a narrative convergence of past and present functioning as Kit's and Shorty's story world. Thus, Almond's and Lake's plots demonstrate Searles' definition of performativity as "the ability of some descriptions to bring about the described situations in reality" (qtd. in Sweetser 305). Building on Searles' definition, Sweetser expands the dynamics of performativity to reflect the relationship between mental spaces, a relationship these novels clearly appropriate by blending the magical space invoked by the boys' talisman with the narrative space of each novel's plot. The plots depict the reality produced by these talisman while simultaneously creating the reality of the novels' story world. These talisman facilitate the plots' performative function as they "represent an ontologically prior mental space" (Sweetser 310). Coupled with the novels' plots, these objects transcend their depictive function. Without these items, the atemporal nature of the novels' plots could not be justified. Thus, the talisman function to depict the past and to perform the "ritual" invoking plots enacted within story worlds combining past and present realities.

Moreover, Almond's and Lake's understanding of adolescence as a state marked by one's inability to fully "fit" into the identity of a past or present self precedes their

depiction of a story world in which atemporal chronology reflects this psychological duality. The need to depict accurately the struggles of adolescence engenders the use of talisman to produce the speech act, or plot, placing the novels' protagonists in realities where past and present merge. The performative nature of the talisman, coupled with the depictive function of the plot, combine in the form of narrative performativity: "Performativity occurs when a form whose unmarked function is depictive is used with the opposite direction of fit, where the words bring about the described world state and are thus ontologically and causally prior to it" (Sweetser 310). As such, Kit's and Shorty's story worlds become the "described real world shaped by [the] speech act[s]" (Sweetser 306) of each author. The novels' plots, functioning as these speech acts, represent and create Kit's and Shorty's fictional reality. In these novels, the plots function according to Peter Brooks' "conception of plot as something in the nature of the logic of narrative discourse, the organizing dynamic of a specific mode of human understanding" (7).

The performative nature of these novels' plots organizes the discourse of the coming-of-age narratives they represent into a ritualized enactment of each boy's individual coming of age while also representing the collective human need for such rituals. These plots, intended to performatively invoke the manhood of their respective protagonist, serve as coming-of-age rituals for Kit and Shorty. They invoke their protagonists' manhood through their depiction of the ritualized experience each boy undergoes during the course of the novel:

> In classic works of ethnography, anthropologists reported that the process of coming of age...involves a series of rituals, rites of passage, and experiences involving the crossing of thresholds. These rites of passage separate the young from their previous identity and environment, situate them temporarily in a threshold status outside conventional social categories, and then reintegrate young people into society with a new status. (Mintz 64)

Through the magic of their talisman, Kit and Shorty enter a liminal, or threshold, state and undergo a series of trials ultimately resulting in their maturation and individuation: "an odyssey of discovery and self-fashioning, this passage requires protagonists to pass through a series of trials, temptations, and rites of passage as they struggle to achieve mature status" (Mintz 55).

Almond and Lake incorporate the dynamics of ancient coming-of-age rituals within the very structure of their coming-of-age novels, compounding the experience on multiple levels. The plot itself, then, magically becomes the coming-of-age ritual required for the boys to transition out of their troubled adolescence:

> magic is based on 'contiguity' with the supposed causal effecting agencies or the affected entities, and on 'similarity' or 'analogy' to them. ...The structuralist enterprise in cultural analysis depends crucially on the hypothesis that not only magic but *culture* (and *hence* magic) inherently involves systemic 'parallels' or structural analogies between disparate domains, which are understood as having causal relationships to each other. (Sweetser 318)

Thus, the plots of *Kit's Wilderness* and *In Darkness* function magically, connecting Kit and Shorty, as well as those reading the boys' story, to a ritualized coming-of-age experience, represented by the plots' metonymic and metaphorical accounts of adolescence.

Accordingly, Kit's and Shorty's narratives embody the stages of their personal identity struggles. In so doing, these novels underscore Brooks' assertion

> that there ought to be a correspondence between literary and psychic dynamics, since we constitute ourselves in part through our fictions within the constraints of a transindividual symbolic order, that of signs, including, pre-eminently, language itself. Through study of the work accomplished by fictions we may be able to reconnect literary criticism to human concern. (xiv)

Kit's and Shorty's narratives function symbolically to represent their individual psychological struggles to come of age while emblematizing the collective and all too human concerns of adolescence, the novels' plots "signifying" these issues. By employing multiple narrative techniques, Almond and Lake illustrate Kit's and Shorty's conflicts through the seemingly contentious structures of each novel's text. Initially, the disrupted chronology of these novels seems to complicate, and in Shorty's case possibly stall, the coming-of-age process. However, as each plot reaches completion it becomes evident that the complicated chronological structures of these novels emblematize and actuate Kit and Shorty's coming of age: "a young person's odyssey is as much a voyage of psychological self-discovery and identity formation as it is a matter of physical movement" (Mintz 65).

In *Kit's Wilderness,* Kit's narration begins paradoxically--before his story has truly begun--in the first section of the book, titled "Autumn." The first page of narrative presents an interior monologue, introducing Kit's perceptions of the dawn of Midwinter's Night--the day spring came to Kit Watson: "So it was spring already as we walked back down to Stoneygate from the drift mine" (Almond 209). Kit's narrative is not only out of chronological order, placed in "Autumn" yet describing a winter morning he calls spring; it also challenges his first-person perspective by repeatedly fusing the identity of his internal consciousness with that of two other characters, John Askew and Allie Keenan, characters unnamed and enmeshed in Kit's "we" until the second paragraph. Subsequently, Kit begins his story as "we," a nameless and indistinct narrator: "...we had disappeared...we were dead.... We stumbled out of the ancient darkness" (Almond 3), only referring to himself as "I" in the very last sentence of his introduction; a sentence he uses as both a forward and backward transition in time: "It started with a game *we* played in the autumn. *I* played it first on the day the clocks went back" (Almond 3, emphasis added).

Thus, Kit's introduction reveals that Kit's "I," Kit's ability to exist as an independent individual and narrator, rests within his understanding of his "we," or an understanding of his collective culture in relation to Stoneygate past and present and the citizens who do, and have, peopled this mining town. Interestingly, while this final sentence acknowledges Kit's individuality as well as the use of the changing seasons as a means of narrative division--the novel is divided into three parts titled "Autumn," "Winter," and "Spring;" it simultaneously destabilizes Kit's chronological position and

his control of his role as a first-person narrator. By repeatedly referencing himself as "we," Kit circumscribes his narrative power, placing equal emphasis upon the characters of John Askew and Allie Keenan, allowing them, and what they symbolize, to become as much Kit's story as Kit himself. The paradox of this introductory prologue, along with the next page's abrupt shift to a standard first-person narrative relating the events of the actual autumn Kit moves to Stoneygate, powerfully embody and foreshadow the struggle Kit faces. Constrained by time and body, Kit's story vies against, and ultimately overcomes, these boundaries in the same way Kit's narrative structure concurrently rebels against and conforms to Kit's narration. Kit's text is the wilderness; "In Stoneygate there was a wilderness. It was an empty space between the houses and the river, where the ancient pit, the mine, had been.... the place was hidden" (Almond 4), and hidden in that empty space of wilderness is Kit himself, a Kit seeking his own identity--his own narrative.

Similarly, Lake's novel enlists narrative contradictions representative of Shorty's personal conflict and transformation. Not only is the setting of *In Darkness* deceptive, literally taking place underneath the rubble of a Haitian hospital destroyed by an earthquake and occurring over a three-day period, while Shorty's narrative--through the use of memory and confession--spans from his birth to present day; it, through the use of voodoo and the spirit within Shorty's pwen, ranges from Haiti's enslaved past to the future slums of Site Soley. Most shockingly, Shorty's story merges these settings as, through his pwen's magic, his mind and memory converge with that of the Haitian slave liberator, Toussaint L'Ouverture.

Before this merger, however, Shorty begins his narration paradoxically, as an unidentifiable narrator, speaking from beyond his body as a noncorporeal "voice":

> I am the voice in the dark.... I have no name. There are no names in the darkness cos there is no one else, only me, and I already know who I am (I am the voice in the dark, calling out for your help), and I have no questions for myself and no need to call upon myself for anything, except to remember. (Lake 1)

Shorty claims both to know who he is and to exist singularly. However, his need to remember undermines this claim. In remembering, Shorty reveals that he not only needs to come to terms with his true identity as a marassa, or a divine twin; but, he must also embrace a twinned identification that his initial assertion, "there is no one else, only me, and I already know who I am" (Lake 1), denies.

Thus, Shorty's narrative intentionally subverts itself to illustrate both the dire circumstances of his present condition and to underscore the potential power of his unspoken confession. Although claiming to unburden himself to an unidentified "you": "Listen. Listen. You're the voices in the dark, so the world can't all be gone. There must be people left. You're the voices in the dark, so listen, mwen ape parlay. I'm going to speak to you" (Lake 8); the "you" Shorty addresses, the voice in the dark he asks to listen, is his own. Shorty needs to hear and remember himself to forgive himself: "Maybe, maybe, if I tell you my story, then you'll understand me better and the things I've done. Maybe you'll, I don't know, maybe you'll...forgive me" (Lake 8). Shorty's survival depends upon this forgiveness. Only in the process of confession, "tell[ing] you my story" (Lake 8), repentance, "you'll understand...the things I've done" (Lake 8), and

atonement, “maybe you’ll...forgive me” (Lake 8), can Shorty revivify himself. Consequently, Shorty’s narrative, like Kit’s, begins before he does; the story he begins with, the Shorty under the rubble, has died and cannot be resurrected until Shorty “speaks to [that] you” (Lake 8). However, Shorty can only speak to this you through a narrative in which his “you” is also inextricable from, and understood by, that of his marassa twin, Toussaint L’Ouverture. Thus, Shorty must understand himself as marassa to forgive himself for the life he has lived denying this identity, the existence he has maintained as “only one half of a life” (Lake 9): “Remember, even now, as I lie in this ruined hospital, I am only one half of a life, one half of a soul. I know this. That is why I have done the things I have done” (Lake 9).

Subsequently, the dependence of Shorty’s present on his past as well as Shorty’s inability to access his future without the intersection of both creates another narrative contradiction; time becomes immeasurable as Shorty’s narrative unfolds within the timeless realm of his subconscious. While Shorty’s story occurs within the confines of chapters titled “Now,” his primary assertion, his most urgent need--his only means of life--is “to remember” (Lake 1). These memories engender Shorty’s ability to access “Then,” the chapters during which Toussaint L’Ouverture’s story unfolds and by which Shorty might process his own “then,” the past that currently haunts him. Only by remembering can Shorty confess to the “you” he begs to “Listen. Listen.” (Lake 8), and, in so doing “speak” (Lake 8) the narrative of his own coming of age. Paradoxically, Shorty, and the narrative structure of his introductory monologue, controvert this need as Shorty asserts that he has “no questions for [himself]” (Lake 1), seemingly denying that

the act of memory calls into question his relationship with himself and the past. In spite of his desire "to remember" (Lake 1), Shorty's thoughts remain trapped in "Now," just as Shorty remains trapped both in the trauma of his adolescence and the debris of the fallen hospital. Shorty's need to remember, to summon the past, opposes the "Now" from which "the voice in the dark" (Lake 1) he has identified as himself (Lake 1) narrates. Shorty needs to escape his current psychological and physical imprisonment; yet, ironically, Shorty espouses he needs no name, has no questions, and has "no need to call upon [himself] for anything" (Lake 1) as he "already know[s] who [he is]" (Lake 1). However, Shorty's final exclusion: "except to remember" (Lake 1) invalidates all these other claims.

Hence, like that of *Kit's Wilderness*, the narrative structure of *In Darkness* defies itself. Shorty, like Kit, begins his story with an interior monologue. Whether he actually voices his words aloud to the rubble remains irrelevant as his narrative exercise is inherently personal. Nonetheless, Shorty's deepest personal need, his longing "to remember" (Lake 1), ironically underscores his need for a coming-of-age process facilitated by and through an embrace of a collective cultural paradigm. This need is eventually met by Shorty's physical and narrative union with Toussaint, a union engendered only by Shorty's appropriation of the voodoo beliefs practiced by his community. Initially, however, Shorty struggles against a narrative exercise developing a self-awareness achieved through his embrace of the voodoo religion:

> I don't believe in all that vodou shit. That's kind of a lie, though, cos I saw a houngan turn into Papa Legba right before my eyes. So, yeah, maybe I do believe

> in vodou. ...Anyway, I think, what did vodou ever do to help me. Vodou, it's the old religion of Haiti. In vodou, you got lwa, who are like gods, but some believe they can be ancestors, too. Haitians, they believe that the lwa can come down and possess their bodies.... We talk to our gods; our gods talk through us. Manman talked to our gods, I should say. Me, I didn't have a lot to do with them.... They didn't seem very interested in me either. (Lake 12)

Only in allowing Toussaint L'Ouverture, his marassa ancestor and the lwa spirit inhabiting his pwen, to possess both his physical and narrative body can Shorty enact a coming-of-age ritual leading to his maturation.

Shorty's original rejection of his marassa identification marks the structure of his narrative as significantly as his ultimate embrace of this destiny. In the first few pages of the text, Shorty's few vocalized pleas for help are presented to readers as memories:

> I heard people shouting.... I shouted back.... But nobody answered and the voices went away. I don't know when that was. I don't know when it's night and when it's day, or even if night and day exist any more. If I can hear people shouting, and they can't hear me, does that make me a ghost? I think, maybe yes. I can't see myself. I can't prove I exist. (Lake 6)

Shorty's initial inability to remember his true nature engenders an inability to vocalize the reality of his existence. His body cannot be rescued because Shorty's rescue is contingent upon Shorty's own ability to find himself. In losing his grasp of his identity within the voodoo culture and within a Haiti he navigates outside the context of his gang, he has become trapped in a type of stagnancy of identity whose inevitable end is death. Shorty

can only be rescued if he remembers who he was, acknowledges who he has become, and accepts the potential to transcend the limitations of the liminal existence he has lead as a result of the trauma of his sister's loss.

Fittingly, not only does Shorty speak of his vocal narration in past tense, he questions its reality, reflecting on the inability of the people he heard shouting to hear his replies. Shorty extends his lack of verbal power to his physical condition, begging the question that if he cannot orally assert his existence, if he cannot "cry out" or "speak" and be recognized, can he exist? With no proof of his own existence, with no ability to receive a response from another human being verifying his narrative of self definition, Shorty becomes a ghost, haunted by the memory of his former life, the life he led as only "one half of a soul" (Lake 9). Tellingly, this is a "life" he can now no longer "shout back" (Lake 6) to the world: "I used to shout for help, but then after a while I couldn't tell if I was speaking through my mouth or just in my head, and that scared me.... So, I don't shout anymore" (Lake 2). Shorty's shouts can only be heard when he himself establishes the terms of his existence and develops an individuated self-narrative by undergoing a coming-of-age process reuniting him with the "half a soul" (Lake 9) he has lost--a ritual dependent upon Shorty's reappropriation of his marassa destiny.

Both Almond's and Lake's introduction of their protagonists underscore their need for a collective interpretation of identity. To successfully complete the rites of passage both Kit and Shorty now face, the boys must rely on secondary narratives to process their individual experiences. The narrative confusion at the onset of each novel--Kit, in his fusion of self with the narrative voices of his friends, and Shorty, trapped within his own

monologue and struggling to accept his union with Toussaint and his ability to hear "voices" without apprehending their meaning--illustrates both boys' need for a communion with stories beyond the confines of their current situations. Only in and through identification with larger narratives can Kit and Shorty translate, understand, and transcend their individual adolescent struggles:

> Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives which we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semi-conscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue. (Brooks 3)

Notably, both Kit's and Shorty's stories begin with interior monologues marked by the presence of the most influential narrative forces in their lives. For Kit, these are the legends of the Stoneygate mines:

> here we were, the children who had disappeared, brought back into the world as if by magic. John Askew, the blackened boy with bone necklaces and paintings on him; Allie Keenan, the good-bad ice girl with silver skin and claws; ...and me, Kit Watson, with ancient stories in my head and ancient pebbles in my palm. (Almond 3)

The ancient stories in Kit's head and the ancient pebbles in Kit's hand are those of the mines, and those of the cave dwellers preceding the mines. Both these narratives enable Kit to be "brought back into the world as if by magic" (Almond 3), resurrected by the "magic" of the interpretive power of these tales.

For Shorty, the story of the marassa from his voodoo religion and the access to a second marassa twin--Toussiant L'Ouverture--he gains from his pwen shadow his monologue:

> I try to say the invocation, the words to the Marassa.... My sister, she was my twin. ...We were Marassa, man. You know Marassa? They're lwa, gods, the gods of twins--super-strong, super-hardcore, even though they look like three little kids. They're some of the oldest gods from Africa. ...Marassa can heal you, can bring you good luck, can make people fall in love with you. Marassa can see your future, double your money, double your life. People from where I come from believe human twins can do the same and can talk to each other in silence, too, cos they share the same soul. (Lake 7,8,9)

Trapped beneath the ruined hospital, Shorty retreats within a narrative of direct thought filtered by memory, one of the strongest of his memories his marassa designation.

At first, overwhelmed by the loss of his twin sister, Marguerite, Shorty remembers an emptiness he identifies with the darkness around him. Thus, Shorty "speaks" a narrative of darkness: "This darkness, it's like something solid. It's like it's inside me" (Lake 1), and has mistaken this darkness for his own identity. "Now," Shorty's present circumstance, is nameless, silent, darkness. However, Shorty's acknowledgement of this darkness drives him to remember both a self and a cultural paradigm by which the trauma of this darkness might be overcome. As such, both the "now" of Shorty's narrative confession and the "Now" of the chapter titles during which that confession occurs, acknowledge "Then," a "then" simultaneously unfolding as the pasts of Shorty and his

marassa ancestor, Toussaint. As Shorty confesses a "then" marked by poverty, gang violence, and the loss of his sister, the novel's "Then" chapters merge Shorty's memories with those of Toussaint, linking them to a larger narrative by and through which Shorty might be forgiven and revivified.

Ultimately, in seeking to remember Shorty narratively invokes a veve, defined by Alfred Matraux in his book *Voodoo in Haiti* as a symbolic "drawing" "reveal[ing] the presence of the [voodoo] god in tangible form. ...These emblematic drawings have a magical nature. ...Their function is to summon the loa [or lwa]" (165). In remembering, Shorty summons "Then," combining his soul with Toussaint's in the same way the chapter divisions combine and inform both Toussaint's and Shorty's narratives. It is his acknowledgement of "Then," the "Then" of Toussaint's story and the "then" of his own past, that enables Shorty to both narrate and process "Now." It is a "Then" Shorty "ask[s] to unbury [him]" (Lake1), "calling ["Then"] to come and dig [him] out" (Lake 1) of "Now." Thus, as a veve summons the lwa, Shorty summons Toussaint as Shorty's "Now" conjures Toussaint's "Then." "Now" buries Shorty in darkness; "Then" "dig[s him] out" (Lake 1). "Now" Shorty dies; "Then" Shorty lives. "Now" Shorty remembers "Then." Thus, the memory of his own personal "then" enacts Shorty's insertion of self within the larger "Then" chapters of Toussaint's narrative, ultimately enabling both Shorty's physical and psychological survival.

Although a seemingly personal exercise, Shorty's remembered confessions, coupled with his initially unorthodox use of the the pwen he has inherited, nonetheless

facilitate his merger with Toussaint, the marassa ancestor with whom he is destined to "share the same soul" (Lake 9):

> My mind drifts off, and I start to think about vodou. Toussaint, he went to see a houngan, talked about some thing that was inside him. ...And I've seen...I don't know what I've seen. I've seen myself flying through the night air and rushing down and going into the mouth of a man, and then I was dreaming of Toussaint. I think maybe there's something to this vodou stuff after all. I reach into my pocket and take out my pwen. I hadn't really thought about it until that moment. ...It's a stone with a god in it, from the old country. A gede lwa, one of our ancestors. It's meant to protect me, so I think, well, now is the time. ...--Tell me lwa, I say. Tell me if there's a way out. (Lake 112, 113)

As the novel progresses and the narrative divides between the chapters titled "Now" and "Then," it becomes clear that Shorty's thoughts, whether immediate or remembered, sift themselves through a sieve of personal narrative history at the same time as they combine with the shared history of Toussaint L'Ouverture; this merger, this marassa veve, revealing Shorty's "way out" (Lake 113).

Consequently, while claiming the dichotomous titles of "Now" and "Then," the novel's chapter divisions fail to adhere entirely to their descriptions. "Then," as illustrated by the paradox of Shorty's own self-definition, exists inextricably with "Now." "Now" becomes the vehicle for the expression of a "Then" haunted by Shorty's personal memories as well as the figure of Toussaint. "Then" unfolds within the grip of "Now," riddled with allusions to Shorty's memories as well as Toussaint's flash forwards into the

Haiti of Shorty's "Now." Hence, the "Then" and "Now" of the chapters serve to convoke the process of unification experienced by Shorty and Toussaint; they are marassa. Even though the "Then" chapters reflect a third-person limited narration, "...narrative in the third person is most often told by a narrator situated outside of the world of the story" (Abbott 71), in this novel, the narrator chronologically and physically "outside of the world of the [Toussaint] story" (Abbott 71) is Shorty. The Toussaint story is narrated by Shorty from both the confines of the rubble in which he is trapped, and from the confines of his subconscious. Bodily "outside" Toussaint's story, Shorty is psychically and narratively present in spite of the chronological impossibilities and vice versa as Toussaint inserts himself into Shorty's first-person narrative. Thus, the performative nature of the plot enables Shorty to engage in an atemporal merger with a story beyond his own. In the end, it is Shorty's link to a larger narrative which enables him to understand and interpret his own experiences.

Shorty transcends the imprisonment of his own first-person experience, and the boundaries of his trapped existence, through Toussaint, uniting the "Then" and "Now" chapters as well as the narrative structures of the text. Ultimately, the irony of the chapter titles reflects the reality of a single narrative, a narrative told in darkness yet not darkness itself, a narrative outside of time and unlimited by body: "I am the voice in the dark.... I am the voice calling for you to come and dig me out. I am the voice in the dark, asking you to unbury me, to bring me from the grave out into the light, like a zombi" (Lake 1). Shorty's is a narrative of darkness finding darkness and becoming light, the narrative of

Shorty's own self delivery, of his first death and second birth, his coming of age "in blood and darkness" (Lake 14).

For both Kit and Shorty, their personal narratives depend upon their appropriation of shared cultural tales. Only by embedding their stories within these larger collective narratives can Kit and Shorty process their own identities. As Peter Brooks underscores in *Reading for the Plot:*

> Until such time as we cease to exchange understandings in the form of stories, we will need to remain dependent on the logic we use to shape and understand stories, which is to say, dependent on plot. A reflection on plot as the syntax of a certain way of speaking our understanding of the world may tell us something about how and why we have come to stake so many of the central concerns of our society [in the case of these novels, the concern of how modern coming-of-age rituals might be enacted and why they are a necessary facet of the adolescent experience], and of our lives, on narrative. (7)

Accordingly, the novel's protagonists are shadowed by the narrative constructions of both texts.

Concatenate with their novel's narrative structures, Kit and Shorty both mirror and create themselves within their use of language. For Shorty, the language of memory and confession creates a magic by which he merges his narrative with Toussaint's, raising both from the darkness of the past. For Kit, the language of story defines and frees both him and his friends, John Askew and Allie Keenan, from Stoneygate's effects. Resultantly, the narrative structures of both *Kit's Wilderness* and *In Darkness* manifest as

the first of many “double identities” explored in each novel, establishing alter-egos for Kit and Shorty. Kit’s alter-ego becomes that of the storyteller, a role inseparable from that of magician. Shorty’s alter-ego becomes that of Toussaint, a role contingent upon the magic of voodoo. However, before they can fully embrace these identities, Kit and Shorty must overcome the temptation to circumvent their coming-of-age experience by aligning themselves with individuals who celebrate, yet never transcend, the past.

CHAPTER TWO: TALISMAN, TRAUMA, AND "THE GAME CALLED DEATH"

Critical to both David Almond's and Nick Lake's performative development of each novel's plot is the use of magical objects, or talisman, enabling both Kit and Shorty to process their adolescent experiences. Not only do these talisman function performatively to facilitate the narrative "ritual" of coming of age, they become an important symbol of the trauma both boys must overcome to "come of age *correctly*" (Baxter 2). Just as the novels' narratives function dualistically, so too do these talisman. While Kit's fossils and Shorty's pwen facilitate connections to larger cultural narratives by which they might process their own coming-of-age rituals, these same talisman project dangerous reflections of adolescences interrupted before the coming-of-age ritual is complete. As emblems of the past, the talisman, if not properly understood, might be interpreted only as vestiges of their respective pasts—read as a singular narrative. Similarly, Kit and Shorty, if unable to overcome the trauma of their loved ones' deaths, if unwilling to assimilate this experience into their coming-of-age experience, risk entrapment in a state of liminality produced by this trauma. Like their talismans' connections to ancient cultural narratives, the boys' personal traumas have the potential to incite or stall their coming of age. If stalled, both boys become trapped within a singular narrative, victims of the "games of death" they embrace in their attempts to understand loss. As such, Kit and Shorty must overcome the temptation to employ these

talisman as a means of subverting their coming of age and instead appropriate its narrative power to "come of age *correctly"* (Baxter 2).

The talisman facilitate a narrative juxtaposition of past and present which contributes to the development of each protagonist's alter-ego. What is unique about these alter-egos is that they themselves function on a dualistic level. First, they manifest through significant talisman bequeathed by a literal or figurative ancestor. Kit's role as a storyteller or magician, linking his present situation to his ancestors in the mines and to the life of the cave-dwelling Lak, is facilitated through the gift of fossilized ammonite from his grandfather. Shorty connects with his alter-ego, the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture, through the gift of a pwen, a stone believed by Haitian voodoo culture to possess the spirit of a lwa ancestor. Further, Kit's and Shorty's alter-egos exist both as historical "others" and as the boys themselves; their identification with these figures from the past represents the process of identifying and embracing their own adult selves. Interestingly, both Kit and Shorty find and face these alter-egos as a result of volatile friendships with their own foils, John Askew and Biggie, as well as through the more positive influence of their ancestors.

When Kit's grandfather gives Kit the ancient fossils he retrieved from the Stoneygate mines, "...gift[s] from the deep, dark past" (Almond 44), he bequeaths the ability to transcend the present, explaining: "'When we dropped down in the cage we dropped through time. Million years a minute. Pitmen. Time travelers'"(Almond 43). Endowing Kit with "'Gifts from a time traveler'" (Almond 44), Kit's grandfather passes on the ability to elude time, giving Kit a form of immortality. While Kit has been trapped

in the present, "...in my room, doing homework, something boring about time differences between England and the rest of the world...." (Almond 42), he reveals a subconscious desire to escape this captivity: "I worked out that if you traveled far enough you could get to where you wanted before you even started" (Almond 42). Kit's solution to the problem of "time differences" (Almond 42) signifies his openness to the past and future as vehicles of self-creation. Further, by asserting "you could get to where you wanted before you even started" (Almond 42), Kit references the organization of his own narrative; he started his story on the dawn of Midwinter's night, before he narratively enters "Autumn" (Almond 2) or Stoneygate.

Like the fossils, Kit's statement captures the essence of his story, the reflection of its form, in the hard rock of the present. However, within this present are the echoes of past and future:

> He put it on the desk in front of me. It was a flat rectangle of coal.... There were deep imprints on its surface. I ran my fingers across them. 'It's tree bark,' I said. 'That's right. Tree bark. Lots of coal's got tree bark patterns on it if you slice it careful enough.' 'That's what coal was,' I said. 'Trees. Millions of years back.' ... 'There's this as well.' He put a black fossil on the desk. A spiraling horn-shaped shell. ...'An ammonite. This is the fossil of its shell. ...This too came out of the pit, just like the tree bark.' (Almond 42-43)

These fossils emblematize Kit's ability to see beyond the present moment and are a catalyst for his "time travel." In the same way he sees the tree bark and ammonite frozen

within the coal, Kit sees the "ghosts" within the mines, the compressed essence of these souls' pasts, imprints fossilized within the mine's rock:

> I rubbed my eyes again, squinted, then I saw them, skinny bodies in the flickering light. They hunched in the corners at the light's edge. They blended with the walls. They shifted and faded as I tried to focus on them. But I saw their goggling eyes, their blackened skin, heard their high-pitched giggles, and I knew that they were with me, the ancient pit children.... (Almond 50)

Further, Kit sees himself reflected in the fossils, a self he will be, and unconsciously is--"you could get to where you wanted" (Almond 42)--in spite of the future tense of a journey unfolding through his and his grandfather's collective memories of the past, a past that has happened "before [Kit] even started" (Almond 42):

> 'It's another one for the wall I think. *Silky,* by Christopher Watson.' Annie Meyers in front of me put her hand up....'Can we really call it Kit's story if he got it from his grandfather?' 'Yes, we can. ...It's how stories work. They move from person to person, get passed down through the generations. And each time...they're a little different. I'm sure, for instance, that Kit added a few touches of his own to his grandfather's tale. Yes, Kit?' 'Yes.' She smiled. 'So stories change and evolve. Like living things. Yes, just like living things.' (Almond 55)

As Kit rewrites the stories of the mines handed down by his grandfather, he appropriates their significance according to his personal experiences. The stories of the past are "read" by Kit only to be reinterpreted, and rewritten, within the context of the present. Kit, through the tales of the mine shared by his grandfather, "reads" the past to discover, and

incite, his own future: “we read in a spirit of confidence, and also a state of dependence, that what remains to be read will restructure the provisional meanings of the already read” (Brooks 23). Thus, the fossilized talisman form the plot enacting Kit’s coming of age; they embody the narrative phenomena Brooks’ has termed “the anticipation of retrospection” (Brooks 23): “If the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place, already in wait for us to reach it” (Brooks 23). Kit’s maturity, his coming of age, is contingent upon an actuation grounded in his embrace of a past “read as present” (Brooks 23).

In the same way Kit’s grandfather bestows the fossils upon Kit, Dread Wilme bestows his pwen upon Shorty. Dread, although not a biological ancestor of Shorty, represents the lineage of racial, political, and socioeconomic struggle Shorty inherits as a resident of the Haitian slum, Site Soley:

> Dread Wilme was in charge of the Site. …Dread was an old chimere, a drug dealer who had become so powerful he was like a mayor—in one part of the Site anyway. But he got his guns and some of his money from Aristide, to protect the Lavalas supporters, so really it was Aristide who was in charge of the Site; Dread Wilme was just someone who did Aristide’s work for him, who kept his people safe. (Lake 72, 73)

Dread embodies a duality against which Shorty also vies: “Dread Wilme began as a chimere and he ended as one. But he built schools, too. He paid for people to go to the doctor. Nothing is as simple as it seems, you’ll come to see that” (Lake 73). While on the one hand Dread influences positive change and represents the potential for transformation

within Site Soley, on the other, his endeavors are darkened by the use of violence and gang life as a means to achieve these ends.

Similarly, Shorty himself seeks gang involvement as a way to reconnect with his sister and to attain a higher quality of life. As such, Dread's decision to bequeath his pwen to Shorty signifies his recognition of Shorty's divided existence—both on a psychological and spiritual level—and Dread's understanding of his own personal failures, one of which is an aberrant coming-of-age experience. In providing him with the pwen, Dread provides Shorty with a link to a culture greater than that of the gang world Dread directly represents. Although in possession of the pwen, Dread's decision to use his role as a chimere to effect change in the Site has prevented him from fully embracing the pwen's potential. Dread's resolute dedication to gang culture counteracts the connection to Toussaint available through the pwen. While Dread admires Toussaint, he has failed to appropriate Toussaint's narrative—the pwen's true power.

However, for Shorty, who is still an adolescent, this pwen, and the spirit it houses, offers a link to a Haitian past and a voodoo cosmogony by which he can process his coming of age in connection with a larger cultural paradigm, one which has the power to transcend his dependence on contemporary gang culture as a means by which to transition into adulthood. As Kent Baxter emphasizes, "you must come of age *correctly*. Any attempt to avoid or circumvent the process or cheat is quite simply unnatural and leaves one outside the window of society" (2). Shorty's initial embrace of the Route 9 gang represents an incorrect, or unnatural, coming-of-age experience.

Although the gang offers what seems to be a transition into the adult world, it does so prematurely and by offering a type of liminal existence positioning boys in a suspended adolescent experience. Dread Wilme, who transitioned into adulthood in and through his identification with the gang, exists in this form of stasis. Similarly, while in Route 9, Shorty sustains specious adolescent beliefs about right and wrong and life and death preventing his healthy transition into adulthood. While he "matures," he does so through violence and in the context of a false reality. Thus, his maturation occurs within the micro-society of his gang, leaving Shorty "outside the window of [his larger Haitian] society" (Baxter 2). Additionally, gang life precludes a true adult existence as most gang members die during their teen or early adult years. Their designation as "chimere," which literally means "ghost," underscores this reality:

> Chimere is for *gangster* in the Site. …Chimere cos we die so young we may as well be ghosts already. You're thinking, strange thing to call yourselves; strange thing to have a name that means you're gonna die young. And yeah, it's a name that the rich people came up with, the people who lived outside the Site, but we took that name and made it our own. …You wanna name me a chimere? Too late. I already named my ownself. (Lake 5)

In naming himself a chimere, or a gangster, Shorty positions himself within a type of counterfeit context for his transition to adulthood as the ritual of gang life hinders rather than facilitates his coming-of-age process. Rather than functioning to situate Shorty upon a temporary threshold: "rites of passage separate the young from their previous identity and environment, situate them temporarily in a threshold status outside

conventional social categories, and then reintegrate young people into society with a new status" (Mintz 64); gang life perpetuates Shorty's liminal existence. However, through the narrative power of his pwen, Shorty can transition out of the gang world and reintegrate into Haitian society having evolved as a result of his union with Toussaint, his pwen's spirit. Thus, the pwen's capacity to offer Shorty a coming-of-age experience marked by a connection to a larger cultural and historical context proves critical to a healthier and more complete transition into adulthood.

Like Kit's embrace of his grandfather's fossils, Shorty's reception of the pwen comprises an ironic merger of timelessness and death. Shorty receives Dread's pwen while facing mortality, witnessing the death of others while fearing the loss of his own life: "Something hot exploded in my leg and I looked down to see a blossom of red on my jeans. I knew it was blood. The thing that shocked me was how much it hurt. I was already on my knees and now I fell down altogether. Time slowed" (Lake 122). While not critically wounded from the gunshot to the leg, Shorty, pinioned by "time slowed" (Lake 122), lies unconscious as "coming toward [him]...[is] an armored vehicle...going to crush [him] without hesitation to get Dread" (Lake 123). Dread Wilme, also shot, approaches Shorty within this space of "time slowed" (Lake 122).

Lingering between life and death, Dread now physically embodies his psychological liminality:

> There were so many holes in Dread...you could see the light from the trucks and the torches on the soldiers' guns shining through him.... All these bullets in him, through him...and he was still standing there, filtering the light, like that was his

> destiny.... Then--...Dread Wilme turned to me, and…it was like he saw something holy, something that could save him. He started to move toward me. (Lake 123)

Dread Wilme, "still standing there, filtering the light" (Lake 123), simultaneously alive and dead, embraces his ultimate destiny, defying the life and death whose boundaries he straddles, to pass his mantle, his pwen, to Shorty. Dread is the filter through which the marassa spirit of Toussaint is passed to his true twin, Shorty:

> Bullets were still slamming into him, but he staggered toward me, the light flickering through the holes in him.... And all the time the tank was coming toward me--toward Dread Wilme especially, but it was going to have to run me over to get to him. Dread Wilme did not want that to happen.... He staggered toward me without stopping for anyen, even as they shot him. Dread Wilme was still dying, still moving toward me.... (Lake 123)

In that place of "[t]ime slowed" (Lake 122), with "Dread Wilme...still dying, still moving..." (Lake 123), Dread and Shorty exchange destinies. Ironically advancing in the guise of death, Dread endows Shorty with life:

> Finally, Dread Wilme reached me, and he picked me up.... He bent down, picked me up, and carried me to the side of the street…the body of Dread Wilme…was more holes than flesh and he was leaking all over the world.... He was lying in a pool of blood, like the one that had grown between [Manman's] legs when me and Marguerite were born, and [Manman] had a deep sense inside her of deja vu.... Dread fumbled in his pocket and took out this stone, a smooth pebble.... it was a pwen, and there was a god in it that had traveled all the way from the old country

> in west Africa.... --For the boy, he said. He only has half a soul. He must be protected. One day soon another soul will possess him and it could be good or it could be bad, but this shorty could be the one to.... --Ayiti, he whispered. *Haiti.* (Lake 124-125)

In this moment so uncannily akin to the circumstances of Shorty's first birth, Dread invites Shorty to embrace new life: "[o]ne day soon another soul will possess him..." (Lake 125). Just as Shorty's first birth united him to his twin sister, Marguerite, the pwen invites Shorty to embrace another birth, and another twin, Toussaint L'Ouverture, through the power of its magic. Without Marguerite and without the pwen, Shorty remains trapped in the same state Dread now occupies--straddling life and death as only half his soul survives. In accepting Dread's pwen, Shorty accepts the possibility of a second birth.

The pwen functions as a powerful talisman in the voodoo religious system. As Milo Rigaud explains in *Secrets of Voodoo,* "amulets and talisman…represent a sort of superior soul to the Voodoo adherent. …The Voodooist usually carries such a talisman and may address it at any time external danger threatens him" (83). In the case of the pwen Shorty inherits from Dread, the "superior soul" (Rigaud 83), or lwa spirit, housed inside the pwen is a marassa, thus offering Shorty not only protection but rebirth. Not only are the marassa divine twins, but the divinity of the marassa is emblematic of the "magic regency of the sky through birth and rebirth" (Rigaud 69). Thus, the pwen embodies the power to resurrect and recreate Shorty, a power garnered through the narrative of Toussaint; however, to appropriate this power, Shorty must come to terms

with his understanding of his present identity and his existence as “half a soul” (Lake 125). Only in facing the reality of the missing half of his soul--the death of his sister--can Shorty escape his own gang involvement to be possessed by the pwen’s marassa spirit, Toussaint, and combine his story with Toussaint’s for the resurrection of his own identity.

Unfortunately, even after they are given the fossils and the pwen, Kit and Shorty struggle to fully translate the true meaning of the stones. Before they are able to actuate the identities their talisman emblematize, the fractured souls driving Shorty to Biggie, Route 9’s leader, and rendering Kit unable to resist John Askew and the draw of the darkness he represents--“I knew there was no turning back, that I was both driven and drawn into the darkness...” (Almond 179)--ultimately lead both boys deep into the past, both their own and others, before enabling them to come to terms with their present and future selves. Frozen within the fossils and the pwen, as well as enmeshed in their relationships with Biggie and John Askew, Kit and Shorty find themselves trapped within the realm of “death,” fossilized inside their inability to overcome their circumstances. Their relationships with Biggie and John Askew exacerbate not only this struggle, but “death’s” hold.

John Askew finds Kit “...alone and at the edge of the wilderness” (Almond 9) a week after his arrival in Stoneygate. Kit, “at the edge of the wilderness” (Almond 9), at the edge of his own self-discovery, attracts the dangerous presence of Askew. Ironically, Askew’s aberrant attempts to experience the ritual necessary for his own maturation distract Kit from a more pellucid connection to his past and cloud the promise of the coming-of-age experience his fossilized talisman represents. Like Shorty’s involvement

with the Route 9 gang, Askew's fascination with the ghosts of the Stoneygate mines has facilitated a liminal existence preventing his ability to "come of age correctly" (Baxter 2). Deeply immersed in darkness, Askew, as a means to escape his difficult home life, has engrossed himself in the exploration of Stoneygate's history, in particular in the channeling of the spirits of children trapped in the mines. However, as Michael Levy indicates, ""the symbolically named John Askew" (27), has a skewed perception of this history. Failing to use the past as a means to process the present difficulties of his coming-of-age experience, Askew remains trapped by the lure of death and darkness he believes Stoneygate's legends represent. He has begun a ritual connecting him to a larger, collective culture by and through which he might experience his own rite of passage into adulthood, but instead, Askew never individuates himself from his ancestors. He is lost within the liminality of failed ritual. Askew now draws Kit into the same dangerous exploration of the past:

> 'You're like me, Kit. You think you're different, but you'll come to see that me and you is just the same.' He winked, patted my shoulder. 'Askew,' he said. 'John Askew.' He watched me for a while. 'It's like I've been waiting for you,' he said. 'Expecting you.' …'Your stories is like my drawings, Kit. They take you back deep into the dark and show it lives within us still.' (Almond 12, 15)

Obsessed with his namesake, an ancestor, *"John Askew...aged thirteen"* (Almond 20), who died in the 1821 Stoneygate pit disaster, Askew has replaced his own identity with that of his eponymous predecessor. Spending his free time in the mine's labyrinth of caves, creating "the game called Death" (Almond 5), Askew substitutes the reality of his

present for his fascination with the past. In Kit, whose name is shared with a "...great-great-great-great-uncle" (Almond 21) memorialized on the pit disaster monument, Askew sees a link to this past: "John Askew, Christopher Watson, with the long list of the dead between us, joining us" (Almond 21). Through his obsession with these dead miners, Askew has cultivated a state of liminality from which he has failed to progress; ironically, in spite of his ritualized behavior, Askew remains in a state of perpetual adolescence.

Continually playing the "game called Death" (Almond 5), Askew engenders the death of his own maturation process:

> He has initiated a number of the children of the town's old families into 'a game called Death,' which is played in the 'wilderness...an empty space between the houses and the river, where the ancient pit, the mine, had been.' In this liminal space, on the threshold between the contemporary world and the past, between reality and imagination, down in a deep hole, Askew has created a den for himself, its walls covered with drawings like those found in Neolithic cave dwellings. Also on the cave walls is a list of all those who have 'died' playing the game, his own name appearing at the top. (Levy 27)

Although Askew recognizes his adolescent need for a ritualized connection with the collective culture of his past, he fails to apprehend how to employ this experience as a means by which to interpret his present circumstances and move forward in the process of his own individuation. Tellingly, "the list of names on the wall of Askew's den parallels a similar list on a monument in the local cemetery" (Levy 27). Askew has

initiated himself and the children of Stoneygate's oldest families into a preternatural ritual preventing rather than advancing their ability to come of age in an appropriate fashion.

Kit, in his own tenuous position, finds himself drawn to Askew and the "death" he embodies. While terrified: "I saw how brutal Askew might be, but...I felt drawn to him" (Almond 29), Kit faces death through his relationship with Askew. Drawn to the palpable power of death made manifest in Askew, Kit risks his own death, a failure to come of age correctly, as a result of their relationship. Cultivating his connection to the past at the expense of his present and future--"Why didn't I hurry home to Grandpa? Why did I rush to play the game called Death instead?" (Almond 67)--Kit limits himself and his narrative ability. While enmeshed with "death," John Askew, Kit's narrative exists singularly, contained within a first-person perspective, and his ability as a storyteller remains inextricable from the dead he meets in connection with Askew.

Interestingly, Kit, brought to Stoneygate by the death of his grandmother: "We came to Stoneygate because Grandma died and Grandpa was left alone" (Almond 17), is initiated into its history by "death"--John Askew:

> Askew held the shining blade before me. 'Do you abandon life?' 'I abandon life.' 'Do you truly wish to die?' 'I truly wish to die.' He rested his hand on my shoulder. He drew closer. I saw nothing but his eyes, heard nothing but his voice. 'This is no game,' he whispered.... 'You will truly die....' 'This is Death,' he said. And I knew no more. (Almond 49-50)

Kit begins to see the ghosts of the mines after he plays John Askew's game of death, a game directly connecting him to the spirits his grandfather has introduced in his stories:

> I came to on the damp clay floor.... I rubbed my eyes. 'Who's there?' I whispered.... I rubbed my eyes again, squinted, and then I saw them, skinny bodies in the flickering light.... I knew that they were with me, the ancient pit children, down there in the darkness of Askew's den. (Almond 50)

At the same time, Kit also plays with the consequences of death as seen through the mental deterioration of his grandfather, who too seems a captive of the past, describing his episodes as akin to chasing Silky, a ghost he and his fellow miners claim haunted the Stoneygate pits:

> It's like following [Silky] all alone along the darkest tunnel, along a tunnel you never knew existed, way past all the other men. It's like getting to where you think Silky is and finding nothing there. Just darkness. Just nothing. And you can't move, and you don't know how to get back. And the more you stand there the more the darkness comes into you, till there's nothing but the darkness.... (Almond 61-62)

The experience of Kit's grandfather parallels Kit's own while playing Askew's "game of Death" (Almond 5): "I thought of the den, of knowing nothing, remembering nothing. I trembled as I watched [grandpa], lost in his darkness" (Almond 60). Like Askew, both Kit and his grandfather enter the darkness and risk being consumed by its power--"you don't know how to get back" (Almond 62)--becoming nothing, swallowed by death. Kit and his grandfather simultaneously explore death's regions as both surrender their consciousness, one willingly the other unwittingly, to death's grasp.

While this is an inevitable transition for Kit's elderly grandfather, Kit has prematurely navigated an experience with death while still trapped within his own adolescence. As such, Kit places himself in a dangerous position between his adolescent reality and an exploration of adulthood solely through "the game called Death" (Almond 5). This game prevents Kit from reading Stoneygate's past as a paradigm by which to interpret and understand the coming of age he must experience in the present, a means by which to correctly transition into his future adult identity: "If the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place, already in wait for us to reach it" (Brooks 23). Kit must understand that Stoneygate's past, hidden inside his fossilized ammonite, is merely a vehicle by which to "read," and reach, his adult future.

As Kit allows Askew to bestow death upon him, leaving him senseless and alone in the cave with the ghosts of the Stoneygate mine as his only companions, Kit's grandfather slips farther and farther into the past, daily losing his grip upon the present as his physical death nears. Both Kit and his grandfather, by abandoning their present realities, become "ghosts," haunting, rather than actively engaging, their current circumstances. Ironically, however, Kit embraces "death," returning to Askew and the cave in spite of knowing the danger of his involvement in Askew's game and while fighting against death's hold on his grandfather. As Kit vacillates between these two realms, his role as a storyteller and its concomitant power become increasingly significant:

> "...it was the start of magic..." [Allie] said. "A simple trick: you make something disappear, then you make it reappear again. Even the cavemen did it. The first magicians. They used pebbles and stones.... They believed that their magic was a way to conquer death." (Almond 127)

Kit, through stories hidden in the fossils of the past, through the magic of the tree bark and ammonite--objects encompassing all realms of time, reflecting the past in fossilized form, the future in the transformation produced, and existing in the present--has power as a storyteller. Kit, through story, "can make [a person] disappear, then...make [them] reappear again" (Almond 127).

Kit discovers this ability when, in an effort to guide his grandfather out of his mind's senility, recasts him in the role of Silky. In allowing his grandfather to be lost inside Silky, Kit finds his grandfather, and himself, again:

> 'Grandpa,' I whispered. 'Listen. Once upon a time there was a boy called Silky...A glimpse and then he's gone.... A thing of brightness,' I said. 'Deep down there in the dark.' He lifted his hand, trembling, touched my face, gazed into my eyes. 'It's Kit,' I whispered. He blinked, and looked, and blinked again. He smiled.... He said the word: *Kit.* (Almond 147)

Kit's narrative omnipotence enables him to temporarily "resurrect" his grandfather from the "death," or loss of reality, his dementia has caused. In turn, Kit must recognize that he himself, as a result of his relationship with John Askew, has become as lost as his grandfather, and must narrate his and Askew's escape from the death they face within the caves of Stoneygate's abandoned mines. However, before Kit can appropriate the power

of his own narrative voice, he must discover his own disappearance, a disappearance rooted in his relationship with John Askew and his "game called Death" (Almond 5), a game burying Kit under layers of "Winter" (Almond 74) and awaiting a "Spring" (Almond 207) he must narratively engender. While linked to Askew and submitting to death's "game," Kit can only retell the stories his grandfather has already told him, his writing fails to generate true creative power. Kit possesses this ability, but has replaced its life giving force with the lure of death and John Askew.

Just as Kit finds himself trapped in "the Game of Death" (Almond 5) created by John Askew, Shorty, under the influence of Biggie, plays a "game" of death by joining the Route 9 gang. Biggie, a boy who cannot see beyond life as a gangster--his only ambition, to become a famous rapper, directly linked to this gangster lifestyle--initiates Shorty into gang life:

> Biggie, he was the general of Route 9, and before that he was the right-hand man of Dread Wilme and a big dog in the Site. He did all the shit the government should have done in the slums. He funded the schools, provided security. He punished thieves and rapists. He sold drugs and killed people. He made me what I am today. (Lake 71)

Crippled by the memory of his sister's abduction and filled with hatred, Shorty sees Route 9 as a means to rescue his sister from Boston, the rival gang he believes has kidnapped her:

> I thought, Biggie is Route 9. If I can become Route 9, too, then maybe I can fight Boston and get my sister back. I was sure she was still there in Boston, cos it was

> the Boston crew who had taken her, who had killed Papa. Besides, I knew she wasn't in Route 9 cos I'd never seen her, and I was sure I would recognize her, even now, four years later. She was more than my best friend. I wondered if she would recognize me, though. —How can I become a chimere? I said to Biggie. I wanted a whip, too. I wanted everyone in the street to like me how they liked Biggie. Biggie laughed. –It's easy, he said. Just ride with me. (Lake 184)

Shorty's hatred of Boston attracts him to Biggie, whose present reality has also been infected by an inability to overcome his past. Abandoned by his mother, Biggie has ensconced himself in the gang world of Site Soley, living only in the present so as to ignore the traumatic reality of his past. Defining himself through his role as the leader of Route 9, Biggie channels the hatred his abandonment and poverty have inspired into an enthusiastic embrace of death concomitant with gang life. Interestingly, Biggie's attempts to counter the effects of his past all fail. In spite of Biggie's bravado, he cannot fully escape within the present--Shorty overhears him begging his mother to return to the Site--or wholeheartedly embrace his future, a future inevitably linked to a premature death. Covering himself in the ashes of Dread Wilme as protection against death, Biggie contradicts himself, clinging to his hatred and his houngan to protect him from his past and his future while living in a present dangerously infected by his fear of both:

> Biggie said his houngan took a bone from Dread Wilme after Dread was shot by the UN soldiers. He said the houngan ground that bone up and sprinkled it on Biggie, and that meant bullets couldn't touch him, cos Dread died for Haiti, like Toussaint. So Biggie was proof against bullets, immortal, cos he had Dread's bone

> powder on him. That's what he thought, anyway. I even saw the bone dust in a jar when Biggie took me to see the houngan. Sure, I saw Biggie live through shit that no person should be able to. But I also saw Biggie take a full clip from a machine gun whose bullets tore him to dog food in the end, bone powder or no bone powder. (Lake 13)

Ultimately deceived, Biggie discovers, too late, what Shorty himself must learn; life cannot be lived entirely within the past or the present and the attempt to do so accelerates one's own destruction.

Prior to the gang conflict responsible for Biggie's death, Biggie importunes his houngan, through the vehicle of possession by the lwa of war, Ogou Badagry, to bring the future deaths of his enemies to fruition in his present reality. Significantly, the houngan cannot achieve Biggie's request: "can you bring us Ogou Badagry? We need war in our met tet, we need to be strong.... --No, said Legba. --No? --No. He touched Biggie's head and Biggie shivered.--You are full, Legba said. You have a dead man inside you" (Lake 257). Biggie, though at this point still physically alive, has "a dead man inside [him]" (Lake 257). He cannot be possessed by the lwa of war because his soul has already been claimed by him. Biggie has lost the battle for his own soul and is now, himself, death. Satiating his pain by taking the power of death in his hands, Biggie has murdered himself along with every other person he has killed. Through his gang involvement, Biggie attempted to erase the memory of his past while scorning the danger his present posed on his future. As a result, Biggie, desperate to "destroy [his] enemies" (Lake 257), destroyed himself.

Shorty, "possessed" by Biggie's influence, now faces death in the darkness of his own confinement, an imprisonment in which Shorty is both physically and psychologically fettered by the consequences of his past: "[Biggie] made me what I am today. I have not forgiven him for that, not yet" (Lake 71). Trapped beneath the earthquake rubble, Shorty faces his own "death":

> Now, I think, maybe I *am* a real ghost. Not a gangster, but a dead person. …I can't prove that I exist. …I move maybe one body length and then I hit a wall of blocks. I reach up with my hands and stand up, and I feel that it goes to the ceiling. Only the ceiling is lower than I remember, so that's not great, either. To my right, the same thing—a broken bed, then a wall of rubble. And behind me. I'm in a space maybe one body length in each direction. I'm in a coffin. (Lake 6, 7)

Ultimately, the troubled figures of John Askew and Biggie propel both Kit and Shorty into the wilderness and darkness of their own personalities; forcing them to choose between their own lives and deaths, choices requiring passive or active reclamations of their self-narratives. First, however, Kit and Shorty's friendships engage them in "the game called Death" (Almond 5), a game John Askew and Biggie are currently losing.

Shorty's game of death begins and ends with Biggie, as death--Biggie--initiates Shorty into Route 9:

> --You want me to...? --Yes, said Biggie. Yes.... I was in front of the door and I raised the shotgun as the shadow of a man loomed before me. I pulled the trigger.

> It was that quick. There was a *boom* so loud, like the world was falling down, and I saw a spray of black and red.... --Bon, said Biggie. Welcome to Route 9. I was twelve. (Lake 190-191)

Shorty, driven to this gang initiation by the loss of his sister, welcomes death, and Biggie's friendship, as he is welcomed into Route 9 by his willingness to kill not only the "man [who] loomed before [him]" (Lake 190), but himself--the part of himself which embraced life, the part of him "want[ing] all the dead people not to be dead anymore" (Lake 5). According to Kali Tal's research in *Worlds of Hurt: "*An individual is traumatized by a life-threatening event that displaces his or her preconceived notions about the world. Trauma is enacted in a liminal state, outside the bounds of 'normal' human experience, and the subject is radically ungrounded." Shorty, traumatized by the murder of his father and disappearance of his twin sister, Marguerite, has continued the enactment of his trauma narrative through involvement in the Route 9 gang. As Shorty transitions into Biggie's gang, into a world of death and destruction, he enters a paradox. Willing to court death as a member of Route 9, Shorty's purpose in joining the gang is to rescue his sister, Marguerite.

Culturally, as voodoo marassa, Shorty equates his sister's loss with his existence as half a soul:

> We were Marassa, man. They're Lwa, gods, the gods of twins.... They're some of the oldest gods from Africa. ...Me and my sister, we were magic. We were meant to be born. We shared the same soul...so when she was gone I became half a person. (Lake 9)

In his quest to reunite with Marguerite, Shorty joins Route 9, sustaining the liminal state produced by his sister's disappearance. Fighting for his sister's release from the hands of the Boston gang he believes has kidnapped her, Shorty daily places himself in death's path in an antinomic effort to return his sister to the life she has lost. As Maya Deren notes: "[marassa] are understood as two parts of a whole, hence share one soul.... Since the twins are, essentially, one, that which affects one part affects the other...and their violent separation may lead to disaster" (qtd. Bellande-Robertson 104-105).

Shorty's separation from Marguerite results in the disaster of his gang involvement. As a gang member, Shorty embodies Kali Tal's description of survivors haunted by trauma: "survivors never 'get used to' losing their sense of meaning; they are forever changed by it. Many are transformed into liminal figures who must remain, like ghost[s]...on the fringes of society." Shorty, living in the midst of death while longing for life, becomes this ghost. Ironically, Shorty's involvement in Route 9 is marked by his designation as "Vre chimere. A *real ghost*. Chimere is for *gangster* in the Site. Chimere cos we melt out of nothing and we go back to nothing after. Chimere cos we die so young we may as well be ghosts already" (Lake 5). Consequently, even in the aftermath of Marguerite's loss, Shorty's identity remains inextricable from that of marassa, marked by a duality engendered through trauma. As a gangster, Shorty is "Vre Chimere"; however, as a trauma victim, Shorty's embrace of this denomination reinforces his status as a "liminal figure," a "ghost on the fringes of society" (Tal).

Shorty's understanding of his identity through the context of voodoo drives both his interpretation of trauma and his potential to reinterpret his trauma narrative. Further,

Shorty's marassa birth joins him not only to his sister, but mystically connects Shorty with the broader trauma of Haitian history, foreshadowing his union with Toussaint L'Ouverture. Ultimately, Shorty's trauma mirrors Haitian trauma; his psychological liminality parallels the liminal state of postcolonial Haiti. Shorty, like Haiti, remains "radically ungrounded" (Tal). Though the physical enslavement of Haitian blacks has ended, their liberation is incomplete:

> Ever since it was discovered by Christopher Columbus, this nation has been enslaved. Columbus was a slave-driver. The French and then the Americans are his successors—and they more than equal him in cruelty and injustice. …--The Americans would like the people of Haiti to vote in a new government. …They would like to control our companies and make us slaves again for their own profit. …--Put Lavalas in power and we will throw the Americans into the sea. We will invoice France and America for all that they have stolen…. They took our freedom, our labor, the fruits of our land. …Two hundred years ago, our coffee beans and sugar cane turned to gold in the coffers of merchants from Paris, while the French slave masters here in Haiti turned our people into animals, trammeled with chains, lashed by whips. …--And what happened when we had our independence? …Once we had set aside our chains, once we had stayed their whips and stood up on our own two legs, beasts of burden no more, the French sent an invoice to *us,* demanding we pay for our freedom in taxes and trees. … Everything that was left is being taken away from us even now. …The colonial powers have been enjoying a banquet at our expense…. (Lake 15-16, 17)

In the same way Shorty's trauma has incited his continued embrace of the liminality it produced, Haiti exists in a type of postcolonial liminality. Unable to fully overcome its colonial history, Haiti's present reality remains inextricable from the wounds of its colonial past. Thus, the volatile after-effects of Haiti's economic and ideological dependence on colonial systems of power fetters them in poverty and violence just as Shorty remains fettered by the consequences of his sister's disappearance.

Significantly, Shorty's birth coincides with political turmoil. His delivery occurs following the above speech, after an earthquake strikes a political rally his mother was attending in support of the Lavalas party:

> Me, I was brought into this world as a symbol; I was marked from the beginning. There were some, even before the world fell down, who believed I was meant to do something special. It started right from the time I was born. This was 1995. … Manman was at a Lavalas rally. …This was Aristide's new party, the ones who were going to keep him in power. Manman loved Aristide—he was a communist and that meant he believed everyone should have egal money, egal houses, and egal jobs. At that time, Aristide had been in power for about five years and no one in the Site had any jobs, but Manman said that was cos it was hard for Aristide. The Americans and French had made such a mess of the country it was going to take him a long time to sort it out. (Lake 14-15)

Shorty's birth becomes symbolic as it occurs in the midst of a rally emblematizing Haiti's postcolonial struggles and because it is marked by his designation as a marassa, or a twin, a highly significant designation within the voodoo religion: "Twins (*marassa*), living and

dead, are endowed with supernatural power which makes them exceptional beings. In the Voodoo pantheon they hold a privileged position beside the *grands mysteres*" (Metraux 146).

Mystically, not only is Shorty "twinned" with his sister, Marguerite, the conditions of his birth "twin" him with both Haitian corruption and revolution as he is delivered by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, following an earthquake's interruption of his political rally:

> Manman stared up at the roof of the church, and she saw that there was a hole in it. Through it, the stars shone out of the blackness, as if to say that darkness is never complete, that there is always hope. She felt a tearing and she screamed again and again…. She hauled herself up to see first the big flaque of blood between her legs and then Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Prime Minister of Haiti, holding two babies, one in each arm. He had delivered her children. 'A girl and a boy' he said. Twins! The Marassa Jumeaux made flesh. This is a sign. These are the first babies born in a free Haiti. They will never be slaves. (Lake 20)

Voodoo informs the significance of Aristide's announcement: "in Haiti, where the reality of life is intertwined with religious elements, when this type of [marassa] birth occurs, mythical, spiritual, and symbolic significance is implied" (Bellande-Robertson 104).

Thus, Shorty's identity as marassa creates an inextricable link between his life and that of his marassa ancestors, one of whom is Toussaint L'Ouverture, a Haitian revolutionary who fought against Haiti's colonial powers: "Within Vodou's cosmogony, the marasa are 'the first children of God'....the first and most important characteristic of

the ‘divine twins’ is that they incarnate the notion of segmentation of some original cosmic totality that must regain wholeness” (Bellande-Robertson 108). Shorty, physically marassa through his sister, spiritually embodies a role transcending his state as her twin. He has been marked as the twin of revolution, a marassa identity enduring in spite of his sister’s loss and emblematizing both his and Haiti’s need to “regain wholeness” (Bellande-Robertson 108), a wholeness Toussaint’s narrative emblematizes. Toussaint worked to free Haitians from slavery while simultaneously encouraging them to overcome their need for revenge and violence; however, Shorty, unable to access Toussaint while enmeshed in gang life, remains enslaved by an inability to process his childhood trauma through anything other than violence. Concomitantly, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who delivers Shorty and Marguerite, seeks revenge for the trauma of Haitian colonialism. Both Shorty and Haiti suffer from a need for revenge. As such, both Shorty and Haiti, still not free from the trauma of their respective pasts, need to be reunited with Toussaint’s spirit and the larger narrative it represents:

> *[T]hey’re rebelling only to hurt the whites. They’re doing it for revenge, not freedom, and that will kill their revolution before it’s even born, like a slave mother doing violence to herself to destroy her mulat baby in the womb. The fruit of rape killed on the branch before it can fall.* He [Toussaint] asked himself why he was rebelling, then, but he already knew the answer. He himself was free—as free as he needed to be anyway. …But others were not free. (Lake 59)

Fittingly, Shorty is not the first marassa to transcend his biological identification as a twin: “Toussaint stood up shakily. –When I was a boy, a houngan said that I had half

a soul. My twin sister died when we were young. The houngan told me we were Marassa, said we had power when we were together, but when my sister died the power was lost" (Lake 91). Toussaint, a marassa whose "twin sister, born one minute after him, had died of diphtheria before she could walk" (Lake 38), found a second "twin" during his 1791 quest for revolution. Magically, this twin was, and is, Shorty. Shorty's delivery by Aristide, who celebrated Toussaint and, in spite of his failure to realize the political promises he made to economically enslaved Haitians, "came to be regarded as a prophet.... His election...in 1990 mark[ing] a break with a social system still unchanged since the days of slavery" (Hurbon 124), links Shorty with both Toussaint's memory and the need to address the dire consequences of Haitian colonialism on contemporary society. Shorty embodies the trauma of a postcolonial existence offering him nothing more than a life of poverty and gang violence. Thus, his union with Toussaint, and his symbolic importance as a marassa, function to offer both the hope of his own correct coming of age as well as hope for Haiti's resurrection from the harmful stasis its political and social instability have produced.

Toussaint L'Ouverture, who possessed the pwen while seeking Haitian liberation, associates its power with the aspirations he has for Haitian society. On his way to his own imprisonment, following his capture by the French, Toussaint passes the pwen on to his son Isaac, explaining that it embodies his hope for Haiti:

> He drew out the pwen and handed it to Isaac, his movements as exaggerated as mime so that the soldiers would see he wasn't producing some hidden weapon. …--What's that? said Issac…who had never fought anyone in his life, nor been

> whipped, nor stood in a swamp and danced as a houngan beat his drum. –A pwen. It contains the spirit of a lwa. It belonged to Boukman and now it belongs to you. *It…It's Haiti*. Toussaint found that he had tears in his eyes. (Lake 297, emphasis added)

Importantly, following Toussaint's inheritance of the stone after his fellow revolutionary and friend Boukman's death, the pwen's spirit reveals itself as Shorty's spirit, a spirit Toussaint now identifies as his hope for Haiti itself:

> [Toussaint] had a sudden and all-encompassing conviction, something that struck him with the force of lived experience, that revenge could only lead to pain. This too was odd, because he had never taken revenge on anyone in his life. But his mind felt…different now. He felt simultaneously wise and hopeful and vulnerable. It hurt, but it was extraordinary. (Lake 58)

Before the ceremony in Bois Caiman, Boukman summons the spirit of war he believes inhabits the pwen:

> Boukman raised a stone to his lips and kissed it. It was his pwen. In it was one of the gods the Dahomey had brought with them to this new world, a god of war… Or so Boukman believed. After kissing the stone, he slipped it back into his pocket. Boukman believed the stone would protect him from those who wished to hurt him and would help him in times of need. (Lake 47)

Ironically, however, the spirit the houngan summons, the spirit that comes to possess the pwen Toussaint inherits from Boukman, is Shorty, not "Ogou Badagry, the lwa of war" (Lake 46). Rather than being "possessed by war itself" (Lake 46) as Boukman

thinks necessary to overcome colonial oppression, Toussaint finds himself possessed by Haiti's future--by Shorty:

> [W]hen he slept the dreams would come and he would turn into a young man in a strange version of Haiti, where the blacks were free, but seemed to be imprisoned still in a city of shaky houses, encircled by soldiers. …There were so many odd sights and sounds that he always woke feeling dizzy and disoriented, despite this world seeming familiar to him, *as if part of him belonged there.* Other nights, he was not in this city, but in a small space, like a cave, and it seemed that the world was pressing itself down on him. He was convinced that no one would rescue him and that he was going to die. (Lake 139-140)

Thus, it is his union with Shorty, a marassa spirit scarred by the consequences of his own and others' thirst for vengeance, which drives Toussaint to seek a revolution marked by freedom from both slavery and revenge.

Not only does this underscore the importance of Shorty's marassa role, it underscores the performative magic of the pwen as it is the vehicle by which the novel's "Then" and "Now" chapters are both created, explained, and unified. Additionally, it indicates that Haiti's national identity must include a more complete apprehension of Haiti's past and present political conditions. Like Shorty must do with his relationship with Biggie and the trauma of his past, Haiti must remember the trauma of colonialism so as to overcome the grip of its horrific past. Only in finding a way to remember, yet not be overcome or perpetually bound by the trauma of this past, can Haiti, like Shorty, hope to

transcend its traumatic origins and find freedom in an "adulthood" marked by a truly individuated national identity.

Thus, Shorty and the contemporary Haitian society his spirit represents need to appropriate the revolutionary narrative of freedom Toussaint emblematizes:

> It seemed to [Toussaint] there were three kinds of slaves, three kinds of people. There were those who were so filled with hate by their experience, by their oppression, that they snapped and destroyed property or people. There were those who were so filled with sadness by their experience that they snapped and destroyed themselves…. The third kind of person, though, was filled by their experience for a fierce longing for justice, a fierce desire to make things right in the world, to redress the balance. In the darkness, Toussaint fancied that he was the third kind of person, and to fire his soul, to fill himself with a sense of the need for justice, he called up the faces that embodied for him slavery's evil. He lay there, and he remembered. (Lake 93)

Similarly, Shorty's need to remember works to connect him with Toussaint and to allow him to move from his entrapment as the first kind of person to the maturity and freedom life as the third type of person offers, the type of person Toussaint—through his ironic unification with Shorty, has become:

> When you keep hurting someone, you do one of three things. Either you fill them up with hate, and they destroy everything around them. Or you fill them up with sadness, and they destroy themselves. Or you fill them up with justice, and they

> try to destroy everything that's bad and cruel in the world. Me [Shorty], I was the first kind of person. (Lake 87)

As a marassa marked by both a physical and spiritual need to "regain wholeness," "the 'divine twins'…incarnate the notion of segmentation of some original cosmic totality that must regain wholeness" (Bellande-Robertson 108), Shorty's birth continues to set Shorty apart, inevitably culminating in his inheritance of the pwen of Dread Wilme, Aristide's representative in Site Soley, Shorty's slum. Just as Aristide aided Shorty's first, physical birth, Dread aids Shorty's second, psychological birth, offering him the pwen as a means by which to be resurrected from the death and darkness of his personal and societal circumstances.

Ironically, Aristide and Dread Wilme both recognize Shorty as a means by which to transcend a trauma they themselves have perpetuated:

> really it was Aristide who was in charge of the Site; Dread Wilme was just someone who did Aristide's work for him, who kept his people safe. Only no one had jobs still, and no one had any money. So it seemed like not very much had changed, and people were starting to complain about it. There were rebels who tried to fight the government and assassinate people. Most of these rebels lived in the Site. So Aristide gave guns and money to Dread Wilme to make his own private army and keep control of the slum. In the end, though, he was only able to take control of one half of it—the other half was controlled by the rebels who lived in a part of the Site called Boston. These two gangs, Dread Wilme's and the

> rebels, they were always fighting, always shooting each other. At the same time, the attaches were coming into the Site and killing people. (Lake 72, 73)

Shorty's inability to overcome the trauma of his sister's disappearance drives him to embrace the gang life his country's fractured political state continues to support. Shorty's involvement with Biggie and Route 9 fetters him to gang violence and political corruption, preventing his understanding of the pwen's power, and his own destiny, for many years: "[The houngan] touched my head. ...you are empty. You were Marassa, now you are nothing. You are half a person, but you won't be for long. The ceremony has already been completed. It was completed many years ago" (Lake 257). Shorty's failure to overcome the liminal perpetuation of his early trauma hinders his actualization of this destiny; however, as prophesied by the houngan, Shorty cannot escape his spiritual marassa, Toussaint L'Ouverture. Shorty needs the pwen to access the spirit of Toussaint and heal from his past just as Toussaint needed the pwen, and Shorty's spirit, to lead his Haitian revolution.

In a paradox of suspended chronology, Shorty already exists as Toussaint's twin, but he must defy the liminality of trauma to enact this role. Trapped beneath the remains of the Canape-Verte Hospital, Shorty has no choice but to confront his fate: "there is no one else, only me, and I already know who I am…and I have no questions for myself and no need to call upon myself for anything, except to remember" (Lake 1). Shorty, trapped psychologically within his own interior monologue, believes he narrates his physical entrapment as "half a person" (Lake 9), stating, "there is no one else, only me" (Lake 1). In the gang conflict resulting in his hospitalization and imprisonment, Shorty recovered

the truth of his sister's death, learning his mother lied to him about Marguerite's kidnapping. Shorty's entrapment impels him to face his present circumstances and either physically succumb to the death he has already suffered psychologically: "I had known it already, but when Manman said it, something broke inside me and I stopped being me, stopped being a person.... She's dead.... after that, everything fell down" (Lake 305, 307), or embrace life, and become whole again through his pwen's power to unite him with Toussaint:

> It was crazy, but it was like I knew everything that Toussaint was, everything he knew. How he'd learned medicine from his father. How his wife's eyes had been the precise color of polished amber at dusk. How Toussaint knew what that looked like—amber, I mean—cos his master used a piece of it as a paperweight in his study. …So now I think, maybe I'm losing my shit, cos I can't be Toussaint l'Ouverture—that would be crazy. I keep telling myself I'm just dreaming, that I'm remembering this stuff cos Biggie was always talking about Toussaint…. Sometimes he said that Dread Wilme was Toussaint l'Ouverture born again, but as I lay there in the darkness…I thought, no that's not Dread—or maybe it was Dread once, but not anymore—that's *me*, I'm Toussaint. But then I made myself stop thinking that, cos it's completely mad, completely crazy. (Lake 107, 108)

The dependence of Shorty's present on his past as well as Shorty's inability to access Toussaint, his future, without the intersection of both, develops narratively. To escape the imprisonment of both the collapsed hospital and his collapsed psyche, Shorty must narrate his way out of confinement:

> I want to see the daylight. There's no moun coming after me, but maybe the walls of this place are my enemy; maybe I should fight. I crawl over to the closest pile of rubble and I start to pull at it. It's stupid cos I saw the building from above—I think I did anyway—and I know I can't dig myself out. But I try. I'm a cold gangster, a real G, motherfucker. Gangster for life. That's what I say to the plaster and the metal and the concrete, cursing that stuff as it cuts my hands. I can't see it, but I throw it behind me. I'm crying, I think, and I'm grabbing this stuff and just throwing it into the darkness. I don't even know if I'm going in the right direction. I just dig, and once I start, I can't stop. (Lake 203-204)

Ultimately, in admitting he can't dig himself out, Shorty admits his need for Toussaint and an alternate narrative. As he digs, he remembers Biggie and the process of remembering becomes a confession and an act of atonement. In spite of his imprisonment, if Shorty can forgive Biggie and substitute Biggie's narrative of death with Toussaint's narrative of life, he can escape his past and the darkness of his present circumstances.

Only through the pwen's power to actuate Toussaint's narrative intervention can Shorty's "digging" enable his escape from both beneath the hospital and his past. As Kali Tal points out, "expression, in the form of narration, is frequently a step on the journey towards becoming postliminal, towards rewriting the traumatic events that severed...connections to the rest of society." Shorty must recover his own, and Toussaint's, narrative to reconnect with a life free of destruction and violence. Hidden in the "Then" chapters in which Toussaint's story unfolds is the means by which Shorty can

interpret the "Now" he remembers beneath the rubble. As Shorty continues to dig himself out, and continues to merge his memories with those of Toussaint, he discovers his need to abandon his connections to Biggie and Route 9 and to acknowledge his union with a marassa other than his sister, a union with his spiritual twin, Toussaint L'Ouverture. In so doing, Shorty transforms the past into a vehicle by which to process the present and move forward into his own individuation.

Through their relationships with Biggie and John Askew, Shorty and Kit have prevented their experience of appropriate coming-of-age rituals by sustaining the liminal existence these adolescents embody. As Kent Baxter emphasizes:

> The 'coming' part of 'coming of age' implies some sort of movement. So, in its most basic sense, a coming-of-age narrative often depicts the movement from the pre-adult stage...to adulthood. The developmental arc of the protagonist is motivated by the desire to become an adult, and this journey toward adulthood quite often entails struggle. To put a fine point on it, 'coming of age' signifies an arrival at a destination (consistent with the O.E.D.'s specification that body and mind have reached 'full development'), but the story happens before this arrival, and the story is what interests us. (3)

In embracing John Askew and Biggie, Kit and Shorty have not been "motivated by a desire to become an adult" (Baxter 3), but by their inability to escape the lure of death John and Biggie represent. Both Kit and Shorty have stalled the movement, or abandoned the plot, necessary for the completion of their coming of age; however, the story of their maturation still exists in and through their talisman. If, as Roland Barthes notes,

"expectation [is] the basic condition for truth, [and] truth…narratives tell us, is what is at the end of expectation" (qtd. Baxter 4), the truth of these story worlds, performatively engendered by both boys' talisman, functions as both the readers' expectation of, and the perfomative inevitability of their plots' role as, a rite of initiation into adulthood: "Couched in these terms, the 'truth' at the end of coming of age might be the adult the character ultimately becomes" (Baxter 4). Functioning as the novels' plots, the boys' talisman create and explain the discourse by which Kit and Shorty are themselves defined: "This design 'brings narrative very close to the rite of initiation.' ...[T]he 'rite of initiation,' the movement from immaturity to maturity, dissolution to coherence, question to answer incites readerly desire and propels the narrative forward" (qtd. Baxter 4). Thus, by redefining their relationships with John Askew and Biggie, reappropriating the power of their respective talisman, and returning to the narratives they represent, both boys can "come of age *correctly*" (Baxter 2).

CHAPTER THREE: FACING SHADOWS CAST BY GHOSTS

Kit's and Shorty's relationships with John Askew and Biggie incite incidents which force the boys to reevaluate themselves and their coming-of-age experience. Faced with the dichotomy between the narrative freedom their talisman embody and the liminality their foils emblematize, Kit and Shorty must choose the course by which their own adolescences might be processed. Poised on the threshold of individuated identities, Kit and Shorty face two paths, an embrace of the "ghosts" cast by their inability to transcend the past, or a future lighted by an appropriation of the past as a means by which to understand the selves they might become. Ultimately, this choice rests in both boys' interpretations of the narratives their talisman engender. Kit and Shorty must discover the performative power of narrative, a power embodied within these talisman, to discover the adult self embodied within the layers of adolescence they must translate as they come of age. Either the two can appropriate memory as a tool by which to integrate themselves and their experiences within the larger narrative of their collective culture—a narrative formula engendering a ritual facilitating rather than hindering their coming of age, or exist within a singular trauma narrative, fettered by an inability to transcend the selves these traumas created.

Only when outside circumstances disrupt the course of their friendships with Askew and Biggie do Kit and Shorty find the distance necessary to evaluate the

consequence of these relationships. Significantly, these disruptions are themselves derivative of Askew's and Biggie's "deathly" influence. Although Kit and Shorty are slowly transformed by Askew's and Biggie's influence, they both reach points where they must face themselves and the consequences of the changes their exposure to "death," to Askew and Biggie, have wrought. For Kit, this moment is his teacher's discovery of Askew's cave and "the game called Death" (Almond 5) while for Shorty it is his long awaited confrontation with the rival gang, Boston.

As Askew and his game's influence intensify, Kit manifests a quiescence produced by the game's liminality, resulting in a creative disinterest in the power of his grandfather's stories. Kit's teacher, Ms. Bush, connects this with Kit's desire to rush off from school and spend time with Askew, watching as he heads to the wilderness--to Askew's cave--to play "the game called Death":

> English, and Burning Bush wanting to make a fuss about the [Silky] story again. Maybe we should get some illustrations, she said. Maybe we should make a colored cover for it. She smiled at me. What did I think? "Aye," I muttered. "Anything." …"Good," she said. "Maybe we could talk about it when the lesson's over." "Yes. Anything." I said …"So" she said, when the others had gone. …[She] started on about the cover…. I stood there, let her go on. Outside, Askew and Jax disappeared over the edge of the wilderness. "I've got to go," I said. "Sorry?" "Got to go." "I thought this might be interesting for you." "It is. But…" She caught my arm as I tried to leave. "Christopher, what's going on with you? What is it, Kit?" "Now't," I spat. "Bloody now't." And I shook my head, pulled away,

> lifted my bag, just left her there, hurried out. …I saw Burning Bush watching from a window. (Almond 66, 67-68)

Alarmed by Kit's changes, Ms. Bush follows him to the wilderness and discovers he has been chosen to "die" that day: "The knife stops, pointing at my feet. I take Askew's hand, kneel in the pool, hear Askew's whispered words, stare into his eyes, feel his touch. This is not a game. You will truly die. This is death. Collapse into the pool. Darkness. Nothing" (Almond 68).

In spite of Kit's friend Allie's fearful cries that Ms. Bush not disrupt Kit's state, she pulls Kit from the den as all the children but Allie flee. It is deeply significant that Kit's stories drive Ms. Bush to rescue him from his experience of "death" in Askew's den. Fittingly, Ms. Bush, who encourages Kit's narrative ability, sees the link between his deviant behavior and his apathy toward his story. Kit's writing has the potential to engender his healthy transition to adulthood and to serve as a means by which Kit can process his present circumstances; yet, he has replaced it with Askew's ritual of death. To access his narrative power, to be truly pulled from the floor of Askew's cave, Kit must combine his current reality with the legends of the past, using them as a means by which to interpret himself and his situation rather than a way to abandon the self, and the life, he presently fears:

> What are you looking at I wanted to yell at [Ms. Bush]. What's it got to do with you? I told myself, *Go home. Go home.* But I stood there sullen and silent with my eyes downcast, held back by the terror of what I might find if I did go home,

> and driven to the darkness that my grandpa knew, driven to the darkness that I knew I'd find again that day. (Almond 68)

Only after Ms. Bush and the other teachers discover that Kit, Askew, and other students play "the game called Death" (Almond 5) and subsequently bulldoze the den Askew created for this purpose, is Kit positioned to transcend the limitations of the past and develop a narrative merging his past and present circumstances. Significantly, this occurs as "Winter" (Almond 74) descends on Stoneygate and Askew disappears, marking both a "division" in the structure of Kit's personal narrative as well as in the novel's chapters. Askew leaves Stoneygate for most of the winter just as he is absent from the novel's plot for a large majority of the "Winter" (Almond 74) chapter. Following the end of the game and his consequent expulsion, Askew seems driven to his own "death" by the stress of his father's increasing abuse and violence as well as by his inability to continue the rituals he enacted in his den. Askew flees Stoneygate, leaving its citizens to wonder whether he has died or simply run away. In Askew's absence, Kit regains his creative powers; it is in "Winter" (Almond 74) that Kit reaches his grandfather by re-telling Silky's story. Further, in "Winter" (Almond 74) Kit begins to discover himself, and gain control of his relationship with John Askew and "death," through another story--Lak's narrative.

Importantly, Kit's narrative now transcends his first-person perspective. Lak's story, told in a third-person limited voice, affords Kit with greater narrative power. Like Shorty with Toussaint, Kit "beg[ins] to blend with Lak" (Almond 131) as his dreams transport him to Lak's world, a world merging his past and present circumstances:

> I began to dream. I began to blend with Lak. I crouched in the cave, by the fire. … [T]he magician wore a string of teeth around his throat. Blue tattooed gashes streaked his face. A bear was painted red upon his chest. …Somewhere someone thumped a drum…. He grunted, whimpered, groaned. …Lak's mother was at my side. She held a clutch of shining colored stones in her filthy palm. 'Bring my son back,' she asked. 'Bring my baby back.' The magician rocked and his eyes swiveled. …The magician threw dust into the fire and it flickered, flared; pink smoke filled the cavern. We stood up and danced with the magician around the fire. I held the ammonite out to him. 'Bring my grandpa back,' I said. (Almond 131, 132)

While Lak's story merges Kit's contemporary reality with that of the Neolithic Lak, this union does not translate into Lak's circumstances directly paralleling those of Kit. Unlike Shorty, who transcends the first-person perspective of his own confessional to merge his soul with that of Toussaint's, whose story Shorty seems magically to "narrate" from the third-person limited perspective of "Then," Kit, while also a narrator chronologically and physically "outside of the world of the [Lak] story" (Abbott 71), ultimately transfers the identity of Lak to John Askew:

> the story Kit [is] writing for school is about a young Neolithic boy named Lak who sets out to save his baby sister after she's been stolen by a cave bear. John Askew clearly needs saving from his drunken thug of a father (who also needs saving of course), and, for that matter, [so do] John's much abused mother and baby sister. (Levy 28)

In uniting Askew with Lak, Kit offers Askew a second chance at life at the same time he presents himself with a new identity. Thus, as he dreams his way into Lake's narrative, Kit becomes both the narrator of and the magician in Lak's story:

> I crouched in the cave. Lak's mother was at my side. She held a clutch of shining colored stones in her filthy palm. …The magician rocked and his eyes swiveled.... The magician danced… 'Bring my son back,' said Lak's mother. 'Bring my baby back.' ...We stood up and danced with the magician around the fire. I held the ammonite out to him. 'Bring my grandpa back,' I said. Lak's mother tugged my arm. I met her eye. 'Bring my son back,' she said. '*You.* Bring my baby back.' She pressed the shining stones into my hand. 'Bring them back to me,' she said. (Almond 131-132, emphasis added)

Initially importuning the magician of his own story to "'Bring my grandpa back'" (Almond 132), Lak's mother, in turning to Kit and placing her stones in his hand, reveals that he is the magician whose help he sought: "'Bring my son back,' she said. '*You*. Bring my baby back'" (Almond 132, emphasis added). In including the "'You'" (Almond 132) in her statement, Lak's mother makes clear that she is imploring Kit, not the magician Kit has himself addressed, to bring her children back to her. As such, Lak's mother reminds Kit that he controls his narrative; he is the magician before the fire; he wields the magic of story. Kit already holds the key to his, and the children's, return; it is the ammonite in his hand. Awaking from his visionary dream, Kit opens the palm in which he has been clutching his ammonite only to find the impression of Lak's mother's stones beneath the weight of his talisman: "I held the ammonite in my fist.

Beneath it on my skin were the impressions left by Lak's mother's tiny colored stones " (Almond 132). In the stories Kit's talisman engenders is a magic—and a magician—that can reach the lost John Askew as well as recover the self Kit has lost in Askew's darkness.

Kit must recognize himself as both storyteller and magician to actuate this transformation. In so doing, he personalizes the talisman's performative magic as his "*description* of a speech act [--his story about Lak--] 'counts as' a *performance* of the relevant speech act" (Sweetser 306):

> 'Lak's mother comes to me…She comes to me at night. She brings me gifts. She tells me to bring her son and her baby home.' 'Jeez, Kit.' …'It's really like she's there,' I said. 'Brilliant,' she said. 'Dead scary.' 'See?' I said. 'See what?' 'Magic. Telling stories is a kind of magic.' 'You've not shown Burning Bush yet.' 'No. When it's done. Anyway, it's not just for her. It's for John Askew.' 'Him?' 'Yes, him. I told him I'd write a story and he could do the illustrations for it.' 'If he comes back. If the worst hasn't happened.' 'Yes, if he comes back again…. That's another part of the magic,' I said. 'What is?' 'I think that if Lak and his sister're safe, then Askew'll be safe. And if he's safe, they'll be safe.' She stared at me. 'Jeez, Kit. What d'you mean?' 'I'm not sure,' I said. 'But I'm sure it's true.' (Almond 153-154)

In actuating the performative magic of his narrative, Kit appropriates the creative and narrative power his talisman holds and performs the ritual of telling Lak's story as a means by which to actuate John Askew's rescue and his own transition into adulthood. As

such, Kit's talisman enables his access to Lak's story; telling Lak's story engenders Kit's own individuation as both the talisman and Kit's story simultaneously function as speech acts performatively shaping the novel and its characters' reality:

> By the end of *Kit's Wilderness,* the mysterious events of Kit Watson's own life, the plot of his much praised school story, his recurring dreams, and those of John Askew and Kit's grandfather, have all become so intertwined as to make it essentially impossible to sort out exactly what happens. (Levy 28)

What happens is Kit's discovery of the very type of magical performativity David Almond employs to develop his plot. In an interview with Kathleen Odean, Almond himself admits that the plot he created around and through Kit's inheritance of his grandfather's fossils both produced and became dependent upon Kit's ability to performatively depict Lak's story:

> 'There's even a story within a story, when Kit writes about Lak, a boy who lived during the Ice Age. How did you juggle all of those elements?' 'There was a point when I thought, I can't do this… I can't do this; this is just too much. This was the point when the story of Lak had come in, which I hadn't expected. Kit was writing the story about Lak [for a school assignment], and I thought, Gosh, I can't write this book. But then I thought, Well, I can…. Once I had made that decision and gone back to the book, it really did just take on its own life. …Kit writing the story of Lak in *Kit's Wilderness* really helped the story for me. It was as if each time I came to pieces of the Lak story, I'd say, Oh, Kit can do that. So Kit was writing that bit, and I was writing the other story.' (49)

Ironically, Almond's use of the fossils as a means by which to depict and explain the novel's narrative structure, to performatively actuate that structure, engenders his protagonist's embrace of the same type of performative magic. Almond's use of the fossils to performatively enact the novel's story world in turn produces a character who writes a narrative performatively enacting Kit and Askew's transition from adolescence to adulthood. In both cases, Almond and Kit employ performativity as the basis of their narrative constructions, equally dependent upon "the ability of some descriptions to bring about the described situations in reality" (qtd. in Sweetser 305): "'That's another part of the magic…if Lak and his sister're safe, then Askew'll be safe. And if he's safe, they'll be safe'" (Almond 154).

While Kit's encounter with Lak's mother helps him to begin the process of regaining narrative power, ultimately, both Kit and Shorty must accept that neither Kit's grandfather or Marguerite can be "brought back," or saved from physical death. Only in so doing can Kit finish Lak's story and Shorty fully unify his own narrative with that of Toussaint's. While Kit and Shorty both initially cling to false hopes, they cannot be sustained. The two, through the creation of Lak's story and complete immersion in Toussaint's, must face "death's" consequences or risk the loss of their own identities at the hands of their continued denial. Ironically, it is Kit's inability to accept the inevitability of his grandfather's physical death that drives him into the psychological exploration of death offered by Askew. His fear of facing his grandfather's decline leads Kit to embrace his own. If Kit continues to immerse himself in death's game, ignoring Lak's mother and his narrative role, he will regress in time, becoming lost in the mines

and unable to control or complete Lak's story, swallowed in darkness just like the Christopher Watson of Stoneygate's past: "We came to a larger grave.... It was a monument to the Stoneygate pit disaster. ...I read the final name, caught my breath again, felt the thudding of my heart. ...I traced it with my finger: *Christopher Watson, aged thirteen"* (Almond 20-21). John Askew, whose name also appears on this monument —"Right at the top was the name I knew. "*John Askew. ...Aged thirteen"* (Almond 20)— seeks his own and Kit's merger with the ancestors memorialized on the face of the stone monument; this aim inspired "the Game called death" (Almond 5):

> For Askew, Kit is thus not simply another new follower to bring into his game. … he shares with Askew a unique talent. The two of them can see ghosts, more specifically the ghosts of the Stoneygate children who died in local mining accidents like the one commemorated on the stone, especially those bodies who were never recovered. (Levy 27)

For this reason, at "Winter['s]" (Almond 74) end, when Askew reappears, he draws Kit back into the mines.

John Askew, who like Biggie, fights his lack of control over his circumstances, views death as a welcome escape from his abusive, alcoholic father. Whether this death comes as his own or as his father's murder, Askew longs to succumb to its grasp and is determined to get Kit to accompany him:

> I've come for you, Kit. …You're the only one. …you see things. Things that don't exist for other eyes. …This is because you're dead, Kit. You see through the eyes of the dead. Here you are, among the dead. …Remember, Kit. John Askew, aged

> thirteen. Christopher Watson, aged thirteen. Written in stone beneath the trees. It waited for you. Death drew you back. Death called you to it, Christopher Watson, aged thirteen. Even your gravestone waited for you, just as it waited for John Askew, aged thirteen. …I'll call you, Kit Watson. You know that, don't you? And when I call, I know you'll come. (Almond 167-168, 169)

Thus, a few weeks after Askew's return, he sends Bobby Carr, one of the children involved in "the Game called death" (Almond 5), to summon Kit to the depths of the abandoned drift mine in which Askew awaits the dead, among whom he counts Kit:

> The sun already fell toward the west. Midwinter's Day, the shortest day, the longest night to come. …'Don't look back,' said Bobby, and we turned away, into a narrow valley. …The longest night had already begun. Bobby glanced at his watch, smiled at me. 'S'all right,' he told me. 'This way.' We walked into the hawthorn, twisted through the dense branches, ripped our clothes and skin on the thorns, came to the head-high hole in the rock, the entrance to the ancient drift mine. The boards that had once covered this place were propped against the rock. KEEP OUT was written on them. A skull and crossbones was printed on them. DANGER OF DEATH. (Almond 176-177)

In "DANGER OF DEATH" (Almond 177), in the depths of the ancient drift mine alongside John, Kit's narrative power meets its final test as his and John's future depend on Kit's ability as the storyteller magician to bring "Lak"—John—back, and by doing so, recover his own identity.

Similarly, Shorty faces the final obstacle preventing the full actuation of his narrative power and coming of age as his relationship with Biggie brings him face to face with death's truths. In his final attempt to recover his sister, Marguerite, Shorty recovers two very difficult truths—that of her death and Biggie's involvement in her murder. After joining forces with Biggie to attack Boston and retrieve the girl he believes is Marguerite, Shorty confronts the consequences of his current identity. Ever since her disappearance, Shorty has placed life inside Marguerite while he himself embraced death:

> Marguerite. She's alive. She's with Boston. She's everything--she's hope, she's life, she's the future--not this gangster bullshit of the cars and the cribs and the hos. Together, we're Marassa. We have power. We can heal. We can see the future--we can change it, even.... With Marguerite, I could do anything. We think together. We are two halves of one person. We could use our power. Fix things. But alone I am nothing. I have to have her with me if we're going to be able to do anything to heal this Site in which we live, to change its future. I have to rescue her. (Lake 232-233)

Driven to reunite with the life he has hidden inside his sister, Shorty manipulates the power of death, planning to murder the members of the Boston gang and rescue Marguerite.

Unfortunately, Shorty's use of death to resurrect life miscarries as Shorty finds himself confronted by a reality he has long resisted:

> I was through the smoke and in clear air when I found her. She was huddling against a broken bike, watching the flames. She was so beautiful and so

> vulnerable. She was the only thing pure and uncorrupted in this whole slum. --Marguerite, I said. Marguerite, it's OK. I held out my half of the necklace. --See, I said. See, I still have it. Where's yours? I was looking at her neck to see if she was wearing her necklace. She stared at me, fear and horror on her face. --What are you talking about? she said. Who's Marguerite? (Lake 265)

Not only does Shorty discover that the girl he attempts to rescue is not Marguerite, he learns that his mother lied to him about Marguerite's death and that Biggie helped carry out his family's murder. In an eerie encounter reminiscent of Dread's transfer of his pwen to Shorty, death and life eclipse one another, as Biggie, like Dread Wilme before him, equips Shorty with the final piece of knowledge he needs to access both the spirit in the pwen and his own identity:

> Then Biggie saw me. He was lying in so much blood it was like he was floating on a red sea, like he was something more than a man. I thought then of Dread Wilme and how Manman said that he stayed alive long enough to save me from the guns and the tank and to give me the pwen. (Lake 283)

Biggie, death himself, "...was something more than a man" (Lake 283), and like Dread Wilme, knows he must stay physically alive long enough to impart death's truth upon Shorty. Only the truth of his father and Marguerite's deaths, of the death of half of Shorty's soul, can "save [Shorty] from the guns and the tank and...give [Shorty access to his marassa spirit, Toussaint L'Ouverture, within] the pwen" (Lake 283) Thus, Biggie's confession is the final key necessary to set Shorty's self-delivery in motion:

> I'm sorry, Shorty.... --Sorry for what? He closed his eyes. --What for, Biggie? I said. What you sorry for? ...Your papa, he said. It wasn't Boston...It was me. I was there. Before I had...my own crew.... --But you said... --I lied, said Biggie. I thought...hating Boston would make you a good soldier. The truth is, it was Dread who told us to kill your papa.... (Lake 284-285)

Biggie and Dread merge as Shorty confronts the circumstances of his first death, a death he must embrace to find resurrection from its repercussions. Paradoxically driven to the very murderer of his family, fueled by false hatred, Shorty has destroyed himself with death as a result of Dread and Biggie's lies. Through Biggie, Shorty relives his encounter with Dread as Biggie, like Dread before him, dies, but not before imparting the truth to Shorty, a truth Shorty must now face.

Manman too, mirroring the past, enters this scene of destruction. She, like Biggie, has a confession to make:

> --I did this, she said. I blamed you when you joined Biggie and his gang, but I was the one who did it.... --Marguerite—began Manman. --No, I said. No. I didn't want her to tell me. I knew what she was going to say and I didn't want to hear it. I tried to put my hands on my ears, but Manman wouldn't stop and she pulled them away. --They killed her that night, my manman said. Marguerite. I lied to you about it. (Lake 304-305)

Aware of the truth, of the irony of his relationship with Biggie and the death of his sister, Shorty's past overwhelms him:

> I had known it already, but when Manman said it, something broke inside me and I stopped being me, stopped being a person.... so when she tried to hand me Marguerite's half of the necklace, I closed my fist against it, refused to take it, and crossed my arms over my chest. --You should take it, said Manman. You could put the pieces of the heart back together. --No, I can't, I said. She's dead. ...after that, everything fell down. (Lake 305-307)

Shorty, now unable to deny his sister's death, dies himself: "I stopped being me, stopped being a person" (Lake 306). Not only does "everything fall down" (Lake 307) around him as the fault lines in Haiti give way, "everything fall[s] down"(Lake 307) inside Shorty. With Marguerite's physical death, and his own spiritual death, Shorty has truly become a ghost, merely a physical body whose soul he has destroyed. Trapped beneath the hospital, Shorty "measure[s] the space of [his] prison. ...one body length in each direction....a coffin" (Lake 7), discovering that he is buried by more than rubble; he is buried under the layers of his own story, a story he himself has never told; he is his own coffin. Driven to narrate the events leading to his "burial," Shorty calls out a narrative of confession, his story his cry for help, his request to himself "for you to come and dig me out. ...to unbury me" (Lake 1). As such, Shorty, finally, connects himself to his narrative, and that of Toussaint:

> I feel like if I tell my story to you till the point when I came to the hospital, then that will be the point when I break through into the light. It sounds, dumb, I know, but that's what I'm doing. I'm digging and I'm telling you this shit, and I'm

> throwing the stuff I'm digging behind me, just like I'm throwing my story behind me. It's dirt, my story. I don't need it anymore. (Lake 245)

Ultimately, although Askew challenges Kit's true purpose as much as Biggie challenges Shorty's, Askew and Biggie become important catalysts to both boys' understanding of themselves and their narratives. While Askew and Biggie attempt to deceive Kit and Shorty into accepting them, and death, as their alter-egos, preventing the two from embracing their true natures and developing the identity their destinies have prescribed, they not only fail to do so, they inadvertently advance Kit and Shorty's reappropriation of themselves and their narratives. Kit's relationship with John Askew motivates his creation of Lak; Shorty's relationship with Biggie forces him to narrate his own confessional. Thus, the forces propelling Kit and Shorty to Askew and Biggie simultaneously complicate and enhance the actualization of their destinies.

Similarly, the fossils and pwen wield ironic powers. While Kit's grandfather and Dread Wilme have given Kit and Shorty the necessary talisman to resist the lure of Askew's and Biggie's relationships with death, these talisman encompass a magic derivative of death. Kit and Shorty must learn to distinguish between the imitative mockery of death's power—the game and the gang—and death itself. This ability rests within the realm of narrative. While Askew and Biggie attempt to offer paths for Kit and Shorty to follow, it is Kit and Shorty alone who have paths worth taking, paths transcending the binary simplicity of good and bad, imagination and reality, and life and death.

To come of age, the two must come to terms with death as a force greater than the definitions by which Askew and Biggie have defined it. Only in recognizing Askew and Biggie's negative attractions to this force, and making peace with life—part of which involves dealing with the consequences of the deaths of their grandfather and sister—can they reject their false "twins" and fully comprehend their own, and death's, true "twin," memory. In memory, in the remembrance of his grandfather and Lak, and in the story of, and marassa union with Toussaint L'Oueverture, Kit and Shorty discover the key to their own, and their loved one's immortality. Memory becomes critical for Kit's and Shorty's survival. Memory also becomes critical to their coming of age as these figures, through the power of the boys' talisman, connect Kit's and Shorty's stories to a larger cultural context, providing the ritual necessary to lead them both out of the liminality and death they have embraced.

CHAPTER FOUR: MAGICIAN & MARASSA, PAST & PRESENT SELF

In remembering the past, Kit regains narrative control, finally achieving psychic and temporal transcendence. Kit does this by merging the past of John Askew with that of the ancient cavemen, in both writing and in narrating Lak's story to Askew. Imprisoned by Askew deep within the modern remains of the Stoneygate mines, Kit conjures the narrative power necessary to magically engender both boys' escape:

> I closed my eyes and saw a night so dark and long it went on forever. Opened them and saw Lak watching from the bearskin. 'What was the story?' said Askew....'Tell it to me.' ...I closed my eyes. I gathered the threads of the story. 'His name was Lak,' I murmured... (Almond 191-192);

The past and future merge as John and Lak fuse their stories: "'Askew,' I whispered. 'What is it?' ...I turned my eyes toward Lak's mother. 'There,' I whispered. He looked through the dying flames.... 'Yes,' he said" (Almond 196).

In guiding Askew to Lak's story, Kit guides Askew to a deeper understanding of himself, freeing him from the "game of Death" (Almond 5) and from his imprisonment within the past. Using Lak as a link between past and present, Kit provides John Askew with a future, "gathering [all three within] the threads [of his] story" (Almond 192). Driven to finish Lak's narrative, to save John's life, Kit finds himself at the same time he

saves John Askew. In controlling the narrative, in using story to transcend time, Kit forms his own identity, finally separating “we” (Almond 3) from “I” (Almond 3),

narrating himself into existence as he magically transforms death into life before John Askew's eyes. Ultimately, Kit finally actuates his and John's coming of age through a ritual of storytelling conjuring the past to create present and future:

> He heard the voices of his ancestors--the voices of the dead, calling him, welcoming him. He felt their fingers touching him, guiding him toward them. He entered the great cave into which all the dead descend.... The baby wailed and screamed, filling the world with her voice, her hunger, her refusal to die, her demand for life.... Lak stared. The baby screamed and within the screams Lak heard the words: *These things will come again. These things will come again. These things will come again* (Almond 197)

Through memory Kit finds the key to life, coming of age within and through the knowledge that "*[t]hese things will come again" (*Almond 197).

In the atemporal ritual of shared narrative, Kit discovers and actuates his adult self, realizing that within the longest, darkest night of winter, spring exists, and within spring, autumn waits for summer. Just as the seasons fold over and over upon and within themselves, so too does time, so too do Kit and John Askew's identities. Just as past, present, and future coexist within the fossils Kit carries, so too do they coexist within the realm of memory. Consequently, Kit, and John, can be resurrected from death's cave because its depths fail to extinguish life. Life and death, like time, transcend human limitations. Thus, Allie Keenan enters the cave, and the final scenes of Kit's narrative. Allie Keenan emblematizes light itself—"The girl who brings back disappeared boys in a story and, brings them back in real life. Allie Keenan, actress, life force, rescuer, aged

thirteen" (Almond 205)—as she enacts the ritual of the rescue, the life, Kit and John have already received in darkness, illuminating the revelation: "*These things will come again"* (Almond 197). Kit and John, emerging from the cave alongside Allie, have "come again" (Almond 197) as they have finally "come of age *correctly"* (Baxter 2). Fittingly, "Spring" (Almond 207) has "come again" (Almond 197), despite the chronological reality of winter:

> When does spring begin? March? On the day the clocks go forward? Or does it really start at dawn on the morning that ends Midwinter's Night? ...it was spring already as we walked back down to Stoneygate from the drift mine. It was spring when Christmas came. And it was spring when Grandpa came to stay with us for the final time. (Almond 209)

John Askew, rescued by Kit's story, has found "Spring" (Almond 207), new life, just as Kit, the storyteller magician, his found his own narrative. This experience enables Kit to come to terms with himself and his grandfather's fate, discovering that his connection to his grandfather, preserved in his memory of the story of his grandfather's life, can never be broken:

> 'One day,' he whispered, 'I won't be here anymore. You know that, Kit. But I'll live on inside you and then your own children and grandchildren. We'll go on forever, you and me and all the ones that's gone and all the ones that's still to come.' (Almond 221)

For Shorty also, memory transforms death into life; memory resurrects Shorty. Through memory, Shorty frees himself from the burden of his past: "I'm throwing my

story behind me. It's dirt, my story. I don't need it anymore" (Lake 245). Shorty has to abandon the lies he has believed about Marguerite, remembering them and their negative consequences, to embrace truth--life--the story of Toussaint. Narrating the false Marguerite story, Shorty lost himself in death, filling the empty part of his soul with hatred. Shorty's trauma narrative left him "fill[ed] up with hate, and destroy[ing] everything around [him]" (Lake 87), including himself. For this reason, Shorty began his narrative as a powerless voice unable to determine whether he narrated from the realm of life or death:

> I've been in darkness before, with bodies. I know this place. I wonder now if the hospital is only the shack again, and maybe I wasn't shot in the arm but in the heart or the head and all of this is hell.... Everything I remember is too vivid. My fallen-down hospital is a cinema with the lights turned down--it's total blackness, and my life is too bright against it. (Lake 84)

Initially helpless to overcome the force of his own past, blinded by the memory of a "life...too bright[ly shining]" (Lake 84) on the truth of his soul's darkness, Shorty must find a way to forgive himself, his mother, and Biggie or be destroyed by the consequences of the liminality and hatred he has cultivated since his sister's "abduction." His pwen, and Toussaint, grant him this power by actuating the possibility of a new narrative, a ritual by which he too might "come of age *correctly"* (Baxter 2). Overcome by the pain of his past, Shorty confesses his sins to himself, not realizing that in the act of this confession he begins to free himself from death--from his grip on the dead half of his soul, his grip on Marguerite--opening his soul, and his narrative, to a new twin, to the

spirit of Toussaint embodying his pwen. By embracing Toussaint's story as his own, Shorty finally allows his old life to succumb entirely to death so that he can "rise again," as a complete person, coming of age in control of both his identity and his narrative.

Whereas Shorty has lived a story of hatred producing destruction, Toussaint has lived a life "filled by [his] experience[s] with a fierce longing for justice, a fierce desire to make things right in the world, to redress the balance" (Lake 93). For Toussaint to achieve this, he, like Shorty in the rubble, has had to remember his past--a past filled with slavery and oppression. However, Toussaint, unlike Shorty, overcame the temptation to hate, transcending the liminality produced by such emotional imprisonment. Instead, Toussaint embraced a future of forgiveness while simultaneously seeking justice. Thus, as Shorty merges his story with Toussaint's, he finds a new narrative of forgiveness within the depths of his pwen's magic. By embracing his connection with Toussaint, by acknowledging the reality of their possession of one another, Shorty is reborn, his second birth one of blood and darkness like his first, but unlike his first, this birth is one of self-delivery.

In choosing to make Toussaint's narrative his own, Shorty engages a coming-of-age ritual ultimately resurrecting himself: "We are in the darkness. We are always in the darkness. ...There is no future and no past. We are in the darkness. We are one" (Lake 326-327). In discovering Toussaint, Shorty discovers himself: "He understood that somehow, in some sense, he was this boy and this man simultaneously" (Lake 317). In narrating Toussaint's story, Shorty tells his own, transcending past, present, and future to

entire the realm and the narrative of "Always" (Lake 326), a place where he and Toussaint speak the story of "Now" and "Then" simultaneously:

> Something unties itself inside me and floats loose. At the same time, something takes root inside me, or someone, I should say, cos I feel...I don't know, but I feel that it's the person who was in the dark with me, the person who was dying with me in the dark. I know deep down who it is.... (Lake 331)

"[W]hole now, no longer half a person" (Lake 332), Shorty is ready to embrace both forgiveness and life: "I don't want to be left behind in the darkness anymore" (Lake 333). He is ready to save not only himself from the darkness of his past, but Toussaint from the darkness of his own death so many years before his pwen found Shorty. Together, Shorty and Toussaint revive a narrative of forgiveness capable of saving their own lives and bettering the lives of their Haitian countrymen:

> And it's OK, it's good, it's OK to touch me, cos I'm not Maguerite… I have skin covering my body. I don't have holes in me anymore. I'm whole and I have a soul entire inside me. I've lived and died so many times for this country, and there's nothing that can get in and hurt me. …I think, yes, I was a zombi all along. I should not have been afraid to be a zombi, though, cos… Yes, I died, over and over. But now I've been reborn. (Lake 337)

Together, Shorty and Toussaint were "...in darkness, but now [they are] in light" (Lake 337).

Through the poignancy of Kit's and Shorty's struggles to understand themselves and the stories in which they find themselves, *Kit's Wilderness* and *In Darkness*

underscore the creative power of narrative to transcend the bounds of time and body, ultimately engendering, through the performative magic of the ritual of story, their protagonists with distinct narrative voices. The narrative conflicts faced by both Kit and Shorty symbolize their struggles to overcome the liminality of their adolescence through an awareness of the stories they tell of themselves. Kit and Shorty come of age by learning their dependence on narrative, their need to both represent and reinterpret themselves through the transcendent conditions of narrative discourse, learning the secret of themselves at the same time they uncover the true nature of their individual narrative: "we read in a spirit of confidence, and also a state of dependence, that what remains to be read will restructure the meanings of the already read" (Brooks 23). In discovering the ascendancy of story, Kit and Shorty translate their true identities, finding life as they actuate the force of their own narratives to overcome the depth of their minds' wilderness and darkness: "[the] mind is a small dark place…. We are all trapped in a cave, and that cave is ourselves" (Lake 318)--a self whose escape exists as its own story.

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