

# **Emancipation in the Danish West Indies: Reading Representations in History and Historical Fiction**

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## **The Continuum of History and Fiction**

A simple injunction opens Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*: 'Always historicize!' (1981: 9). Jameson's larger theoretical model in this text undergirds the methodology undertaken here, both as this study juxtaposes historical and fictional accounts and as it investigates authorial agendas and their influence on the (re)construction of (historical) narrative. Indeed, Jameson identifies ideological analysis as the object of his Marxist critical method (1981: 12), focusing his study on 'alternate or rival interpretive codes' (1981: 100) and examining the way specific representations may be seen to undermine, demystify or 'decode' their 'initial givens' (1981: 152). By mapping the transformation of representations of a specific historical event, this study mirrors the method that Jameson describes and executes. Importantly, Jameson suggests that 'the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions' (1981: 79). While that larger scope of Jameson's argument cannot be rendered here, its attention to the underlying ideology resulting in narrative formation and to the way narratives respond to societal dilemmas is the basis for this exploration of history and historical fiction.

Broader mappings of the historical fiction genre have already been undertaken, most recently in Jerome de Groot's *The Historical Novel* (2010). Likewise, critical treatment of the relationship of romance and history in 'literary' and 'popular' romance novels has been started, for example, in *Doubled Plots: Romance and History* (2003), edited by Susan Strehle and Mary Panizza Carden. The purpose of this study is not to offer broader contours of these genres but to excavate a point of their intersection in representations of emancipation in the Danish West Indies (now the United States Virgin

Islands). By placing historical accounts of this event next to those found in historical fiction, this study will map the mutation that this history has undergone and explain why those mutations have been made, and it will show that authorial perspective shapes the telling of the historical narrative—both in traditional historical discourse and in historical fiction. In *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960's Fiction*, Amy J. Elias writes: 'Both postmodernist historical fiction and postcolonial fiction share a metahistorical imagination, an imagination that returns to history and questions the grounds on which it has been epistemologically and politically established' (2001: xiii-xiv). The present study seeks to uncover the grounds on which representations of emancipation in the Danish West Indies are established and will reveal that such grounds establish a continuum of history and fiction along the axis of creative production. At the same time, because the historical context here is one of colonization, it is relevant to note that the (re)construction of history is bound by hierarchical political forces. In short, this analysis seeks to answer, for a particular time and place, Hortense J. Spiller's monumental question: 'So, who cuts the border?' (1991: 16).

Focus on the 'fictional' nature of historical accounts is not new. Ann Rigney, in *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism*, asserts that 'the various concepts covered by the term 'literature' [...] may be applicable to historical representations, not only to works of historical fiction but also to works of historiography' (2001: 7). In *Is History Fiction?* Ann Curthoys and John Docker point to the antecedents of Rigney: 'History cannot escape literature, as Hayden White, one of the writers who has most insisted on the fictive character of history, has famously suggested' (2010: 11). Indeed, White suggested 'that the meaning of the work is to be found in the codes that organize the presentation of its manifest reference, that is, the events that it interprets' (Pihlainen 2002: 41). As a result of the work started by White and others, '[h]istory has become unstructured, linguistic, open, discursive, and in the process, ideological' (Strehle and Carden 2003: xxiii). Likewise, in 'Hystorical Fictions: Women (Re)Writing and (Re)Reading History,' Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, following Linda Hutcheon, assert that '[i]f history and fiction are both constructs, because history is itself largely narrative, the two remain interdependent' (2004: 141).

Of primary concern here is how fictional and nonfictional representations of emancipation in the Danish West Indies differ and what these differences convey about the enterprises of the authors. Reading the fictional historical narratives in relation to other versions of this history uncovers the manner in which that history was encoded, transmuted and transformed, and it foregrounds both the fictional nature of any historical narrative and the varying enterprises of both fictional and nonfictional accounts. Prior to exploring the *fictionalization* of this history, then, this analysis will examine the *fiction* of this history as it is presented in traditional historical texts—both to lay a foundation for examination of the historical fictions and to suggest that such historical texts find their own places on the fictional continuum. Historical texts selected here reflect only a sampling of those available and focus on those which would have been available to the novelists at hand, especially in light of linguistic and geographical limitations that would have restricted their research. With this in mind, one may turn to the contested history of the Danish West Indies—a history which has gone largely unmapped in present cultural, literary, and historical accounts.

### **Historical Accounts of Emancipation: The Writing and Righting of History**

In one of the earliest renderings of emancipation in the Danish West Indies, *A Historical Account of St. Thomas, W. I.* (1852), John P. Knox gives an account of insurrection in the islands and offers a reading of the events of 1848. Less important than the information given are the assumptions which orchestrate how the narrative is constructed. Knox begins his chapter on emancipation by asserting that a considerable number of the slaves imported into St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix were ‘of the most savage character’ (1970: 110), at first requiring strict laws (as well as death and amputation) before the King of Denmark ‘took them under his fostering care’ and they were ‘turned from their heathenish views and immoralities to the service of God’ (1970: 111). By beginning his account at this point in the history—the point at which legal and religious institutions combined powers in order to subjugate and control the behavior of Africans for the purpose of controlling labor—Knox underscores his basic premise that the behavior of Black people at the time of rebellion and emancipation marks the triumph of Christianity

in 'civilizing' Black peoples in the Danish West Indies. The remainder of his 'history' is thus rendered in a manner which validates this reading.

After questioning the policy of informing slaves that emancipation was ordered to occur in twelve years (a proclamation which Knox reads as a benevolent but misinformed gesture on the part of the Danish government), Knox recounts the ringing of alarms on the night of July 2, 1848, the first evidence of imminent insurrection, but one that was followed by no immediate threat. The following morning began the march to Christiansted, where increasing numbers caused inflamed 'passions' and lead to the sacking of the houses of police officers and judicial personnel. Knox neglects to suggest that the sacking of the houses of police and judicial personnel and the destruction of the scaffold reflect deliberate and organized resistance to the legal institutions that underpinned slavery. Instead, this behavior is attributed to emotionalism and mobbism.

Continuing, Knox points out that many freedmen left town and that 'quietness was partially restored' (1970: 115) that evening, after the governor-general announced immediate emancipation. That night, however, shots were fired and freedmen killed when a 'band of negroes' attempted to reenter the town, and it was this night that 'fires were visible everywhere, lighting up the very heavens' (Knox 1970: 116). The following day militia was called out, and fires continued the following night. Underlying this narrative is the fear these events provoked for those on St. Thomas, the fires 'being visible by their reflection in St. Thomas' (Knox 1970: 117). Knox's physical location on the neighboring island of St. Thomas during these events thus compels the import with which these particular events are rendered. Next, on the sixth, without orders, troops marched out and 'arrested the leader of the rebellion, Buddoe, a young man belonging to the estate La Grange, with other prominent blacks, and found that on many of the estates the negroes had remained faithful, and had even fought desperately against the rebellionists to protect their masters' property' (Knox 1970: 118-19). Here, Knox renders events in terms that build his argument for the success of Christianity. Absent here, for example, are the personal motives that may have underscored some of the defensive behavior on the part of those Afro-West Indians fighting to secure property from destruction. Through narrative juxtaposition, in fact, Knox implies that it was due to the instigating leaders that others had acted rebelliously.

According to Knox, estates suffered losses, though the fires, he says, were largely confined to out-houses and cane pieces, and '[t]he life of not a single white person, however, had been taken' (1970: 119). Knox does not follow the fates of the Black leaders, only mentioning that nine were killed, as were other Blacks on the island. The fact that no whites were killed and the little said of the black leaders signal Knox's sympathy with the planting and professional classes and are used by Knox to suggest that the majority of Blacks had been transformed (pacified) by Christian doctrine. The narrative itself, however, fails to sustain Knox's reading. The presence of mercenary military forces, the number of Afro-West Indian deaths, the numbers refusing to work except 'on their own exorbitant terms' (Knox 1970: 119), and the ensuing enactment of strict labor codes all point to a continued resistance on the part of Afro-West Indians, one that led to the recodification of labor relations.

What Knox's oscillating narrative makes most clear is his own fear of and anticipation of mass Black violence: 'That the slaves was [sic] not impelled to greater acts of violence [...] is a matter of astonishment' that can only be accounted for by 'a moral and religious influence' and by the years of Danish 'paternal solicitude' that curbed 'the ignorant laboring classes' from greater acts of 'fury and revenge' (1970: 120/21). His shock is not that the injustices of slavery failed to produce greater anger. Instead, 'passions' are seen as curbed by paternalism on the part of the Danish government and by the efforts of Moravian, Episcopal, and Lutheran congregations. At the same time, however, the narrative hedges; quiet and order are said to be maintained by Spanish troops (not Christian morality). After discussing (without conclusion) suspicions that Governor-General von Scholten was either aware or unaware of the rebellion about to take place, Knox summarily asserts that von Scholten's actions 'were unworthy [of] his high office, and jeopardized the dearest interests and welfare of those he was bound to protect' (1970: 120). Knox's alignment is clear, as is the implicit negation of any concept of Afro-West Indian citizenship; 'men' are white men, and it is clearly for them that the governor should administer.

Knox's position as pastor of the Reformed Dutch Church on St. Thomas and the time of publication (1852) certainly prepare the contemporary reader for the tone of Knox's work, for the underlying nostalgia for the 'paternal' national control of Black

labor found therein, and for the assertion of the triumph of Christianity. At issue here is the manner in which perspective regulates the apparent actuality of the narrative—what is included and what is excluded, as well as what underlying principles orchestrate the terms in which the narrative is told.

This is also gleaned when comparing Knox's account with eyewitness accounts rendered by Frederik von Scholten and published in Charles Edwin Taylor's *Leaflets from the Danish West Indies, St. Thomas, D. W. I, 1888*. Frederik von Scholten, brother of Governor-General Peter von Scholten, quotes Knox's text but also challenges its veracity: 'We prefer, however, to give the statements which have been placed at our disposal, of those who were active participants and whose knowledge of the events which took place would be more accurate from this very fact' (1973: 126). According to Stadthauptmand Chamberlain von Scholten, he himself delayed the firing of the alarm for fear of immediate Black seizure of the island. Stadthauptmand recounts his own attempts to calm Black demonstrators on the morning of the rebellion, and he asserts that 'it was quite the opinion of every one that only the prompt emancipation of the slaves would save the island from further destruction' (von Scholten 1973: 129). He also renders an account of actions taken by Buddhoe and Martin King, two Black leaders. While all the details cannot be rendered here, it is important to note that this account differs from that of Chamberlain Irminger, which immediately follows. Irminger reveals Peter von Scholten's initial refusal to use militia force to quell marchers, and his narrative starkly contradicts the assertion that all agreed that emancipation was the only course. In fact, he had gone to the ship Ornen to ready arms and was surprised to find that emancipation had been proclaimed (von Scholten 1973: 134-35). The remainder of his detailed account renders the riotous aftermath and the shift to a new government, after which Frederik von Scholten then recounts events on the west and south ends of the island, of his brother's trial and acquittal, and of the fates of Buddhoe and Martin King.

Looking at these accounts closely and along with Knox's text, it becomes clear that verifiable occurrence is not easily obtained. Stadthauptmand and Irminger, for example, differ on the time of arrival of the Ornen at Bassin/Christiansted (Irminger himself being aboard). Differences such as these underscore the shifting and constructed nature of the historical narrative from this period. It also becomes obvious that a great

deal of information in each of the narratives is second-hand—written as it was told to the author by another party. Narrator Frederik von Scholten makes this clear: ‘[p]assing over the concluding remarks of Chamberlain v Scholten which have reference, merely, to some incorrect reports afterwards set afloat [...] we come to the narrative of Chamberlain Irminger’ (1973: 132). Given the numerous reports of second-hand information in all three narratives—as well as the context of the text, in which the first two accounts are told to and written by Frederik von Scholten, with little distinction made between his own voice and those he translates—the verification of the entire piece is questionable, though most convincing when alternate accounts concur.

More interesting is what happens to accounts of 1848 as historians write at later dates, further transforming the history and, at times, reclaiming formerly absent points of view. Compare Knox’s rendering of emancipation with that of J. Antonio Jarvis, a well known and honored Afro-Virgin Islander who published *The Virgin Islands and Their People* in 1944. One may argue that Jarvis’s (re)writing seeks to ‘right’ the historical narrative, to decode it from the rubrics of earlier versions by encoding it in new terms and paradigms. Not under the rubrics of insurrection and emancipation, but in a chapter entitled ‘Revolt in St. Croix,’ Jarvis subtitles his account ‘How the Negroes wrested freedom from their masters—The changes emancipation made in the economy of the island.’ Moreover, he begins it by stating:

When the Negro slaves in revolt set fire to the island of St. Croix in July, 1848, the glow was visible forty miles away in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, where excited blacks and frightened whites remembered stories of 1733, when Negroes had made St. John a battlefield whose ruins the restorations of a hundred years had not effaced. (Jarvis 1944: 78)

Also physically located on St. Thomas, Jarvis here reveals the underlying narrative within his account, which counters that of Knox. His account is to be of slaves who ‘would not wait’ for freedom; and, this being the case, it focuses more upon the agency of the Black population than upon the emotions of whites (and is not at all about the effects of Christianity upon the Black mind).

According to Jarvis, when Governor-General von Scholten went to Christiansted, he found ‘[o]ne band of slaves, numbered nearly two thousand [...] ready for a massacre

if not given their way' (1944: 79). A recreation of one of their voices is included in the text: 'but we can burn and destroy Santa Cruz if we no fo' get free; and dat we go'n do' (Jarvis 1944: 79). This sentence is an altered version of the one found in Stadthauptmand Chamberlain von Scholten's narrative: 'but we can burn and destroy if we do not get our freedom, and that is what we intend to do' (von Scholten 1973: 130). In each case, it seems, the authors translate what was (apparently) said into their own language and that of their (intended) readership, Stadthauptmand's translation stressing for his (white) audience the apparent need for immediate emancipation, while Jarvis's translation stresses for his (Afro-West Indian) readership the collective agency evidenced by the Black laboring class. Further, according to Jarvis, General Buddhoe, 'resplendent in an unmatched uniform, with polished boots and sword, rode about the country and mustered his bands' (1944: 79). Here, Jarvis's (re)creation of detail transforms Buddhoe from an outlaw insurgent (as in Knox's narrative) into a striking and heroic leader of (what is thereby) organized Black resistance—a regal leader rather than a riotous rebellionist.

According to Jarvis, the ultimatum of Afro-West Indians stipulated that action would be taken if demands for freedom were not met by four o'clock. However, other than jeers, damage was not done until Draper Moore suggested shooting Blacks in order to control the crowd, at which time he was forced to flee and his house was destroyed. Jarvis is here careful to expose the oppressive behavior on the part of the colonial officers which led to Black retaliation, which is no longer seen as being caused by specific rebellionists (as in Knox's text) but by actions against the Black community. It was not until after the proclamation, while officials plotted against von Scholten and his cabinet, that '[t]he former slaves began needlessly to burn the island' (Jarvis 1944: 81). At issue here are both the manner in which history is transmuted and the manner in which authorial enterprise effects the 'facts' rendered and the tone of the rendering. Jarvis's text gives agency—verbal, physical, and organizational—to the Afro-West Indians seeking their freedom. While his text fails to render the complexity of bondage that led to what he sees as needless burning, his narrative substantially revises the tone found the writing of earlier missionaries and Danish officials.

Discussion of representations of the emancipation in the Danish West Indies assumes, in part, a premise articulated by J. Hillis Miller. 'Reading means not just



reading literary works, but [...] cultural signs of all sorts,' says Miller. 'Such signs are transmitted from the past and permeate our lives today in ever-renewed memorial acts of reading that make history' (1991: 127-28). Of importance is the fact that history itself is created by 'memorial acts of reading.' With this in mind, one may also consider the program for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of emancipation, which contains letters from various officials; a reprint of von Scholten's Emancipation Proclamation; a reprint of Buddhoe's profile from *Profiles of Outstanding Virgin Islanders*; a chronology of the governmental career of Governor-General von Scholten, '[w]ho on July 3, 1848 emancipated the slaves in the Danish West Indies' (1973: n. p.); population statistics from von Scholten's papers; and King Frederik's September proclamation validating the one by von Scholten (who was then soon to be prosecuted in Denmark for his actions on the grounds that he had misused and overstepped his authority). This 1973 program obviously highlights the role played by von Scholten and Buddhoe, creating heroic figures through the 'memorial acts of reading' undertaken by Virgin Islanders receiving the program.

At the same time, the program ignores research done by Preben Ramlov several years earlier and available through an interview published in a 1967 *Virgin Islands View*, a semi-centennial commemorative edition focusing on fifty years of American citizenship. Researching the life of von Scholten for a commissioned biography, Ramlov suggests to the interviewer regarding Anna Heegaard, von Scholten's mistress: 'Now, you can see who freed the slaves!' (1967: 16). The reclamation hinted here and evident in the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary program is more fully undertaken by the writers of historical fiction. What is relevant, however, is that historical accounts, from the earliest to the more recent, (re)create the history of emancipation in the Danish West Indies according to the sympathies and perspectives of the authors, which shade and transform that history, placing the historical narrative on a continuum with fiction.

### **Fictional Accounts of Emancipation: The (Re)Writing of History**

In *The Romantic History of St. Croix*, Florence Lewisohn sums up the conditions leading to emancipation:

Time was running out, and the stage was set for rebellion with the characters onstage: a liberal Governor; his free-colored mistress; reactionary or dubious planters; a slow-moving home

government; some 5,000 free Negroes, and some 17,000 slaves on St. Croix who wanted their freedom. (1964: 51)

It is the ‘romantic’ nature of these conflicts upon which Patricia Gill and Jean Heyn capitalize in their historical novels of the event. Patricia Gill—a dramatist, sociologist, and educator who was born in New York and who emigrated to St. Croix—self-published *Buddhoe: The Man Who Shaped the History of St. Croix* in 1976. Twelve years later, Jean Heyn—a novelist then residing in Santa Barbara, California, having spent ten years in the Virgin Islands, during which time she researched her novel—published another version of this history entitled *The Governor-General’s Lady: A Novel* (1988). Both works share a fascination with the history of St. Croix during the late 1840s; yet, like the histories noted above, each text varies that history to suit the underlying narrative of the author. These texts also share a fascination with the Black participants, particularly Buddhoe and the governor-general’s free-colored mistress, Anna Heegaard. Their project, then, can be seen as one of the recuperation, one in which previously silenced figures are given voice. They show ‘the need to resist historical amnesia and to speak the unspeakable [...] the necessity of rewriting the past because the dominant versions of history have left blanks, gaps, and misrepresentations’ (Donadey 2008: 65/ 66). Of course, analysis must be made to determine whether or not such recuperation succeeds in honoring these figures or merely subordinates them to another method of erasure.

That the novels are preoccupied with the rendering of verifiable history is evident in each case. As Leger Grindon writes: ‘The appeal to authenticity is reinforced by embellishing the historical [text] with scholarly references, period detail, or antiquated manners’ (1994: 3). Patricia Gill’s text, *Buddhoe*, painstakingly provides the reader with both a historical layout of the island and the conflicting attitudes of the planters regarding von Scholten’s emancipation plans, as well as the economic conditions leading up to that time (accurately describing, for example, the increasingly difficult sugar market). Figures such as the Harringtons (who are kind to von Scholten and who nostalgically mourn the loss of their slave labor), La Fleche (an obnoxious slave trader), as well as McIntyre and MacGregor (adamantly against von Scholten) reproduce the tensions (and fictionalize actual figures) as they are presented in the histories. Planters, for example, arrange to have mercenaries brought in (Gill 1976: 61); this and a wide variety of other details from

the historical accounts are rendered throughout the text. In fact, by placing John Rand in the position of administrator and letter-writer for von Scholten, Gill is able to dramatize the series of petitions that the governor-general undertook seeking the freedom of the 'unfree.' Gill's text also takes care to reproduce actual efforts on the parts of both Heegaard and von Scholten to educate Black children (1976: 27). However, a significant historical change is made in Gill's text; the burning of the plantation begins the night before the slaves march on Christiansted. This change emphasizes the fear of the planting class and diminishes the perception of the slaves as remaining an unruly mob after the proclamation is made. Notably, Gill quotes Stadthauptmand Chamberlain von Scholten's version of the threat of slaves to destroy property, though she has altered the date of the firing of the plantations as rendered in this text. Here, the fictional nature of the history is both played upon and emphasized, this play being determined by the project of the author.

Heyn's text, *The Governor-General's Lady*, also renders the landscape and socioeconomic history of the island, as well as the act-by-act movements of von Scholten via Heegaard's perspective as his mistress. The failing sugar economy and the attitudes of planters are carefully represented. Significantly, in recreating this world, Heyn also attempts to represent the island dialect of the time. While significant changes occur in relation to the characterization of Buddhoe (discussed below), events of the days surrounding emancipation are largely taken from the earlier histories, including the sequence of the firing upon great houses and the deaths of Afro-West Indians. Unlike Gill's text, Heyn's narrative does not demand the sublimation of these events to textual needs, though, for its purpose, other figures are greatly altered. In fact, it is perhaps in the rendering of the principle historical actors that each of these historical retellings most reveals its own orchestrating principles, and it is therefore pertinent to examine accounts of the figures who become focal points of later fictionalization of the period as one examines the manner in which these figures are transmuted in the fiction.

According to Stadthauptmand Chamberlain von Scholten's narrative, Buddhoe, or General Bordeaux, 'seemed in command of the immense concourse of people which filled the street' (von Scholten 1973: 130). Principle leader of the revolt, he accompanied Governor-General Peter von Scholten on his ride to restore peace after emancipation.

According to Frederik von Scholten, he was later taken prisoner in Bassin; his life was saved by Major Gyllich, and he was placed on board the Ornen dressed as a gentleman, only to have his clothes and provisions taken, to be landed in Trinidad, and to be barred from the Danish islands (1973: 144-45). Following this, '[h]e is said to have been seen in Curacao afterwards, whence he proceeded to the United States of America' (von Scholten 1973: 145). *The Danish Heritage of the U. S. Virgin Islands*, published by the St. Croix Friends of Denmark and translated from Danish records, differs from these accounts by suggesting both that 'Buddho' personally demanded and obtained emancipation, that he deterred bloodshed in the western part of the island, and that rumors indicated that he was make to walk the plank on the Ornen (Lawaetz 1977: 37).

Jarvis depicts Buddhoe as a regal leader of the revolt and of his fate reports only that he was stripped and put to work on board the Ornen (1944: 82). His current folk status is verified by the government-commissioned biographical essay in *Profiles of Outstanding Virgin Islanders* (1972), which asserts that Buddhoe, Moses Gottlieb, was probably from Barbados, was literate, worked as a sugar boiler, led the rebellion, worked to restore peace after emancipation, and was believed to be a friend of Governor-General von Scholten but denied von Scholten's foreknowledge of the rebellion (Project Introspection 1972: 105-6). Buddhoe's history is here seen to be as elusive and fluid as the spelling of his name. His stature has steadily increased with the passage of time, as have the number of variations in the accounts of his life. His life, too, is most altered by the novelists who were to fictionalize it, the sheer mystery, it seems, creating the need for authorial license. As de Groot asserts: '[h]istorical novels concentrate on the gaps between known factual history and that which is lived to a variety of purposes' (2010: 3).

In Gill's text, Buddhoe is a regal figure who is the confidant of the governor-general and ever-present in government offices: '[i]f one sought the elegance of breeding, the contemptuous aristocratic grace, here one found them in Anna and Buddhoe' (1976: 21). What underlies Gill's radical departure from earlier historical accounts, so blatant in a text entitled *Buddhoe*, a text that is so conscious of history that chapters are titled with months in which verifiable historical events occurred? In the vein of her romance, Gill sexualizes Buddhoe, initiating the reader through the attraction of Sybil. Daughter of Reverend Slater, a white American abolitionist, Sybil is a recent immigrant from the

United States who is staying with relatives. Buddhoe is also seen as having an intense platonic relationship with Anna Heegaard (Gill 1976: 44), and as having a sexual relationship by boldly sneaking onto the Harrington plantation to be with Delia, a slave-woman who has a nervous breakdown when he decides to leave her, she asserts, because of his love for Sybil (Gill 1976: 81). The strategy is one which implies Buddhoe's desirability as a central romantic character: 'A woman, he [the doctor] speculated, a young girl, would be terribly sensitive to that aura of healthful containment which was Buddhoe's, a man sleek as a tiger, with a feline, plotting mind' (Gill 1976: 86).

It may be noted that other than Anna Heegaard, none of the other characters in the novel are sexualized in this manner. Is Gill attempting to recuperate Afro-West Indian agency, or is she fetishizing Black male and female bodies? Moreover, in a text presenting (Afro-) West Indian history (to an American mass market), is Gill attempting to render the more lenient codes in the islands pertaining to racial 'mixing,' or is she deliberately drawing upon (and thereby reinstating) American taboos pertaining to interracial desire? Here, Gill's recuperation of Buddhoe as a historical figure is subsumed by racial politics within the United States, which problematize the presentation of him as a sexualized character. In this light, the historical detail of the text may be seen to neutralize the authorial message, preempting judgments on the part of the reader about Buddhoe's (stereotypical) characterization. As Grindon notes: '[h]istory as a veil hides controversial positions and defuses audience resistance or political censorship' (1994: 3).

Further complicating the depiction is Buddhoe's dedication to von Scholten, who is said to have given him his freedom, Buddhoe, according to this account, having been born a slave in the islands. This alteration of history may be seen as an elevation of Buddhoe's stature; he is now associated with government politics. At the same time, this change in history subordinates Buddhoe to the figure of von Scholten, and it also mitigates his accomplishment: leading a rebellion as a Black tied to a plantation (as Buddhoe is seen in the histories) is different than leading a rebellion as an assistant to the governor-general (as Buddhoe is seen in the novel). Gill's attention, then, is to the perception of Buddhoe's stature. Buddhoe's actual role in the rebellion leading up to emancipation is subordinated to depiction of him as one who could wield political influence. Also, by concluding Buddhoe's part in the novel by having him escape from

the island with Sybil (after a ‘touching’ scene between the two in which Sybil throws herself into his arms and in which Buddhoe adamantly verbally defies the planters), Gill butchers verifiable history at the same time that she constructs a white woman as Buddhoe’s center of desire—another indication of her own readership and her own enterprise. The text both breaks the societal restrictions of its day and reinstitutes societal stereotypes; it both allows an interracial union and exoticizes the Black male body.

In Heyn’s text, Buddhoe, or Adam Gottleib, surprisingly turns into the son of Nonno, Anna Heegaard’s young love, whose features she immediately recognizes in the young leader. Heegaard is seen to confer with him after recognizing his name. These incidents are not justified in prior historical readings but enhance Heyn’s depiction of Anna Heegaard’s sacrifice: ‘Anna sat still, her heart pounding as memories of young love [...] came back to her’ (1988: 154). Here, Buddhoe is a regal character, determined for action and said to be much like von Scholten (Heyn 1988: 156/57). Heegaard learns that he is a sugar boiler at La Grange and is told by Frederik von Scholten that he is a leader of the slaves; however, again departing from history, Heyn depicts Buddhoe going to Beulow’s Minde to see Heegaard and von Scholten before the rebellion breaks out (both before and after the initial promise of freedom in twelve years), and both Heegaard and von Scholten are seen to know of secret meetings. Buddhoe is also seen sitting on a white horse—associated in prior histories with Martin King. In Heyn’s text, then, historical veracity pertaining to Buddhoe is sublimated primarily to the stature and characterization of Anna Heegaard. His background affords Heegaard a Black, militant lover to be sacrificed for political dedication to the ‘unfree,’ and his consultations with Heegaard and von Scholten help dramatize the kind of role that *she* played. Writing of Black British historical fiction, Dave Gunning suggests that such fiction ‘is able to insist on the centrality of black involvement’ (2007: 203). Texts by Gill and Heyn indicate this focus, yet they alter the historical record to achieve it.

Anna Elizabeth Heegaard has also become an increasingly present figure in the recreation of the history of this time. Florence Lewisohn offers two detailed accounts of her life and participation, the first in *Diverse Information on the Romantic History of St. Croix* (1964). Here one finds that Heegaard was known to be the daughter of a freed woman and free herself, at one time owning fifteen slaves and considerable property

inherited from her mother and being the mistress of three white men before she ‘joined von Scholten in their long relationship, which was terminated only by the misfortunes of history’ (Lewisohn 1964: 50-51). Lewisohn points out (as do others) that while interracial marriage was forbidden by law, it was customary for officials to have Black mistresses. Lewisohn credits Heegaard with influencing von Scholten to push for freedom of and education for slaves and for inviting both Blacks and whites to receptions, which Heegaard, as mistress of the house, hosted. In *St. Croix under Seven Flags*, Lewisohn expands her description, reporting that von Scholten (governor-general from 1827-1848) fell in love with Heegaard after his wife returned to Denmark. Lewisohn goes on to detail Heegaard’s maternal lineage and her relationships, suggesting that Heegaard still loved Captain Knudsen but left him ‘as a matter of expediency’ (1964: 230) when invited by von Scholten, seeing this as an opportunity for influence. Together, they began programs to educate slaves, built Beulow’s Minde, and began revising the role of Afro-West Indians in the sociopolitical landscape of the islands.

While Lewisohn’s second account is the most detailed of those under consideration here, William W. Boyer offers his own in *America’s Virgin Islands: A History of Human Rights and Wrongs* (1983). Significantly, Boyer cites and agrees with Neville Hall that despite the absence of hard evidence, there are reasons to believe that Heegaard had considerable influence over von Scholten in his attitudes toward Black education and emancipation (1983: 52). Boyer also goes on to characterize Peter von Scholten as a great humanist, citing von Scholten’s writing on the urgency of the abolition of slavery, as well as other evidence of his dedication to this pursuit. This later account concurs with that of Isaac Dookhan, who characterizes von Scholten as having ‘only an elementary education and no real culture,’ as spending lavishly and being ‘very conscientious and warm-hearted’ (1974: 173), and as earning the dislike of the planting population because of his attention to the slave population. In fact, von Scholten had proposed several plans for abolishing slavery, one petition recommending time that slaves could work for themselves, their earnings to be paid into the colonial treasury and then to be used to pay for the freedom of slaves (Dookhan 1974: 174). Any petition, however, required a royal ordinance. Further, although von Scholten did proclaim

compulsory free education for all slave children, this plan was long in being fully enacted, particularly in the frightful aftermath of emancipation.

In Gill's *Buddhoe*, Anna Heegaard is not seen in relationships prior to her involvement with von Scholten. Gill is thereby able to construct a love relationship between Heegaard and von Scholten that earlier historians have not justified. To do so, Gill constructs Heegaard in both erotic and exotic terms: 'The shock of unexpected beauty, is that it? [...] But look at the long, strong legs, revealed by the fine, clinging silks I bring her from France. Regard the waist; what white woman has such a waist, I ask you?' (1976: 15). Here, Heegaard is eroticized through von Scholten's point of view. She is also described as 'power and a threat' (Gill 1976: 16), and she is seen in contrast to Sybil, who is a strict figure, if also anti-slavery, who becomes softened by island leisure and relaxed social codes. The two become foils when Sybil becomes the tutor of Heegaard (though Lewisohn suggests that Heegaard was already literate) and Buddhoe (also contradicting earlier accounts). Heegaard is placed in a position of power over the increasingly debilitated von Scholten, and Gill emphasizes her ownership of Beulow's Minde (which she did, indeed, own, either partially or in its entirety). The focus in this portion of the narrative is upon an idealized love relationship that concludes when von Scholten leaves the island to defend his actions in Denmark. Their romance is paralleled by that of Inger Hansen and her love for a young Black man whom she attempts to run away with before they are caught and he is lynched (Gill 1976: 56-58) — an extra narrative that supplements the romantic focus of the text for which history is altered. The conclusions of their lives are cited briefly in an epilogue to the novel; hence, for Gill, the story is concluded with the denouements of the major romantic plots.

In Heyn's *The Governor-General's Lady*, direct acknowledgement is made for those who aided her research into Anna Heegaard's life, both librarians and surviving family members, and she cites as a major source Lewisohn's *St. Croix under Seven Flags* (1970). This, of course, does not stop her from adding to and altering that narrative. Though Heegaard is long deceased in the framing narrative of Heyn's story, her ghost is said to still haunt Beulow's Minde looking for the return of von Scholten (1988: 17). Following Lewisohn's description, Heyn begins her narrative by establishing Heegaard in the context of the home of her mother and grandmother, but creating for her an elaborate



romantic affair with a slave named No-no (1988: 59), whom her mother (in the role of native informant to Anna's white suitor) causes to be sold so that Heegaard will consort with a white man of means. This relationship is economical, and Heegaard is not given the economic endowment that she is known to have had. This alteration allows Heyn to dramatize the sexual bartering of the Black (and mixed) female body that was inherent in many such relationships of that time. It also sets the stage for her depiction of Heegaard as not only deeply in love with von Scholten but also deliberately positioning herself to help attain freedom for her people—even at the cost of relationships within the Afro-West Indian community. To this end, Heyn also fabricates (or depicts) an abortion for Heegaard, who refuses to have a child for one of her consorts and thus becomes barren. Clearly, then, Heyn alters history in order to emphasize Heegaard's political motives and to construct a romance between Heegaard and von Scholten.

In her relationship to von Scholten, Heegaard is given a great deal of authority. The governor-general is seen entreating her assistance: 'Anna, what shall I do? Help me, Anna. There must be something' (Heyn 1988: 125). His political ideology is also seen as having been deeply influenced by hers: 'But Anna's words kept coming back to him: "You must stand firm [...] the workers must have their freedom"' (Heyn 1988: 173). She is also thoroughly involved in creating educational prospects for slaves (Heyn 1988: 148) and in helping Afro-West Indians in times of trouble. Again, the romantic plot is central; yet, here the narrative does not end at its dissolution; it ends with the death of Heegaard and the departure of Hannah (the transcriber of her narrative) back to her mainland home. Here, then, while the romantic plot is central and highly crafted, it is also subordinated to the depiction of Anna Heegaard's life and legacy, to her (possible) empowerment in the political milieu of the day. Like Gill, Heyn transforms history to suit her authorial needs; however, Heyn's focus is less on the creation of a historical romance and more on the depiction of Heegaard as a heroic figure. If this leads her to exaggeration, it may be for the reason articulated by Norman W. Jones, who suggests that historical fictions 'tend to emphasize points of connection alongside differences [...] overstating similarities and exoticizing differences, projecting positive or negative fantasies on some historical other as a utopian self or dystopian shadow' (2007: 2).

The commonalities between the novels of Gill and Heyn are as relevant as their differences in this discussion of authorial enterprises. A shared feature of each work, for example, is that the character most closely linked to narrative perspective—in Gill's work, John Rand, a frequent center-of-consciousness, and in Heyn's work, Hannah, the character in the text who hears and writes down Heegaard's story—is someone who travels to the island, who becomes an outside witness to historical narrative, and who is changed by the experience. This not only indicates the perspective of the authors (both non-Islanders who migrate for varying amounts of time and who research the history that they write about), but it also indicates readership and authorial project. The reader is implied to be unfamiliar with the island; his or her introduction is eased and facilitated by the point of view of the traveler; he or she is meant to be awed as the traveler is awed and changed as the narrator is changed by the island's aesthetic. The reader is thereby indoctrinated into the culture (the slow pace, the particular notions of race-relations) and is thereby vicariously embroiled in the romances upon which both of the novels focus. It is only the historical context that mitigates a reading of the texts as ethnographic treatises.

Gill's text begins as John Rand arrives on St. Croix seeking economic betterment. His change begins almost immediately, when he is received by Governor-General von Scholten and Anna Heegaard at a formal reception. At first shocked, by the end of the first chapter, Rand has already had a realization: '[s]uddenly he knew that even if he went back home in a year or two, it would not be that same John Rand who returned. "I know no Buddhoe's in Virginia," he said to Harrington' (Gill 1976: 23). These first changes in Rand relate to a different racial climate in the island. An aesthetic is also hinted by the attitudes of the Harringtons when many other planters begin departing: 'some of us just can't [leave], can we? I mean, life wouldn't be right, anywhere else' (Gill 1976: 64). In fact, by the end of the novel, John Rand and Sybil Slater 'both belong to the island' and 'have no other home' (Gill 1976: 122).

In Heyn's text, Hannah, an American teacher with relatives in the islands, is the site of narrative consciousness. She learns of Anna when Beulow's Minde (now abandoned) is pointed out to her. She is awed by the structure, and it is explained to her that she is a distant cousin of Anna Heegaard. She decides that she must hear Grandfather Benoni tell Heegaard's story, and upon hearing, she decides that she must write it. Again,

this mirrors the author's own point of entrance into the history and, at the same time, suggests an audience who shares that authorial position: 'And [Heegaard] seemed to want something of her, her kinswoman. Perhaps to have her story made known? Yes, it must be done. Anna's ghost, visible or invisible, demanded it of her' (Heyn 1988: 19). The first chapter, then, may be read not only as setting the context of the novel but also as justifying the appropriation of Heegaard's biography for mass consumption by an American market. With Hannah's return to the mainland at the end of the novel, the intended reader is vicariously returned to the reality of mainland American life and out of the narrative space of the novel, but the reader is also vicariously changed by a transformative experience: the acquisition of Heegaard's narrative—the papers carried back by Hannah and the text held in the reader's hands. The papers carried back also belie the novel's concern over questions of what Maria Margaronis calls 'the anxiety of authenticity' (2008: 138).

As seen here, in each of these cases, the historical fiction is designed, in part, to initiate an American reading public into the history of the Danish West Indies/United States Virgin Islands. It is relevant to note, then, that '[m]odern historical fiction emerged in parallel with the rise of modern nationalism' and that 'the genre offered a means of reflecting on the identity of the nation state, and of minority cultures' (Samuels 2008: 38). Treatments of historical fiction and its creation of national consciousness lead one to speculate on the implications of texts by Gill and Heyn, which imaginatively insert the history of the Danish West Indies into the national consciousness of the United States. As stated by Sarah Eden Schiff: '[u]ltimately, acknowledging literal and figurative ancestors who are autonomous agents yet significantly different from one's self means incorporating, among other things, historical legacies haunted by pain, distortion, and perversity into the national myth of origin' (2009: 110). In purchasing the Virgin Islands, the United States acquired its history—one which authors such as Gill and Heyn are imaginatively inserting into the national consciousness. For their (American) readership, these authors are 'reinsert[ing] communities into the past, rescuing them from the marginal positions to which they have consciously been consigned' (de Groot 2010: 148).

Mutations of history in the works discussed here reveal that each author has usurped history and recreated knowledge in a manner suited to his or her own end—

whether it be to champion Christianity (as for Knox), to erect a national hero (as for Jarvis and *Profiles*), to sell a love story (as for Gill), or to accumulate culture (as for Heyn). At stake in this ability to control knowledge and (re)make history is the power to define a people and all the power contingent upon that. Michel de Certeau's analysis rings painfully true in each of these cases: '[f]urthermore, this storytelling has a pragmatic effect. In pretending to recount the real, it manufactures it. It is performative. It renders believable what it says' (1989: 207). In each of the narratives noted here—in each history and each historical fiction—the author usurps history by creating a 'fiction' of history that he or she attempts to render believable. What is implicit in the traditional historical genres (which purport to convey verifiable 'truth') is also deliberately implied by the fictions (which 'profess' veracity by giving attention to historical details). What is implicit in the historical fiction genre (which assumes authorial creative license) is also contained in the histories (which use authorial license, at times, just as dramatically). Moreover, that these texts overtly draw upon and comment upon each other is evidence not only that this history remains contested but also that something remains at stake in this contestation—namely racial and race-related representation and the discourse which informs it in all of the contexts out of which the writers emerge: the context of Danish colonialism in the West Indies, the context of American neocolonial ownership in the Caribbean, the context of American race relations following the Civil Rights Movement.

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