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Ayana Aisha Flewellen

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Three Bozals: An Exploration of Possibility

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Daina R. Berry

Maria Franklin

Three Bozals: An Exploration of Possibility

by

Ayana Aisha Flewellen B.A.

Report

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Dedication

For my mothers.

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Abstract

Three Bozals: An Exploration of Possibility

Ayana Aisha Flewellen, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Daina R. Berry

Abstract

In Gargi Bhattacharyya's text, *Tales of Dark-Skinned Women: Race, Gender and Global Culture*, she explores how dominant ways of knowing and understanding the world are based on Western epistemologies that attach value and truth to what is seen without recognizing the violence that this type of knowledge production directs onto brown and black bodies, in particular dark-skinned women. She demonstrates how story-telling has been used throughout time by black and white people to theorize the world around them, particularly offering a critique to the ways black female bodies are ill configured in white Western imaginations. In this article, I pull from Bhattacharyya's theory on story-telling as a means of counter-history and place it in conversation with Saidiya Hartman's *Venus in Two Acts*, where she discusses a methodology to counter archival violence through a blending of the imaginative and the historical. In what follows I critique Daniel Schafer's

text *Anna Madeline Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation*

Slaveowner, by interrogating the language and framework used to construct a biography of Anna Kingsley. I then present my own tale of dark-skinned women as an imaginative counter-history to Schafer's text, which blurs understandings of truth, collapses time and dances with the ethereal to present a story outside of the truncated narrative Schafer provides. My tale of dark-skinned women, a creative piece, *Three Bozals*, is my attempt at imagining possibility in impossible spaces.

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“If the stories you believe define your range of possibility, then you have to change the story to be something else” - Bhattacharyya
Tales of Dark-Skinned Women

“It would not be far-fetched to consider stories as a form of compensation or even reparations, perhaps the only kind we will ever receive” - Hartman “Venus in Two Acts”

Daniel Schafer once wrote a story about a “dark-skinned” woman who occupied a unique place in antebellum history.¹ Her name is Anna Kingsley and she was an African enslaved woman who became a free land owner, slaveholder and wife of white plantation owner Zephaniah Kingsley during the early 19th century in Spanish Florida. Her historical narrative is opaque like most black women during the antebellum era and is one steeped in the complexities of race, gender, and class. With archival documentation in conjunction with a bit of imagination, Schafer pieces together a biography of Anna Kingsley that attempts to fit her subjectivity in neat boxes instead of reveling in the complexities that leave her narrative fragmented in the archive and romanticized in Southern imagination. Schafer relies on liberal understandings of freedom and enslavement tied with romanticized language to describe the sexual violence that existed in Anna Kingsley’s life, the lives of other black enslaved women that Zephaniah engaged in sexual relations with, and to paint Anna and Zephaniah’s relationship. This ultimately leaves the preadolescent enslaved child Anna was, before given the title of wife by her enslaver, to be indicted in her own subjection. If the stories that exist as fragments in the archive define the

¹ Daniel Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slaveowner* (University Press of Florida, 2004).

range of possibility for black women, reducing them to caricatures, and blame them for their own victimization, then it becomes imperative that those stories be changed.

In what follows I critique Daniel Schafer's text *Anna Madeline Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slaveowner*, by interrogating the language and framework used to construct a biography of Anna Kingsley. I then present my own tale of dark-skinned women as an imaginative counter-history to Schafer's text, which blurs understandings of truth, collapses time and dances with the ethereal to present a story outside of the truncated narrative Schafer provides. My tale of dark-skinned women, *Three Bozals*, is my attempt at imagining possibility in impossible spaces. This requires imagining a tale that reaches outside the "two-dimensional" stories, to pull from Bhattacharyya, that flatten black female experiences.² I am interested in how black women "resisted the commodification of their bought and sold bodies by *feeling* and *feeling for*" one another through the Middle Passage and on the plantation landscape.³ These women were "shipmates," as discussed in Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's canonical piece, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic," where she illustrates how these queer relationships offered a powerful means of resistance through same-sex erotic desire. She writes that these queer relationships that occurred through the Middle Passage and on the plantation landscape offered a mode of resistance that connected the enslaved body "in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to, loving your own kind when your kind was supposed to cease to exist, forging interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires for Africans' living deaths."⁴

² Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Tales of Dark Skinned Women: Race, Gender and Global Culture*. (Routledge, 1998).

³ Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic-Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ-A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14 (no. 2-3, 2008): 191.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

Three Bozals is a story that writes back to the dominant narrative written about a white planter and the various black women he had sexual relationships with as described in Schafer's biography of Anna Kingsley. It is a story about envisioning the possibility of love. Moreover, it is about how the act of loving one's form, and those forms disavowed in the past and present offer a powerful means of resistance through the body, a sacred space.

Gargi Bhattacharyya and Saidiya Hartman provide the theoretical and methodological grounding for *Three Bozals*. Bhattacharyya's text, *Tales of Dark-Skinned Women: Race, Gender and Global Culture*, explores how dominant ways of knowing and understanding the world are based on Western epistemologies that attach value and truth to what is seen without recognizing the violence that this type of knowledge production directs onto brown and black bodies, in particular dark-skinned women.⁵ Bhattacharyya demonstrates how story-telling has been used throughout time by black and white people to theorize the world around them, particularly offering a critique about the ways black female bodies are configured in white Western imaginations. She writes that hidden within story plots is the "history of the West," and ingrained in these stories is a disavowal of the corporal as well as intellectual production of black and brown women.⁶

Bhattacharyya counters these Western stories with her own narrative of four women, the model, sportswoman, newsreader, and entertainer. These women tell tales that interrogate how the black female body has been configured into warped images throughout European expansion, colonization, and globalization. These tales told by dark-skinned women offer an avenue outside of the truncated stories of the West. They change these stories into tales of dark-skinned women

⁵ Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Tales of Dark Skinned Women: Race, Gender and Global Culture*. (Routledge, 1998).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

existing outside and beyond the limitations of racial, gender, and class subjection that shape their daily lives. They are tales of possibility.

Bhattacharyya's theorization on story creation aligns with Hartman's theory on archival violence in her piece "Venus in Two Acts."⁷ Hartman posits that black women during the era of enslavement show up opaquely in the historical archive as distorted fragments usually through their encounters with power. This is Venus, the black female folding ambiguously into the historical archive, always opaque and slipping through the fingers of researchers, never fully tangible, but at all times haunting. Hartman writes that the archive acts as a death sentence for enslaved black women. Thus scholars, in order to avoid archival violence, must create alternative sources that aim to "paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible."⁸ Hartman makes a call for a methodological practice that creates a counter-history at the "intersection of the fictive and the historical."⁹

Hartman, like Bhattacharyya, is aiming to change the death sentence of the enslaved black female experience as it is currently represented by the archive. She does this by offering a different story of possibility that does not leave the black female experience as one seen only through court documents and probate list. *Three Bozals* attempts to go beyond Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts" by narrating the event of love that she "refused to describe" in her piece. It is an event that Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley enunciates eloquently in *Theifing Sugar*, that of the erotic desire shared between three women.¹⁰ One of the three women who shows up in *Three Bozals* is Venus, who was among those pulled from her land, surviving the turbulent waters of the Middle Passage (sometimes creating them), and later landing in various forms throughout the

⁷ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *small axe* 12 (no. 2, 2008): 1-14.

⁸ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," in *small axe* 12.

⁹ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," in *small axe* 13.

¹⁰ Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Theifing sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

Americas on the plantation landscape. Venus is my manifestation of Jacqui Alexander's Kitismiba, a spiritual being that influenced her scholarly work. Venus answers Alexander's call for the recognition that the "personal is not only political but spiritual."¹¹ She is the ethereal that guided souls home when they fell into the depths of the Atlantic during the Middle Passage and she is the one who guided me as I wrote *Three Bozals*. As Barbara Christian writes, the black female writer creates stories of possibility as "necessary nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better."¹²

The act of creating stories of possibility, placing Bhattacharyya in conversation with Hartman, speaks back to the archival violence inflicted on the enslaved female experience and offers a new range of possibilities for them. Tales of possibility are essential to understanding the shared experiences of enslaved back women and the complex nature of their relationships. My tale of dark-skinned women, *Three Bozals*, goes beyond Bhattacharyya and Hartman by capturing the experiences of queerness and the sacred, and making them central to the journey through the Middle Passage and on the plantation landscape. Within both Bhattacharyya's and Hartman's texts the black queer female is forgotten. As Sharon Patricia Holland reminds us, to speak about the black queer female in the past and present is a point of anxiety. This is because the spaces that she occupies, that mark her subjugation, "black, female, colored, and queer share a simultaneity that opens them to violence, reduction, and forgetting."¹³ *Three Bozals* is a practice in the imaginative act of remembering these queer bodies and queer experiences.

Anna Madigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slaveowner

¹¹ Jacqui M. Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and The Sacred*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 7.

¹² Christian, Barbara, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* (1987): 53.

¹³ Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 65.

Critically interrogating Schafer's tale of Anna Kingsley is important because his biographical work serves as one of the few texts documenting the life of a legally free, landowning, and slave owning African woman in the Americas. Scholarship focusing on black women landowners during the era of enslavement is scarce with most research centering on Spanish Florida and French Louisiana.¹⁴ As Bhattacharyya reminds me, "telling stories about constraining interpretations" works to demonstrate "where the story needed altering."¹⁵ It is my hope that by interrogating Schafer's text I am able to illuminate clandestine instances of archival violence that manifest into "constraining interpretations." I might identify not only where alterations need to occur in the text, but also ask myself if another story is possible. Returning to Hartman's note on methodology, she warns that the sources researchers use to create historical narratives of black experiences, particularly black female experiences, are always entrenched in dominant discourse.¹⁶

Schafer's biographical text outlines Anna's life through a framework of her being descended from a royal lineage in Senegal. He states that, "Curiously, the African princess references may be the most credible of the Anna Kingsley stories, even though they cannot be conclusively proven. Most of the legends were rumors passed down through the decades by uncritical journalists and local historians who seldom checked for accuracy."¹⁷ Although Schafer states that notions of Anna being an "African princess" are legend and repeatedly states that most

¹⁴For more information see Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*. (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1999) serves as a great resource regarding black life in Spanish Florida. For more information regarding free women of color in Louisiana Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Becoming Free, Remaining Free: Manumission and Enslavement in New Orleans, 1846-1862*, (Louisiana: LSU Press, 2003) and Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997). Larry Koger, "Black Masters: The Misunderstood Slaveowners." *Southern Quarterly* 43, (no. 2, 2006): 52-73, provides examples of freewomen of color who enslaved other blacks, however Koger notes that land ownership and owning slaves in large quantities was a rare phenomena with more black female enslavers living in the north.

¹⁵ Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Tales of Dark Skinned Women: Race, Gender and Global Culture*, 311.

¹⁶ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," in *small axe*, 11.

¹⁷ Daniel Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, x.

of the evidence presented is conjecture, he nonetheless reproduces this theme. As a result, Schafer creates a narrative that he describes as a “lively and imaginative yet scholarly account,” which I believe grotesquely circumvents discussions regarding race and power dynamics, including those involving rape, and sexual exploitation. This is evident in Schafer’s discussion regarding the sexual relationship between Zephaniah and Anna and the sexual relations that Zephaniah had with other enslaved African women that he owned, which Schafer frames as polygamy.¹⁸

I am less concerned with whether Anna Kingsley was actually of royal lineage and more interested in what it means for people to construct her historical narrative as such. In what ways do affording her the term “royal” work to exclude discussions of rape, sexual violence, seduction and consent? It becomes critical to illustrate how Hartman’s notion of seduction as a theory of power, works to address the complexity of sexual relationships between white plantation owners and black women, instead of attempting to circumvent the issue.¹⁹

Schafer’s lack of attention regarding issues of sexual violence and operations of power between Anna and Zephaniah Kingsley has a haunting effect. It is precisely through the absence of such discussion that the topic makes itself visible and imposing. It is important to quote at length a passage from Schafer’s text where he discusses the marriage between Anna and Zephaniah Kingsley as well as the sexual relations that Zephaniah had with multiple enslaved women to illustrate instances of violence. He states that:

“The relationship between Anna and Zephaniah was open and familial and would continue so for nearly forty years. While Kingsley acknowledged Anna as his wife and praised her character and virtue, he also had other slave concubines who

¹⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹⁹ Saidiya V Hartman, *Scenes Of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, And Self-Making In Nineteenth-Century America*, (Oxford University Press, 1997).

gave birth to his children. Anna was the senior figure, carrying the authority of the recognized first wife in a polygamous household whose customs were observed by all in the Kingsley extended family even if they were outside the legal bounds of marriage in either Spanish or American society. Reared in Africa in a polygamous family, Anna would have been familiar with co-wife relationships, tolerant of them, and cooperative with the other wives.”²⁰

Schafer’s explanation of the relationships that Zephaniah had, not just with Anna but other enslaved women throughout his life, is an instance of seduction rearing its head in the form of a “family romance” that jettisons any discussion regarding sexual violence, consent and culpability. Hartman writes to this point stating that, “Seduction erects a family romance – in this case, the elaboration of a racial and sexual fantasy in which domination is transposed into the bonds of mutual affection, subjection idealized as the pathway to equality, and perfect subordination declared the means of ensuring great happiness and harmony.”²¹ For Schafer, operations of power are not at work within the relations that Zephaniah had with Anna or the other enslaved women that he had sexual encounters with because Anna is framed as “tolerant” and “cooperative,” so domination is not up for discussion. Anna also then becomes “tolerant” and “cooperative” in her own subjection and subordination.

Hartman continues her discussion on seduction by stating that when seduction is discussed in such a manner it creates historical narratives that are dangerous inasmuch as they allow for the “displacement of culpability and the designation of the enslaved as the originary locus of transgression, liability, and shame.”²² This raises the question as to who is culpable in the relationship between Zephaniah and Anna as well as the other women that Schafer continues to frame as “co-wives.” Culpability functions on multiple levels throughout this text and at all times works to distance itself from Zephaniah. Anna and the other enslaved women become

²⁰ Daniel Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 32-33.

²¹ Saidiya V Hartman, *Scenes Of Subjection*, 89.

²² *Ibid.*, 102

culpable in their own subjection and subordination as African women who would be “familiar” with such arrangements. This inference, that goes unnoted, is essentialist and only becomes possible when Anna is framed as an “African princess.” This is further complicated by Anna’s ethnicity, because her ethnic background is then transposed onto the other enslaved women, as if they too would have been “tolerant” and “cooperative” in the relationship they had with Zephaniah Kingsley because, in this example, all African women would find such relations “familiar.” Finally, by Schafer stating that Anna was “reared in Africa in a polygamous family” he works to falsely emphasize the inherently African nature of the relationships. The end result is a complete displacement of culpability away from Zephaniah and his role, as being in a position to incite domination, and his background as a European male, because Africa itself and the black bodies that embody the continent in the Americas, those legally free and enslaved, become the “the originary locus of transgression, liability, and shame.”²³

In addition to framing the sexual relationships that Zephaniah had with Anna and other enslaved women as polygamous, Schafer also leaves little possibility of, and places little value in, the relationships black women had among themselves on the plantation landscape. I found myself wondering what kind of relationship Anna Kingsley could have had with Munsilna McGundo, Sarah Murphy and Flora Hannahan, the other enslaved women that Zephaniah fathered children with. I wanted to know if Anna Kingsley had another black woman she could turn to, who shared her experiences. Schafer often paints Anna as lonely, and homesick, while also hinting that Anna may have had resentful feelings towards the other women Zephaniah fathered children with.²⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 58

The only friendship that Schafer mentions at length is one between Susan Philippa Fatio L'Engle, a person that Schafer describes as "a wealthy and influential white woman of cultivated taste."²⁵ This is based on letters that L'Engle writes describing her visits with an "African princess." Schafer makes a point to highlight Susan Philippa Fatio L'Engle whiteness and social status, as defining factors in the relationship the two women had. However, I found myself more interested in a relationship that was given far less attention than the one Anna had with L'Engle. Another woman that Anna had an enduring friendship with is a woman named Sophie Chidgine, who Schafer mentions briefly stating that her and Anna survived the Middle Passage together and were brought to the Florida as two of the three bozals Zephaniah purchased in Havana, Cuba.²⁶ Schafer states that, "Anna and Sophie Chidgine formed bonds that functioned as a kinship tie in later years. The two Jolof women were able to converse in the Wolof language they shared from their homeland."²⁷ Schafer spends four pages describing Susan and Anna's relationship while Sophie and Anna's relationship is mentioned once and then regulated to the notes section. I believe that Schafer discusses the possibility of a friendship between Susan L'Engle more so than Sophie Chidgine because of value he places on the social status attached to Susan, whereas Sophie, as another enslaved black woman, remains regulated to the notes section. Within the notes section of the text, Schafer uses the term "shipmate" to discuss the relationship that Anna and Sophie had. I argue that Schafer disavows the relationship between Anna and Sophie due to the physical limit in space he uses to discuss them. This is also seen with the regulation of the term "shipmate" to the notes section with no mention of the historical richness such a term has when used to describe the relationships black women were able to forage among themselves during enslavement. As I mentioned in the introduction to this paper,

²⁵ Ibid., 58-61

²⁶ Ibid., 30

²⁷ Ibid.

Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's discussion regarding the value in relationships forged among black women during the Middle Passage illustrates how black women were able to validate themselves and their experiences through each other while living in a society based on black subjection. However such discussions are not possible in Schafer's text.

Schafer's tale of dark-skinned women left me longing for more. I longed for an image of black women during enslavement that were not indicted for their own subjection and blamed for their sexual exploitation. I longed for a story that allowed for a love of the black female body detached from the white European enslaver who so transparently is seen and slides easily in and out of the narrative while African bodies remain always opaque. I searched for love outside the reach of Zephaniah and as result imagined Anna choosing to love another body that mirrored her own. I searched for flesh and fullness in sacred spaces hoping that by doing so, pleasure could act as resistance, dancing across the plantation landscape and splashing against boats sailing across the Atlantic.

Three Bozals: An Exploration of Possibility

Anna/Anta Madgigine Jai Kingsley

The only thing I felt was Sophie's hand grasping mine. No sight or smell. Just her touch and her spirit warm next to me. The ship had stopped sailing so the rocking wasn't as fierce, but I stopped feeling the water tugging at my stomach after the first *fanweer* passed. Sophie wasn't so lucky, so when the red men whose skin was pale but scorched by the sun let us, I'd hold Sophie over the edge of the ship as she threw up what little water and food she was able to get down. It was often. She had gotten so weak that I often felt her slip from me at night but if I held her and whispered honey soaked words in her ear while she slept, she'd make sure she wake the next day. For me, she say. But I sang for her and during our time on the wooden vessel we kept

each other alive while the bodies chained around us wasted away. Their souls dived into the water beneath us and they basked in the saltiness because they knew they were going home, ma'ma was going to take them. But what about us skin folk?

Cccrrrrreeeeaaaakkkk!!

Sun

Air

Sugar/blood

Sweet/bitter

“Get up wenches!”

The red men always smiled when they creaked that door open to look at us women chained together. They turn deeper shades of red and you felt they heart beat faster as they manhood rose. They look at Sophie and me. Take in our breast, new, and supple, freshly grown mangos they were. Their eyes moved down to our hips, wide, and then to our backsides. They took us all in; their eyes were hungry for our flesh. We didn't have to see it because we felt it. We knew what they wanted when they opened that door and saw us. Slick with sweat, our skin tasted of salt. They dragged us on deck. Played music and made us dance. Saw men come up too, more limp from the voyage. No air that deep in hell they say. Them men just closed they eyes. Some prayed that they wouldn't have to open them again. Some were stubborn skin folk, like me and Sophie, so they made sure they came to day after day till days and months and time escaped them. Time escaped us all.

Drumming

Drumming

Drumming

Drumming

Who was it whose hand pounded and banged. Forced to pound and bang but loved the force that came from the drum. Sweat mixed with the blood stained whip marks on the drummer's back and his hands turned red as he continued...

Drumming
Drumming
Drumming
Drumming

My body swayed from left to right. They unchained us. Some collapsed, but others swayed right along with me. Sophie sat on the deck near the edge and looked over at me. Her brown eyes hollow with life but full of love. Her dark skin was pale from hunger but always welcoming to my touch. I swayed my body for her hoping the drumming and the music of the waves splashing against the ship would fill her up and keep her soul feed. Us skin folk, we move when the rhythm played, not for the red men, but for our souls so we would know we were still here and that we were still one. Sophie came over and started moving right along with me. For a moment we weren't on the ship so far away from home, but back on the land we knew with water flowing all around us, and the soil that ran through our toes was filled with life and love not the splinters from the wood we had grown accustomed to.

“hold still na”

They splash us all with oil to make us shine in the sun then give us more water and ground flower, *ca-sp-es* is what they call it. If you ate too fast it would turn your insides out and you'd be left right there on the deck to bake in the sun.

Chains
Wrapped around our feet
Sophie holding my hand
Slick with oil
She turns to face me if only for a moment
I'm lost in a moment
Walking down the plank
On to the docks
Into the market
Can you hear it?
The yelling and the chatter

Can you smell it?
The scent of sugar and blood
Haa-vaa-naa
Cuu-baa
Sophie holding my hand
Despair emanating from her body
Like her blood is what make the air so sweet/bitter here
Our blood is what makes the air sweet/bitter here

Venus

My blood is flowing through rivers, down waterfalls into lakes and basins, finally coming to reach the shorelines pouring out into the ocean. Wooden vessels pulling at me, tearing at me, splitting me in half. There is anger, my own. Spinning around the ships, I thrash against them. Hot, and unruly, I pull some of them under. Tears pouring uncontrollably from my eyes, splashing onto the wooden decks, seeping between boards, I'm reaching for black bodies held inside of them. I hear their whispers, weak, calling out for me, conjuring me up. I see them. What place is this? Air thick with death sits inside the wooden cages. Blood mixed with water mixed with urine mixed with sweat mixed with shit covers black bodies and I feel the iron pressed against their skin burning me. My anger grows. I swirl around and around yelling out burst of thunder, lightning jolting from hair floccules, thick drops falling from between my lips. I shake my hands, legs quivering as I pour over ships, swallowing some of them whole. Grasping on to the souls of those from the land I was pulled from, their bodies fall to the depths, into the darkness. Their souls stay with me.

Conjure me into calmer waters
Your whispers, weak, but full of power
Soft words flowing from cracked lips
Conjuring me into calmer waters

I am half of something old searching for sweetness to build something new. I search for sweet spaces in the ship holds. The sweetest of words whispered from lips. The caresses of pleasure

while surround by thick air and the burning of iron, but still sweet words of pleasure. I'm conjured into calmer waters, rocking against ships, cradling them. Black bodies feeling and feeling for each other fill me out and I become something half old and new. Swaying to the beat of a drum feeling the pounding and longing for it to pound and pound and pound louder. Rolling upon the shores I find myself someplace new, something new. Pearls dancing off my tongue, I swim through new lands, finding new riverbeds to lie along, searching for sweetness under the sun and in my moonlight.

Sophie Chidgine

Baa-raa-coon is what they called it. I sound out the name. Baaa-raaa-coon. Anta stood tall against the wooden pillars. We both young but she strong for the both of us. Her sweet words simmering with the salt that emanated through the wooden boards of the ship rang like butterfly wings flapping gracefully in my ears. She my sun that blazed forth and rose even when I didn't want to meet a new day. It was she that held me in hell and held me hands in the Baa-raa-coon. Oily. The sun shown no mercy and the smell of rotting sugar and a touch of blood hit your nose when you walked off the ship so you knew you left one hell for another. Anta stood tall, me next to her, her hand grazed mine and the spark let me know I was alive. This skin still mine, I felt her touch ring through me and knew it. I breathe in deep and let the rank scent fill my lungs. I pushed it out, stubborn to my body wanting to just peel over. I stood instead, weak but standing. The sun mixed with oil and sweat baked my skin to salty hues of deep blues and purples.

The market was full of noise, that you couldn't hear, you just saw the world moving around you and a slight buzzzzzzzz that accompanied it. What is it that they all were doing? Men and women walking with umbrellas to block the sun. They stared while passing by. The sun baked their skin red and kissed it with fire. They meet our gaze and held it. Why they dressed so?

into his and felt the sun beam back, harsh, burning my flesh. I grabbed Anta's hand and a smile rose in the corner of the man's mouth. He wanted us. I knew what he wanted. I was young but I knew. The heat coming off his body smelt like the sea had swallowed him whole sometime ago and vomited him back up on a pile of bile and rotting sugar. He smelt like the room the red man would take us when they creak the door open during the nights on the ship.

“These two!”
“This new nigger and the one beside her”
“And that one over there”

Venus/Sophie

She like to play with shells. She run her hands over a smooth stone her mother gave her for safe keeping. She put a shell to her mouth and let the salt fill her, feeding me. Sophie tugged on the young girl's hair. My name is Venus, but Sophie call me Flora, her daughter. Sophie's hands pulled the hairs on Flora's head. Ritual. Relaxing. She thinks her mother use to braid her hair like this but she can't remember. Sophie sees her daughter place the shells on her tongue and Sophie loses herself, her place, her time, and her ears fill with the sound of water folding into itself against the shore.

We glide back in time together
Sophie's toes wet in the sand
I lick the bottom of their soles
Sophie's fingers clasped around Anta's
I was there
The sky was gray
day falling into night
grief filling spaces between the two women
I howled and sang and wept around them
longing to comfort the two girls walking along the shores of the St. John River
I stretched out towards them wanting to cover them both
settled for kissing their toes

How long ago was it, Sophie thought as braided Flora's hair. She still felt the drops from the rain that fell that evening on her skin. The salty air filling up her nose, tears falling from her eyes, Anta's soft lips pressed onto hers. How long ago was it? She can still hear me howling, she still felt Anta's touch on her skin. How long ago was it? They snuck behind cargo boxes. No eyes just me reaching out to them whispering not to leave. Grainy sand beneath their feet. Shells kicked up as they walked, longing to follow after them. Me singing a tune of sorrow. Their sighs playing alongside the wind. Sophie pressed herself onto Anta; Anta arched her back against the wood of the boxes, shells dancing beneath their feet. Me howling, folding onto myself along shores, singing a song in beat to their sighs, in beat with their thrust, in beat with their hearts. Sophie remembers Anta's skin, burning red from where the white man grabbed her night after night, she felt the pained skin cry out to her to sooth it. She remembered the way Kingsley looked at Anta; she saw the same burn in his eye when he looked at Flora, wanting. How long ago was it, Sophie thought pulling both of us back to the present, holding onto Flora's hair. Her daughter still playing with shells, tasting the salt, thinking of the water.

Venus

My name escapes the books and eludes the narratives. But I was there. My name is Venus but they call me

Munsilna
Flora Hannahan
Sarah Murphy
Anta Madgigine Jai Kingsley
Sophie Chidgigine

I'm swaying to the sound of the splashes against the ships at the docks. I am the splashes folding onto themselves, banging against the wood, singing onto the shore songs of those whose sorrow

and love rest at the bottom of the Atlantic. I'm swaying to the buzz and hum of the market. My name is Venus but they call me

Munsilna
Flora Hannahan
Sarah Murphy
Anta Madgigine Jai Kingsley
Sophie Chidgigine

He saw me, that red faced man and he took me home with him. I was there with them. Anta and Sophie in that ship hold, in that barracoon, and there at the docks. Zephaniah Kingsley and his three bozals, his three new niggers, his own. But we loved each other so fully that there was no space for others. So when Zephaniah pulled me in his room night after night running his hands over the ripe mangos that grew on my chest and sucking for honey and love there was none for him. We only shared sweetness and rum among ourselves. I have many names that reside in the dark spaces of the archive. Those names are awaiting light, a light that begs to be seen through stories that long to be told, tales of possibility.

Munsilna
Flora Hannahan
Sarah Murphy
Anta Madgigine Jai Kingsley
Sophie Chidgigine
Venus

Conclusion

I side with Toni Morrison in her essay "The Site of Memory,"²⁸ in stating that by creating *Three Bozals* I was not so much interested in facts, as I was interested in reaching for some form of truth. Morrison writes that truth is intricately linked to memory and the imaginative. For

²⁸ Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory" in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2d ed., ed. William Zinsser (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 83-102.

Morrison, the imaginative becomes an avenue into the “interior lives” of the enslaved, making audible the voices that are not heard in the historical archive of slavery and making visible the words outside of what is written in slave narratives. Tales of possibility, as gateways into the “interior lives” of the subjugated, are what Hartman and Bhattacharyya reach towards. These tales of possibility work to counter archival violence and Westernized stories that leave black women fragmented in history and distorted in the present.

As I illustrated in my critique above, Schafer’s biography of Anna Kingsley falls short in its attempt to paint a full image of black women. Instead he creates a narrative that reiterates archival violence by usurping the complexities and violence that ignite their existence in the past and construct our existence in the present. However, to his credit, Schafer has conducted most of the dusty work in gathering facts, collecting court documents and piecing together a narrative from fragments of what the archive can provide. It is the story that he constructs from these facts that left Anna Kingsley and other black women who occupied spaces in her life fragmented, further reiterating the violence of the archive. This is a point Hartman warns against.

It is the historical archive of slavery, the court documents, runaway ads, probate lists, planter entries, etc., that act as facts, what Bhattacharyya might describe as what is seen and visible, which leads to the creation of flattened narratives unable to truly give form and flesh to black women.²⁹ It is the fixation with the visible, a Westernized form of knowledge production that supplies the archive, which requires the creation of tales of possibility as a form of counter-history. As Bhattacharyya writes, “The reminder that we are living diminished lives prompts us to regain size, shape, weight, form. To imagine ourselves as something more than someone else’s picture.”³⁰ This is what I strived for in writing *Three Bozals*. After reading and rereading

²⁹ Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Tales of Dark Skinned Women*, 337-338.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 339.

Schafer's text, which is a great resource for facts, I was frustrated and left with fragments of diminished lives. In response I imagined a story in an attempt to "regain size, shape, weight, and form" not only for Anna Kingsley, Sophie Chidgigine and Venus, but also for myself.

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