

PATTERSON'S PORNOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS: A DECONSTRUCTION OF THE SEX SCENES IN THE NOVEL *THE CHILDREN OF SISYPHUS*

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Abstract

The literary depiction of sex, and by extension pornography, in early modern Caribbean literature has been neglected by literary academicians. Using Susan Sontag's theorisation of the pornographic imagination, this paper analyses sex scenes in Orlando Patterson's *The Children of Sisyphus* in order to determine whether or not they could be labelled as 'pornographic'. The analysis is done with reference to other pornographic texts and novelists from various time periods. The link between literature and pornography is discussed and its relevance to the novel under discussion explained. The sex scenes assessed are pornographic because of the gratuitous nature of the sexual details which amount to a deliberate attempt at sexually arousing the reader. Such gratuitous detail is evident in the obsessive descriptions of the sex scenes, the use of fetish, and literary foreplay.

Keywords: Orlando Patterson, Caribbean literature, Susan Sontag, Pornographic imagination, Literary foreplay, Pornographic literature

1. Introduction

The portrayal of sex in novels, and other forms of literature, frequently stirs up debate amongst scholars and society at large. Using Susan Sontag's idea of the 'pornographic imagination', this paper seeks to interrogate and deconstruct several sex scenes from the classic Caribbean novel, *The Children of Sisyphus* by Orlando Patterson, to assess whether or not the term pornography should be applied to the scenes. The issue under discussion is not the classification of the novel itself, but particular scenes in it. The novel itself is a fine example of Caribbean literature and although understudied, it reflects the high quality of Jamaican artistry. The paper looks at the way the sex scenes intervene in portraying specific moments in the. The implications of the pornographic label will also be discussed to identify the relationship between literature and pornography.

Sexual acts are common in fiction. This is simply because sex is a universal human activity, and so naturally it will be captured in the literature of a society. One of the aims of this paper is to articulate the difference between 'normal' depictions of sex and pornography. 'Normal' is a subjective term which can encompass sex being alluded to through vague language and the brief mention of intercourse. Pornography thus becomes a heightened, exaggerated, and ultimately gratuitous depiction of sex in my working definition. This paper will use this working definition, but it is worthwhile

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to consider other definitions so that the discussion is informed. Researchers commonly disagree as to how to define the term. Some researchers require pornography to present visuals of genitalia, some require actual contact whilst others only require that there be intent to arouse (McKee et al., 2020, p. 1086).

The efficacy of calling the scenes ‘pornographic’ is important because it changes how we look at Caribbean literature. When Caribbean texts are analysed, artistry should be at the fore. Pornography as a legitimate means of artistic expression raises the level of quality and it forces us to pay closer attention to the text. As my discussion of the novel will show, whenever questions of pornography are included in the text, they lure us to consider questions of human nature, sexuality, representation of sexual urges and how the pornographic imagination is constructed by the author.

Orlando Patterson published his first novel, *The Children of Sisyphus*, in 1964. Since then, it has become a classic. It has been studied in institutions of higher learning throughout the world and it has become a staple text on the reading lists of most Caribbean literature courses. Although the novel is a broadly read staple text, literary criticism by way of academic articles and monographs is shockingly scarce. However, there has been some reflection on the novel and its place in Jamaican literary history. According to Kwame Dawes, who wrote the introduction to the 2012 edition of the novel:

The Children of Sisyphus was published at a time of growing interest in the life of extremely poor urban Jamaican communities. In 1961, three of Jamaica’s leading young academics had embarked on an unprecedented study of the Rastafarian movement in Kingston and had written a report that threw light upon its origins and ideology and in the process on the realities of urban Jamaican life. (p. 1)

The novel’s primary themes are thus echoed through characterization and setting. It should be noted here that because Patterson is more of an academic sociologist than he is a novelist. His novel has been construed by some critics such as Dawes (2012, p. 9) as the literary manifestation of the author’s sociological research. Although Patterson’s academic work and artistic expression might not necessarily be co-related. Patterson’s novel, as a literary text and not a sociological one, depicts both the day-to-day lives of the members of the Rastafarian community in Kingston, Jamaica, and the poor and underdeveloped community in which they live, called the Dungle. The Dungle is characterised by filth, poverty, and hunger. It forms the backdrop to the story of Dinah, one of the central characters. Dinah is a prostitute who strives to leave the world of the Dungle behind in order to find a prosperous and more meaningful existence elsewhere. Her story of attempted escape from the Dungle serves as a motif that drives the plot forward. It is not only Dinah who seeks to escape, but also other characters like Mary and the Rastafarians. Mary, also a prostitute like Dinah, seeks a better life for her daughter, and the Rastafarians aim to go to Ethiopia, which

is their perceived heaven on earth. The constant theme of movement and effort to escape pervades the novel. The novel is fraught with tensions between religion poverty and, as I will demonstrate in this paper, the construction of sexuality.

2. The pornographic imagination

This article finds its theoretical positioning in Susan Sontag's idea of the pornographic imagination. Simply put, the pornographic imagination is the state of consciousness that novelists are in when they produce explicit sex scenes in their writings. Novelists are in this state of consciousness because "one of the tasks art has assumed is making forays into and taking up positions on the frontiers of consciousness (often very dangerous to the artist as a person) and reporting back what's there" (Sontag, 1967, p. 212). What this means is that pornography is on the edge of human perception and sentience. When the artist engages with it, they push consciousness to its limit by introducing new ways of acuity. Sontag thus attempts to establish a link between literature and pornography and to also assert the artistic value of literary pornography.

According to Hurtado (2014, p. 10), the cultural and legal changes surrounding censorship in the 1960s meant that for writers "the shock and immediacy of sexual imagery came to represent a novelty and innovation in the novel form itself". Pornographic writing at around the time that Patterson's novel was published in 1964, thus stood positioned as a stylistic method of pushing the boundaries of literature. The desire to shock the reader also often led to literary pornography.

Pornography is a fantasy because "men and women fall short of the sexual prowess that people in pornography are represented as enjoying; that the size of organs, number and duration of orgasms, variety and feasibility of sexual powers, and amount of sexual energy all seem grossly exaggerated" (Sontag, 1967, p. 213). This point is abundantly evident in the visual form of pornography where most female actresses have breast implants and surgically enhanced buttocks. The male actors are usually well endowed with penises that are large and atypical of the general male population.

The idea of the pornographic imagination was a response to the many French novels that had acquired "the dubious label of pornography" (Sontag, 1967, p. 205), amongst which *The Story of O* (1954) by Anne Desclos is included. One of the main debates around pornography is not whether there is pornography in literature but whether such literature can be considered as genuine art. Novels such as *The Story of O* are pornographic but at the same time "cannot be refused accreditation as serious literature" (Sontag, 1967, p. 206). This classification conundrum suggests that the aim to sexually arouse, without resorting to didactic intentions, is a legitimate artistic goal. Although there are many other works that were charged as being pornographic, Sontag uses *The Story of O* to explain how the idea of the pornographic imagination might be applied in the literary critical context.

The problem around the intersection of literature and pornography centres on the specific idea of serious literature. There are many novels that are universally celebrated as being exceptional. That is, there are novels that are unequivocally touted as being members of a particular country's literary canon. For instance, in the Zimbabwean context, very few serious scholars would argue against the inclusion of Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger* in Zimbabwe's canon. However, few scholars would also argue against attaching the label of pornography to this great Zimbabwean piece of creative fiction. In the novella, the narrator is conversing with Nestar the prostitute and she begins to describe an interracial sexcapade with a client.

White men have a thing about black women, you know,' she confided. 'And there was nothing I wouldn't do. Most wouldn't even touch me. They'd just make me do things and they'd watch with their eyeballs sticking out. And masturbate like hell. But there was one who always had the same old thing. I would suck his balls and he would come off into my hair. He would really grease my hair with the stuff. Rubbing it in like a bishop laying on hands, while I licked the rest of the drops from his stick. Then he would make me stick my arse right out into the sky of his face with my head between my knees and he would breathe it in like god accepting incense and then the baptism would come when he'd sort of writhe and cry for me to fart and urinate into his face. Like rain. A sort of storm scene. (Marechera, 1978, p. 37)

The above excerpt is explicit, and many readers would argue that it is pornographic because Marechera aims to sexually excite the reader by providing gratuitous sexual details. However, the passage is contained in the body of the most critically acclaimed piece of writing in Zimbabwe. Since pornography might be considered as low brow art judging by the aspersions cast on it by religious figures and censorship boards, it becomes problematic to explain its inclusion in quality literature. Furthermore, the question of how to classify Marechera's novella remains unanswered. Should texts that feature a substantial number of explicit passages be wholly labelled as pornography? It must be remembered that the sole objective of pornography is to sexually excite the reader. If the label of pornography is to be applied, this means that the exceptional qualities of the text such as deep character development, engaging language and the accurate depiction of society and its ills are downplayed. This is not to say that a text cannot be both pornographic and exhibit literary merit through narrative, but, in pornographic novels, these other features are not emphasised, and they play second fiddle.

Sontag (1967, p. 207) explains that the proliferation of pornographic literature is partly a result of the sexual repression brought about by the Christian religion. Christianity is explicit when it comes to the regulation of sexual activity. Sex is only supposed to be conducted within the confines of marriage. Fornication is forbidden because it is a sin. These restrictions thus impede the full exploration of human sexuality. It therefore makes sense that

the Christian religion is challenged and interrogated by Rastafarianism in *The Children of Sisyphus* (1964), which is the novel under investigation. In the novel, the dominance of Christianity is not evident. The vast majority of characters adhere to Rastafarianism. Brother Solomon, the leader of the Rastafarians in the Dungle, converts from Anglicanism. The sexual activity in the novel thus promises to be free of the Christian restrictions on sexual activity that Sontag mentions.

The novel shows a society entrenched in poverty, hopelessness, and failure. It is susceptible to many social ills. The Rastafarians in the novel consume industrial quantities of marijuana for both religious and recreational reasons. Prostitution is a major profession for the female characters in the novel and the family structure is weak because of poverty. The Dungle is actually a rubbish dump squatter camp. The characters survive on scraps of food discarded by rubbish collectors as observed in the first chapter of the novel. A society can be “so hypocritically and repressively constructed that it must inevitably produce an effusion of pornography as both its logical expression and its subversive, demotic antidote” (Sontag, 1967, p. 207). The Dungle is thus a society that lends itself to the expression of pornography. This paper now explores the pornographic outpour of the Dungle.

3. Analysis

3.1 Scene 1: *The Sargasso Scene*

The first sex scene in *The Children of Sisyphus* comes in the form of a flashback in chapter 2. Dinah is at a meeting place waiting for Alphonso, the policeman. She is about to leave Cyrus, her lover of six years. While waiting for Alphonso, Dinah begins to think about her life with Cyrus and how they first met. Their first meeting forms the first sex scene of the novel which is depicted in the flashback. Here Dinah reflects on the fact that the previous night she did not attract many customers and Rachel suggests that she take a bath. Since Dinah is a prostitute, and she hasn't bathed in two weeks, she agrees to this proposition since she does not want to lose customers. As a result of the poverty in the Dungle, Dinah has to bath outdoors in the Sargasso Sea. While taking this bath, Cyrus comes across her at the end of his day fishing and decides to join her in the water. Although she fights him off at first, she reluctantly gives in to him and they eventually have sex. It is important to note that, through the reflections of Dinah it is revealed that this act is consensual and not rape.

The first sex scene is long, and Patterson sets it up patiently and methodically. Vivid descriptions of the two lovers' bodies and their various states of undressing are plentiful. The narrator states that Dinah “took off her clothes and went into the water, cursing softly as it chilled her nakedness” (p. 38). It is interesting to note that the water interacts with Dinah's nakedness, and not Dinah herself. Patterson mentions this to emphasise the fact that Dinah is truly exposed and bare. The water has *carte blanche* and there is nothing to protect Dinah from its chill. A little later “to her own surprise

found that she was beginning to like it" (p. 38). Dinah revels in her nudity and she enjoys being exposed.

The description of the body is not limited to Dinah's alone, but Cyrus's figure is also ogled by the narrator's gaze. The reader's own gaze is thus conveniently led to Dinah and Cyrus's nudity. Cyrus is also in the water standing "tall and black and strong" (p. 38) and "he was still naked except for the little knitted trunk he wore, the top of which fell down, to the very pit of his stomach exposing him almost completely" (p. 38). Sontag (1967, p. 213) states that characters in pornography are depicted as being perfectly endowed to feed a fantasy. Through descriptions of being tall and strong, Cyrus feeds the reader's stereotypical fantasy of an indomitable black man filled with sexual prowess. Cyrus's scant dressing seems to suggest a readiness for sexual intercourse. The two naked bodies thus stand naked and ready for the sex that the literary foreplay is preparing the reader for.

After the explicit descriptions of naked bodies, Patterson continues the sexual build up by creating tension around Dinah's resistance to sexual intercourse with Cyrus. This is because there are indications that Dinah is ambivalent towards sex with the Rastafarian. This is because "[s]he had been facing him all this while naked and unashamed. But now as he glared at her a sense of shame gradually overwhelmed her. She couldn't understand why her hands should come so suddenly to her breasts" (p. 40). This is in stark contrast to the attitude Dinah exhibits when she initially starts bathing in the open outdoors. The narrator reveals that Dinah had no qualms about the passing men who would see her naked whilst she bathed. The men "could have stared till their eyes dropped out, she couldn't care" (p. 38). Cyrus's gaze shames Dinah into covering herself. This is important because it sets up Cyrus as a new type of sexual partner. It must be remembered here that Dinah is a prostitute and therefore she ought not to be shy or reserved when it comes to issues of sex. However, Cyrus is different and his effect on Dinah shows the reader that this sexual encounter is not going to be mundane. The import is that Cyrus's sexual prowess is so effective that even a prostitute can fall to its whims. In the novel, Dinah is not taken by the spirituality of Rastafarianism and Cyrus has no material wealth to offer her. Her attraction is based on the physical bodily desire she feels for Cyrus.

Cyrus causes feelings of sexual angst and anxiety in Dinah. Her self-will and agency are overridden by his mere presence. The narrator makes this evident by stating that "She did not move. She did not dare to, she warmed to him against her will, she felt to scream; she felt to cry with joy" (p. 41). Cyrus is thus an effective sexual machine who convinces Dinah to have sex with him although she is initially against the idea. Cyrus gets rid of the trunk he is wearing, and his full nudity is exposed. The effect of Cyrus's penis causes Dinah's libido to rise, and she becomes aroused. Feelings "surge madly within her" (p. 41) and she twists "with agony in the intense negation of her being" (p. 41) whilst she wants to "terrify herself in her desire for him" (p. 41). Sontag (p. 222) explains that human sexuality is a force that brings

out feelings similar to the ones Dinah is experiencing here. Sexuality brings “yearning for the extinction of one’s consciousness, for death itself” (Sontag, 1967, p. 222). Dinah confirms this when she feels that not to have Cyrus “would be death” (p. 41).

At this point of the scene, the narrative can move on to the consummation. Patterson does this through one of the most intense descriptions of intercourse in early post-independence Caribbean literature. There is a complete and overwhelming domination of Dinah by Cyrus and her sexual capitulation.

She was halfway up when he pounded upon her. He pawed her across her shoulders and spun her round. He sank to the ground upon her. He ravished her. Long and cruelly and sweetly till the purple mountains had dissolved into complete nothingness and the Sargasso a black mass hovering over them, he raped her, he mauled her, he gushed her being with complete rapture (p. 42).

The above passage describes a determined assault on Dinah and her womanhood. She is physically manoeuvred into a sexual position and then restrained by the weight of Cyrus on her, and this can be seen through the word ‘sank’. Dinah is ravished and raped, and this shows that the sex is rough, and she is dominated. In addition, it is described as cruel and sweet. This shows that Patterson wants to show both Dinah’s consent and the violent nature of the sex thereby sexually arousing the reader.

The sex scene in scene 1 is built up patiently and it results in wild and rough sex. This scene, being a flashback, fills the reader in about Dinah’s past, but the scene itself does not further the plot in any way. It is not mentioned again in the rest of the novel. The scene is pornographic in nature as it goes over and above the traditional ‘normal’ descriptions of sex. This is because of the gratuitous details it contains. The details lay bare the naked bodies, amorous feelings experienced by the characters and all-consuming sexual intercourse.

3.2 *Scene 2: The room in Jones Town*

As stated previously, the first sex scene occurs in the form of a flashback whilst Dinah is waiting for Alphonso the policeman. The second scene occurs when Alphonso arrives, and he takes Dinah to his room in Jones Town. Dinah seeks to escape from the poverty and shacks of the Dungle. Jones Town is a decent neighbourhood and fits into the vision that Dinah has of a better life. Alphonso is gainfully employed as a policeman, and he can therefore afford the type of life that Dinah wants. This is in stark contrast to the meagre income Cyrus earns as a fisherman.

The second sex scene is structured around this dependency predicament that Dinah finds herself in. This is because Alphonso is sexually attracted to Dinah, and he is willing to provide materially for her as long as he gets sex in return. The narrator states that Dinah’s “body had thrilled him like that of no other woman ... It would be paradise being able to do that every night” (p.

64). The arrangement can be termed transactional sex. This arrangement is favoured by Dinah because it means that she will no longer go out and ply her trade and she will be free to pursue other ventures. Although the arrangement is still technically prostitution, it is a milder and more acceptable form of it. It is clear that “Each had something to offer” (p. 64). The arrangement also represents success for Dinah because it means she has finally escaped the Dungle.

The second sex scene is a demonstration of Dinah’s sexual allure and seductive talents. It is necessary to show this side of her because of the transactional sexual arrangement she enters into. Dinah has to show she is worthy of the accommodation she has been given by Alphonso in Jones Town. Her new life in Jones Town is dependent upon her sexual attractiveness and skill. Dinah is up to the task, and she has an established track record. “The sailors had all claimed her the best whore on Harbour Street” (p. 64). This impressive title is one of the reasons Alphonso decides to take her in as his concubine.

Just like in the first scene, the literary foreplay is again evident in the second sex scene. The small room forms an intimate setting for Dinah and Alphonso. This foreshadows sexual activity. The information that Dinah is the best prostitute in Harbour Street is deliberately inserted to build anticipation. Dinah’s experience as a prostitute has resulted in her becoming an expert seductress. She is a professional who is in full control of her sexual power, and she exploits it for her benefit. The second scene begins when the sexual desire in Alphonso is made evident.

She caught his eyes. They were hungry. But what did she care? He deserved everything she could give him. Slowly, he came over to where she stood by the bed. His hands went out and trickled down her back, then to her bottom, and there they rested. She could see him waking with desire. She would play with him. She knew her trade (p. 64).

Alphonso is sexually aroused judging by the way his hands find their way to Dinah’s buttocks. Dinah uses this amorous state to her advantage. As an experienced prostitute she knows that she must keep Alphonso waiting. She must delay the coitus to torture Alphonso. Dinah wants to “play with him” because he is “waking with desire”. This results in more sexual excitement and arousal for Alphonso, causing delayed gratification and sexual aggression:

So now, as he tried to embrace her, she nimbly slipped out of his embrace and fell upon her stomach on the bed. Her feet were as far apart as the tight dress she wore would permit. She set her hips at an angle that tormented him. Clumsily, blundering, he tried to move upon her. Again, she slipped him, this time rolling over on her back. By now two or three buttons towards the pit of her stomach were pulled, revealing her black underwear. He was fevering with irritation and desire. He winced. She experienced a slight sense of pleasing hate. (p. 64-65)

Patterson is at pains to show that Dinah is the ultimate seductress. She deliberately punishes Alphonso by manipulating her attractive body. She knows she is being watched and she knows which positions to place her body in. The combination of the tight dress and the angle of her hips shows she wants Alphonso to go mad with passionate lust. The torture is not only meant for Alphonso. It is also for the reader. As a pornographer, Patterson is aware that he has to include vivid sexual imagery that will arouse the reader. This is evident in the way Dinah's clothes are beginning to fall apart even though there is no attempt to undress her. Literature is a form of catharsis and the reader experiences feelings, moods, and emotions vicariously through characters. The reader's interest parallels the character's through the deployment of suspension of disbelief. When Patterson is torturing Alphonso, he is by extension torturing the reader.

Despite not trying to disrobe, Dinah's clothes become undone, and her underwear already shows. Three buttons come undone, and the colour of her underwear is revealed (p. 65). Alphonso eventually gets irritated by this teasing, and he complains that Dinah does not want to have sex. Sensing that her new abode is threatened, Dinah gives herself completely to Alphonso.

The rest of the buttons pulled under the strain as she leaned her back to laugh. The flesh upon her was taut yet gleaming with a black suppleness. He suddenly grasped her to him. He stripped her. She gave her body so completely to him that he had to hold her up. He was so confused for her. He lifted her and threw her upon the bed. It was short hasty, unsatisfying. (p. 65)

Erotic descriptions are plentiful as Dinah's flesh is described as gleaming and supple. Dinah capitulates completely by giving her body to Alphonso. This is to make up for the teasing earlier on, and to give him a chance to release the sexual build up and quench his lustful passions.

Alphonso is not as passionate a lover as Cyrus. Dinah has no emotional investment in Alphonso. This depiction of her emotional state is a deliberate strategy in pornographic narratives. According to Sontag (1967, p. 219), "The emotional flatness of pornography is ... neither a failure of artistry nor an index of principled inhumanity. The arousal response in the reader *requires* it." What this means is that flat emotions limit the extent to which the reader of a pornographic text will be aroused. The writer, by flattening emotions, produces mechanical sex that will arouse the reader because such emotions as love and guilt might consume the reader much more than the sex. In pornographic literature it is undesirable for the reader to be concerned with the emotions of the character. This is because "Only in the absence of directly stated emotions can the reader of pornography find room for his own responses" (Sontag, 1967, p. 219). Patterson follows pornographic convention, and he is successful in cutting out emotion in the second scene in order to sexually arouse the reader. This can be seen in the narrator's explanation of Dinah's lack of emotion. "She was hardly fond of him. There could be nothing like that between them" (p. 64).

The second sex scene is thus similar to the first scene where emotion is also cut out. There is lustful and energetic sexual intercourse because Dinah is sexually attracted to Cyrus. However, there is no love between the two because Dinah hastily dumps Cyrus for other sexual partners. She takes every opportunity to leave Cyrus, which finds her with Alphonso in Jones Town by the second scene and with Shepherd John by the third.

The second scene is highly detailed and descriptive because it needs to show a woman in complete control of her sexuality. Dinah is a woman able to use her attractiveness and sexual prowess in order to obtain a better life. Unlike the first scene, the second one has a part to play in the overall narrative structure. It signifies the beginning of the attempt to escape the Dungle. It also marks the start of the Sisyphean task that the major characters are involved in when they attempt to fight the nihilism and anarchy of the Caribbean. The second scene invokes imagery that is pornographic in nature. Patterson uses his pornographic imagination to sexually stimulate the reader.

3.3 *Scene 3: Religious sex*

Dinah is an itinerant throughout the novel because of her continuous drive to escape the Dungle for a better life, using the skills of her trade as a prostitute. She pursues this new imagined life with feverish ardour. Her movement is not only physical, but it is also spiritual. She seeks to find spiritual salvation. The search forces her to leave Cyrus and Rastafarianism. Shepherd John is the leader of a pseudo-Christian sect which Dinah attends for spiritual salvation from a curse. The sect is pseudo-Christian because it uses books, such as the book of Moses, which are not in the bible. The connection to Christianity and the authenticity of authorship of these texts is questioned by mainstream Christians. Regardless, Dinah realises that the congregants of the church “had something she longed for. It was simple and plain. They were untormented. By their singing and dancing and spiriting they had scraped their misery from themselves” (p. 162). She subsequently undergoes a lengthy conversion process, centred on repentance.

Sontag (1967, p. 229) explains the significance of religion in pornographic novels. She argues that the pornographic imagination is closely linked to the religious imagination. These two phenomena meet on the edge of human consciousness, and they sometimes conflate. Simply put, this means that sex and religion go hand in hand. Sontag’s theorization of sex and religion will be used to analyse how Orlando Patterson merges these two concepts when Shepherd John converts Dinah to the REVIVAL ZION BAPTIST OF GOD church.

There are connections between religion, pornography, and social context. Cyrus in the first scene is a follower of Rastafarianism. This religion seeks to break with traditional Christianity and has a more tolerant view of indulgence. The sex in the first scene should thus be considered in that context. In a similar vein, the sex with Shepherd John offers windows into other religions and their handling of sex since the context is that of protestant

religion. The firm distinction between pornography and sex must be remembered. Sex in this context, has a religious purpose. It is the depiction of that sex that then opens avenues for the introduction of pornography. In other words, it would be possible to have a sex scene that highlights the interconnected nature of sex and religion in a more subdued way. The concern of this paper is that the religious sex on this occasion is presented in gratuitous and explicit details thus culminating in the production of pornography.

Patterson uses the background of religion to introduce the pornography. That is, religion is manipulated by Shepherd John for him to have sexual intercourse with Dinah. The members of the REVIVAL ZION BAPTIST OF GOD (sic) church are part of a personality cult. They engage in hero worship of their leader Shepherd John. Shepherd John tells the congregants that the lord will soon provide a companion for him. When Dinah arrives, the prophecy seems to be fulfilled. Dinah is persuaded to stop cohabiting with Alphonso and to move to the church permanently. On her last night in Jones Town, she “did not make Alphonso touch her” (p. 165). This makes Dinah open to a new sexual partner. From now on, her past sexual activity is to be tied to her past sinful ways. All further sexual activity is to be with the blessing of Shepherd John and the religious sect.

In the third scene, the sex and eroticism are centred on religion. Addressing Dinah, Shepherd John remarks, “Oh, you are stink with sin” (p. 166). Consequently, the purification process begins with a purification bath. Whilst Dinah is naked, Shepherd John prepares her bath while reading from the Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses and the Twenty-ninth Psalm. The constant reference to scripture sanctions and legitimises the erotic activity,

Shepherd John walked forward, put away his Bible and asked for the oil of gladness. The water mother handed him a bottle of olive oil from the table. He poured some in his hand, put down the bottle and rubbed his palms together. He touched her on the forehead, on the tip of her chin, on the crown of her head and on both cheeks with his forefinger, then from her neck he made a slow downward movement, beginning first with her hands, then coming up from her ankles, then horizontally across her belly, making sure that none of the oil touched her pubic hair. As he balmed her he repeated the twenty-sixth verse of the Eighteenth Psalm: ‘With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward’. Dinah remained calm throughout. She was overwhelmed with the mystery of it all. The balmy fragrance, its esoteric acerbity, sweet, lemony stink, seeped into her nostrils, into her every pore, salving her soul. And the touch of Shepherd John’s hand was like magic, every squeeze, every slide, every stroke, soothed her flesh to a lilting, calm vibrance (p. 166-167).

The erotic bath and massage are described vividly by the narrator in the above

quoted passage. Dinah is completely naked and Shepherd John's hands can do as they please with her body. The olive oil acts as a lubricant in the same way bodily fluids lubricate the genitals during intercourse. Shepherd John carefully massages all the erotic zones and soft spots on Dinah's body such as her neck and belly. The oil is not allowed to drip down to her pubic hair because this is a milder version of sex since there is no actual intercourse. Regardless, the mention of the pubic hair serves as a reminder to the reader that Dinah is bare and uncovered. The import is that there are no sacred cows because the hair on her genitals is on full display. Interlaced with the erotic massage is the quoting of Holy Scripture. This is to remind both Dinah and the reader that the arousing activity occurring is holy and blessed. There is no need for the shame and embarrassment usually conjured by sex because this time it is within the confines of the church. Dinah, the best whore on Harbour Street, is enjoying this experience and it leaves her calm and relaxed. The fragrance is described as being pleasant. It soothes her soul leaving her receptive to intercourse.

It is interesting to note that Shepherd John's hands are pleasing and their actions resemble those of the penis whilst they are massaging Dinah. Every action they take is an action that mirrors the movements of the penis during sexual intercourse. For example, the hands 'stroke', 'squeeze' and 'slide'. These verbs are synonymous with the actions of the male genital organ during sex. The massage is meant to be a substitute for sex. This is because the conversion process is just beginning, and it is still too early for sex. The massage cannot be considered foreplay because it stops without being consummated. This massage moment serves to foreshadow the consummation that we see later on as both the narrative and conversion progress. Some days later, a baptism is performed, and a communion service is to be held to complete the conversion. During the communion service, Dinah faints before the spirit of Melshezdek can fully descend upon her. The only way the spirit can fully descend on her is for Shepherd John to have sex with her. Dinah encourages this by pleading with Shepherd, "Ah mus' feel it, Shepherd. Ah mus. Yu know de way" (p. 181).

Shepherd John then proceeds to beat Dinah in a case of religious flagellation. Flagellation is closely associated with sex and sex acts. Many who practise it have a fetish for it. In this instance, however, it is sanctified by the fact that it is part of a conversion process in a religious ceremony. Flagellation is a major convention of pornography and can be found in books and films. The flagellation performed by Shepherd John brings pleasure to Dinah even though it also brings her pain. It is painful because "The whip pierced through the air and sunk into her flesh" (p. 181) but there is also pleasure because as "the pain rooted into her she felt a ticklish tinge in its quivering" (p. 181) and "[s]he ... relish[ed] the warm, vibrating ecstasy of the flagellation" (p. 181).

Sontag (1967, p. 229) argues that there is a pattern of religious metaphors in pornographic books. As in *The Children of Sisyphus*, many

pornographic novels feature scenes where religious conversion and flagellation are prominent. In her survey of pornographic novels Sontag (p. 229) observes that “The whipping, branding and mutilating are described ... as ritual ordeals which test the faith of someone being initiated into an ascetic spiritual discipline.” Dinah’s experience echoes the experiences of other protagonists of pornographic novels. Her situation is closely mirrored by O, the protagonist of *The Story of O* (1954). Sontag holds that “O is that absentminded person who has yielded up her will in order to be totally remade, to be made fit to serve a will far more powerful and authoritative than her own” (p. 230). This is the same situation with Dinah because she also wants to be spiritually reborn hence the conversion by Shepherd John. The religious drive in these two novels opens up the protagonists to sex and by extension, pornographic representations of that sex in order to sexually arouse the reader.

Pornography is also meant to bring satisfaction to those individuals with peculiar sexual preferences. By including a major convention of pornography, in the form of the flagellation fetish, Patterson invites discussion of his art within the context of pornographic conventions. A fetish is a form of sexual deviance (Witcombe, 2015, p. 26). There is an allure to acts of pain during sex. Sontag theorises this by saying that “everyone has felt (at least in fantasy) the erotic glamour of physical cruelty and an erotic lure in things that are vile and repulsive. These phenomena form part of the genuine spectrum of sexuality, and if they are not to be written off as mere neurotic aberrations, the picture looks different from the one promoted by enlightened public opinion and less simple” (1967, p. 222). What this means is that pornography acts as a haven for those aspects of human sexuality that are shunned by the public. Patterson chooses to introduce the fetish of flagellation into his pornographic novel. This is so that readers of his novel with an interest in this fetish can experience catharsis through his creative fiction.

The flagellation can rightly be considered foreplay since it occurs just before sex. After the flagellation the intercourse can finally take place:

He was now completely naked. He lifted her up in his arms. Their skin glowed in the flowing candlelight like enmeshed silkworms. He sucked her nipples, he kissed her gently on her cheeks, then he laid her down on the bed and whispered solemnly: ‘Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee’. He came upon her with all his mighty gentleness. Her soul swelled up to meet him. His flesh stole into her like a spirit. ... Now it was upon her. Her body, forgotten, wrapped itself involuntarily around him. ‘Jesus!’ she uttered fervently (p. 181-182).

The intercourse signals the final part of the conversion. The intercourse is the sweetest that Dinah has ever experienced. It is more emotional and, apart from the flagellation, nonviolent. In the first scene, she was overwhelmed by the aggression of Cyrus, and in the second one it was unfulfilling sex

that felt like an imposed duty. The sex in scene 3 is linked to her very soul. She has found a new religious calling that sanctions the love making. It is the only scene in which the reader observes her reaching orgasm. This is seen through her calling out for Jesus fervently. It is important to note that heightened experiences of orgasm are another convention of pornography. The characters and actors have to feed and fuel the fantasy of ultimate ecstasy that Susan Sontag refers to (Sontag, 1967, p. 213).

4. Conclusion

This paper analysed three sex scenes in *The Children of Sisyphus* in order to investigate whether the term 'pornography' could be applied to them. The paper drew on Sontag's theorisation of the pornographic imagination to explain the link between pornography and literature. The first scene was discovered to exhibit major conventions of pornography. The first scene depicts characters with exaggerated body types and sexual features. This convention seeks to feed the fantasy of perfect anatomical structures. In addition to this, Patterson employs literary foreplay in order to sexually arouse the reader. The literary foreplay is deployed in order to brace the reader for the depiction of sex. Scene 1 was found to be gratuitously explicit in order to sexually arouse the reader. Dinah's initial resistance to sex creates further sexual tension in the reader. Cyrus is described as an ultimate sexual beast. This further fuels the pornographic cliché of perfectly endowed bodies. The scene is couched in the trope of rough sex. This type of sexual representation was found to be gratuitous and therefore pornographic. It was concluded that the scene is pornographic and that it does not further the narrative of the story.

The second scene, too, was found to contain literary foreplay chiefly through Dinah's title of the "best whore on Harbour Street". This title drives the narrative forward because of the expectation it inspires. In scene 2, Dinah's sexual prowess shows the reader that she is a mistress of all that is sexual. The full display of Dinah's talents and sexual experience was found to be a literary device meant to sexually arouse the reader. Dinah's agility and her ability to use her body to fuel Alphonso's sexual passions were found to be pornographic. However, unlike scene 1, the pornographic descriptions in scene 2 move the narrative forward. This is because the transactional prostitution leading to the sex means, from Dinah's perspective, that she has finally escaped the Dungle.

The analysis showed that in Scene 3, religion is introduced as an idea closely related to sex and pornography. The religious motif of flagellation comes into play in the kind of sex happening in Scene 3 because flagellation also features in pornography as a fetish. This fetish, being a major hallmark of pornography, shows deviant sexual behaviour. The erotic massage also serves as a way for Patterson to describe the body's erotic zones and pleasure points. This exposes body parts not normally mentioned in public to the reader. The novel has particular scenes that are pornographic, but on the whole, it is not

pornographic. This is because outside of the explicit sex scenes, the novel develops well and there are no traces of pornography. However, considering the occupation of the protagonist, Dinah, there is an underlying current of sex and pornography present.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, religion is important to consider whenever questions of pornography are considered in relation to this novel. This is because the Christian religion brought sexual repression and Dinah's religious journeys offer the opportunity to study other sexualities in different non-repressive contexts. Dinah's sexual encounters are with men outside the realm of traditional religion. As discussed above, the encounters with Brother Shepherd and Cyrus who are protestant and Rastafarian respectively show deep and powerful sexual experiences.

This paper contributes to the various debates around pornography and literature. It encourages readers and critics alike to reassess Caribbean literature through the prism of the pornographic imagination. The insights that Sontag provides show that pornography can be deployed strategically in creative fiction to make the narrative more vivid: pornography should not be treated with aversion but should rather be welcomed in recognition that it can be a part of artistic and literary merit. I have argued, though, that a novel can have pornographic portraits deliberately inserted at specific moments for illumination, in order not only to elevate the artistry of literature but also to sexually arouse the reader.

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