

MARYSE CONDÉ

Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer

In a recent interview, the Martinican writer Edouard Glissant declared: "I don't believe that West Indian literature exists yet since literature supposes an action and a reaction between a public and an audience. I repeat that we West Indian writers, we are writing forewords to tomorrow's literature."¹ Last year when *Eloge de la Créolité* was published, two of his disciples, Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau, and a linguist Jean Bernabé repeated: "West Indian literature doesn't exist yet. We are in a state of pre-literature. Ours is a written production without an audience at home, deprived of the interaction between writers/readers which is necessary for any literature to exist."²

Although it seems difficult to state seriously that West Indian literature doesn't exist, we easily agree that there is a crisis, a malaise. But we don't blame it on the causes pointed out by Glissant, Confiant, and Chamoiseau. We attribute it to the very commands enumerated throughout the history of West Indian literature by the various generations of writers. For example, in *Eloge de la Créolité*, the authors state: "We must give a name to everything and true to *créolité* say that it is beautiful. Therefore we must see the human dignity of the "djobeurs," understand the life of the Morne Pichevin or of the vegetable markets of Fort-de-France, study how our storytellers operate . . . (*Eloge de la Créolité*, 40). Glissant, Chamoiseau, and Confiant are not the first ones to give commands to the future writers of our islands. West Indian

1. Interview given to Priska Degras and Bernard Magniez in *Notre Librairie* 74 (Caraiïbes 2).

2. Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 14.

YFS 83, *Post/Colonial Conditions*, ed. Lionnet & Scharfman, © 1993 by Yale University.

- Language Conference, University of Kentucky, 1979.
- "Surrealism's Unnamed Manifesto," Conference on French Literature, University of South Carolina, 1979.
- "Reading Saturday Night Fever," Film Conference, University of Purdue, 1979.
- "Proust dans l'appareillage célinien," Société des études céliniennes, Paris, 1979.
- "Traduire l'Amérique: de Chateaubriand à Simenon," French Institute, 1980.
- "Réalité et écriture: Poésie XXème," New York University, 1981.
- "Rabélais between Bakhtin and Jean Paris," Columbia College Program in the Humanities, 1981.
- Readings, Commentaries, Translations: Francis Ponge, Bard College, 1981.
- "Ponge Peintre en mots," MLA, December 1981.
- "Ponge et l'art," Mount Holyoke College, 1983.
- "L'ordre nouveau ou la critique totalitaire," Graduate Center, CUNY, First Colloquium on Twentieth Century French Studies, 1983.
- "L'Humanisme: La tradition," "L'Humanisme: La critique," Universities of Rome, Urbino and Arezzo, 1984.
- "Poë: A Psycho-Textual Reading," Universities of Venice and Bologna, 1984.
- "Michaux du signe au corps," New York University, Michaux Colloquium, 1985.
- "Ezra Pound: Fasciste américain," Ezra Pound colloquium, Cogolen, France, 1985.
- "Blaise Cendrars: remettre le je dans le je," "Michaux ou le démembrement du je," "Saint-John Perse ou le je du maître," "Poë: A Poetics of The Fall of the House of Usher," University of Rome, 1986.
- "Ezra Pound: Ideology and Poetics," University of Bologna, 1986.
- "Henri Michaux: l'autodestruction," University of Milan, 1986.
- "American Poetry during the War in Vietnam," USIS, Milan, 1986.
- "Le Discours totalitaire," University of Milan, 1987.
- "Surrealism and Science Fiction," University of Bologna, 1987.
- "Virginia Woolf: Of Colons, Semi-Colons and Dashes," University of Venice, 1987.
- "Lire Les Signes: La traduction," "Nearing the Text: Cross Cultural Compatibilities," University of Salerno, 1987.
- "Sound Sense," Conference on Translation/Interpretation, Salerno, 1987.
- "Francis Ponge quasi obsessionnel," Twentieth Century Colloquium on French Studies, 1988.
- "Recentrer le moi: poétique/poésie," New England Modern Language Association, 1988.
- "Paris rêve surréaliste," University of Milan and University of Sienna, 1988.
- "Texte et idéologie: Comment juger James Joyce," University of Macerata, Faculty of Law, 1988.
- "Lire les signes cinématographiques: le Chien andalou," "L'image surréaliste: de l'hermétisme à la publicité," University of Salerno, 1988.
- "Structures urbaines/structures narratives," University of Rome, 1988.
- "Aimé Césaire--Poésie et politique, l'humanisme en question," Bryn Mawr College Program, Avignon, 1989.
- "L'objet c'est la poésie," University of Turin, 1990.
- "A Materialist Pact: The Poetics of Ponge and Zukofsky," University of Venice, 1990.
- "Lire Sade," "De Sade au Surréalisme," University of Rome, 1990.
- "Perceiving the Sign Sade," University of Salerno, 1990.
- "Me Tarzan, You Ekphrasis," International Conference on the Novel of the Future, University of Macerata, 1990.
- "Poetics of Translation," University of California, Davis, 1991.
- "Ponge and Zukofsky," University of California, San Diego, 1991.
- Graduate Seminar paper on "The Music in (of) Ponge," Undergraduate Seminar: "Translating

literature born or not yet born has *always* been an object of deep concern.

We shall try to analyze the various commands decreed about West Indian literature, all of them contributing to the edification of an order very few writers have dared to transgress to introduce disorder. In conclusion, we shall try to see whether it is possible to hope for an era of freedom in West Indian writing.

ORDER

In 1927, in a journal called "La Trouée," a group of young Haitian intellectuals declared: "Literature is the cry of a people who want to say what boils within them." 1927: the American Marines had invaded Haiti twelve years earlier because of political upheavals. The Haitian people, who already knew political oppression, were discovering racism. History repeats itself.

A few years later, with the Marines still present in Haiti, the mulatto and upper bourgeois writer Jacques Roumain declared in "La Revue indigène": "Literature must be black and proletarian."³

In 1932, the manifesto called "Légitime Défense," signed by a group of Martinican and Guadeloupean intellectuals, was published in Paris. They had just discovered Marxism and in its name sentenced to death the bourgeois society to which they belonged. They also condemned its literature to death, stating "A foreigner would look in vain for any originality or depth, for the sensual and colorful imagination of the Black Man, or the echo of the aspirations of an oppressed people." On the eve of World War II, Suzanne Césaire, in the journal "Tropiques," uttered her famous command: "Martinican poetry shall be cannibalistic or shall not be."⁴ As for Césaire himself, in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* [*Return to my Native Land*] speaking of the role of the poet, he summed up all these ideas saying "My mouth will be the mouth of those who have no mouth, my voice the voice of those who despair."⁵ From that time on the foundations of order were laid. Even those who are not very familiar with West Indian literature know some

3. Jacques Roumain in "La Revue indigène."

4. Suzanne Césaire, *Misère d'une Poésie, Tropiques* (repr. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1978).

5. Aimé Césaire, *Return to my Native Land*, trans. Emile Snyder (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1968), 61. *The Collected Poetry*, translation with introduction and notes by Clayton Eshelman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

"On Dante's Way," *Talisman*, #19, Winter 1998/99, 78-81.
 "Sans entrailles ni strip-tease: Portrait de Ponge en professeur américain," *Genesis* 12/98, 139-146.

"Mallarmé in the U.S.A." *Talisman*, #20, Winter 1999-2000, 8-14.

"Borrowing Mallarmé," *L'Esprit Créateur*, Spring 2000, 53-64.

"Eros-tic" *SITES*, *Journal of 20th Century/Contemporary French Studies*, vol. 6, issue 1, 227, 2002.

"E. E. Cummings, Antisémité?" *Action Poétique*, Oct. 2002 #169, pp. 54-61.

"Aragon: Politics and Picasso?" *Romanic Review*, vol. 92, #1-2, 2003, p. 47-59.

"The Influence of Marxism, Communism and Surrealism on Négritude," *Rockefeller Foundation*

at Bellagio, August 28, 2003.

"Louis Zukofsky: l'homme et la poésie," *Centre d'Etudes poétiques, Ecole Normale*

Supérieure, (Lyons: October 22, 2003.)

"Con/vers/ation: Louis Zukofsky et Francis Ponge" in *Ponge, résolution* Ecole Normale

Supérieure, (Lyons, 2004, 145-164).

"Le dit du Petit Chaperon Rouge" *Nioque*, May 2003.

Preface to photographic exhibit by Eric Coisel in Rodez (2004).

"Translating Zukofsky" and "Hommage to Robert Creeley" *Golden Handcuffs*,

(Summer 2005).

Reviews

Permanent reviewer for *French News and Education in France*, 1965-69.

Other reviews in *The French Review*, *Book World*, *Books Abroad*, *The Village Voice*, *French*

Forum, *Small Press*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and *Ugly Duckling*.

Selected Speeches and Papers

Maison Française, New York University (four times)

Maison Française, Columbia University (three times)

The French Institute (four times)

Ecole Libre des hautes études (four times)

Miles College, Birmingham, Alabama

Amherst College

Swarthmore College

"Surrealism: the Second Counter-Culture," *Denver Colorado, Seven Sisters College Conference*,

1974.

Discussant on bilingualism, Symposium on Ethnopoetics, Center for Twentieth-Century Studies,

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1975.

"Nietzsche ou l'arrière texte pongien," *Certisy-la-Salle, France*, 1975.

"The Politics of Revolution," *Colloquium on Modern Literature*, West Virginia University, 1977.

1977.

"Francis Ponge et la poésie française aujourd'hui," *University of California at Davis*, 1977.

"Poetics of Revolution," *University of California at Irvine*, 1977.

"Poétique du freinage: L'ambigu surréalisme," *First International Colloquium on Poetics and*

Poetry, Columbia University, 1977.

"When a Poet Speaks to the Sun," *Conference on Helios*, SUNY at Albany, 1978.

"Acts of Translation: Ponge and Breton," *Symposium on Poetry and Translation*, Foreign

of the basic rules, and we don't intend to repeat them again. One may simply say that they were inspired by the theory of social realism which was favored in some quarters, since the victorious Soviet Revolution had heralded what seemed to be the dawn of a new era for the oppressed all over the world. They were also influenced by Sartre who, in 1948, wrote the foreword to the first anthology of French-speaking black poetry.

1. Individualism was chastised. Only the collectivity had the right to express itself.
2. The masses were the sole producers of Beauty, and the poet had to take inspiration from them.
3. The main, if not the sole, purpose of writing was to denounce one's political and social conditions, and in so doing, to bring about one's liberation.
4. Poetic and political ambition were one and the same.

Therefore, pictures of individual love and psychological turmoil were banished. Any description of nature was forbidden. Lyrical outbursts about the mountains or the sea and the sky were left to the so-called "exotic poets" writing at the beginning of the century, who had been ridiculed and sentenced to literary death. The hills were the refuge where the Maroons had escaped the sufferings of the plantation, the trees the silent witnesses of an eternal exploitation. In the celebrated opening lines of *Return to my Native Land*, Césaire gives an example of this ideological description of nature. Looking at the magnificent bay of Fort-de-France, he exclaims: "At the end of the dawn, flowered with frail creeks, the hungry West Indies, pitted with smallpox, dynamited with alcohol, stranded in the mud of this bay, in the dirt of this city sinisterly stranded" (Césaire, *Return to my Native Land*, 40). Is it not time to somehow rehabilitate the so-called exotic poets?

Victor Segalen has shown that exoticism can be considered the first perception of difference: "The knowledge that something is not yourself."⁶ In the case of the exotic poets of the West Indies, one could say that to celebrate their land was the first, timid appropriation of their own world. They were celebrating their land *before* celebrating their peoples. Not *instead* of doing so. Their poetic abilities were ridiculed. "Not art," said Césaire contemptuously, "not poetry. Only the ugly

6. Victor Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du divers* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1978).

- "Words on Paper for Jean Daive," *Substance*, 23-24, 1979.
- "Surrealism's Unnamed Manifesto," *French Literature Series*, VII, 1980.
- "Proust dans l'appareillage célimien," *Céline: Actes du Colloque de Paris*, III, 1980.
- "Céline: Fiction et référentialité -- Lecture de Voyage au bout de la nuit," *Céline: Actes du colloque international d'Oxford*, Paris: Bibliothèque L.F. Céline de l'Université de Paris 7, 1981.
- "Le Château de la voix," *Spirales*, 16, 1982.
- "Aimé Césaire and the Language of Politics," *The French Review*, 56, 2, 1982.
- "Aragon's Persiennes or Discourse Discovered," *Dada/Surrealism*, 10/11, 1982.
- "Art Criticism as Autoportraiture," *L'Esprit Créateur*, XXII, 4, 1982.
- "La Métaphore L'Amour, Métaphor Love," *Gradyva*, I, New Series, 1984.
- "Speculum: John Ashbery's Mirror," *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, VI, March 1985.
- "Poétique du freinage: L'ambiguë surréalisme," *Sicléle éclaté*, 1985.
- "Fragments d'un discours: Ezra Pound, Fasciste américain," *Banana Split*, 18, 1985.
- "L'œil du regard," *Françis Ponge* (Paris: L'Herne), 1986.
- "Ponge on Braque: The Visible Object," in *Self, Sign, and Symbol*, ed. by Mark Neuman and Michael Payne, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pa., 1987, 168-177.
- "Le Passé présent: Paris rêve surréaliste," in *Acta Universita degli studi di Salerno*, 1988/1989, 25-47.
- "The Object is (in) Poetics," *Pegnod*, 34 (1992), 145-159.
- "La Voix de Ponge, entretien avec Serge Gavronsky," *Po&Siclé*, 61 (1992), 3-21.
- "Interview with Marcelin Pleynet," *Shearsman, new series*, 7 (1992), 6-12.
- "Interview with Joseph Guglielmi," *Shearsman, new series*, 8 (1993), 9-12.
- "Translated Mina Loy," *FF 2* (1993), 27-29.
- "The Lying Image," *La scienza, l'arte, la comunicazione* (1993), 117-125.
- "Interview with Julia Kristeva," *Pegnod 35* (1993), 182-189.
- "Il nuovi mezzi di comunicazione," *Il secondo rinascimento* 6 (1993), 112-117.
- "Interview with Raquel," *Witz*, I (1993), 3, 1-4.
- "Poethics: And Other Strategies of Law and Literature," *Cardozo Law Review* 15 (1994), 4, 1127-1138.
- "Marginal Man, essay," in *Il secondo Rinascimento*, 9 (November-December 1993), 66-76.
- "Notes on the Avant-Garde," in *Poetic Briefs* (December 1993-January 1994), Number 14, 1-2.
- "L'essence du poème," in *Discours psychanalytique*, October 1994, Number 12, 124-26.
- Review of Madeline Gins, Helen Keller or Arakawa, *Witz*, Winter 1994, Vol. III, No. 1, 8 and 12.
- "On Translation," Interview with Catherine Wald in *Poets & Writers Magazine*, March/April 1995, 58-59.
- "Tradure Zukofsky," in *IF*, 1995.
- "Lettre d'Amérique, II," in *Action poétique*, 1995.
- "Surrealism and the Killing of René Descartes," in *Gradyva*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1996), 12-17.
- Interviews with Emmanuel Hocquard and Claude Royet-Journoud were translated in the Norwegian literary review, *Vagant*, 2, 1996.
- Essay, "Righting Sides: Arakawa/Gins or 22 Propositions for a Unit," appeared in Japanese in *Gendai-Shison*, Spring 1996, 384-387.
- Collaborated on six poem posters with Jean-Marc Scanreigh, Spring 1996.
- "Lettre d'Amérique, III," *Action poétique*, 144, Fall 1996, 81-83.
- "Is there an Art of Translation?" *Interstice*, 2, Spring/Summer 1997, 152-54.
- "Guarire il male, guarire il Maschio Borghese o Sade Freud e il surrealismo," *Il Secundo Rinascimento*, #52, Feb. 1998, 128-134.

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leprosy of imitation."⁷ He was forgetting that in those days, to imitate to perfection was already a transgression. The black man was not entitled to have any talent, and during slavery to be caught reading a book meant death.

The new order didn't affect only poetry. It also affected history, sociology, and philosophy. West Indian society was not studied *per se*, as an autonomous object. It was always seen as a result of the slave-trade, slavery, and colonial oppression. This past was the cause of every social and cultural feature and thus explained everything: the relationships between men and women, the family system, as well as oral traditions or popular music. It is impossible to deny that the West Indian past weighs heavily on the present. Nevertheless, the plantation system in which this society evolved, the promiscuity of the white master, the arrival of new ethnic groups such as the Indians, are factors responsible for its characteristics as well. Not everything can be explained through slavery. West Indian society came to be considered as a Paradise perverted by Europe. Everything prior to colonization was idealized. Consequently, from the image of Africa, the motherland, were carefully eradicated any blemishes such as domestic slavery, or tribal warfare, and the subjugation of women.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon was the first to realize the dangers of such idealization. But in turn, he blames it on Europe, stating: "Colonialism . . . never ceased to assert that the Negro was a savage and by Negro was meant not the Angolan or the Nigerian, but the Negro. . . . Therefore the efforts of the colonized to rehabilitate himself and escape the attacks of colonialism are to be logically understood on the same level."⁸

At the end of the Second World War, communications were resumed. The intellectuals from the West Indies and Africa were able to meet again and plan for the future. The *Société Africaine de Culture* was created in Paris, a few years after *Présence Africaine*. What was the purpose of this *Société*? Once again, let's consult Frantz Fanon: "This society . . . will limit its activity to a few exhibitions: it will try to prove to Europe that African culture does exist" (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 148).

7. Aimé Césaire, "Présentation" du no. 1 de la revue *Tropiques* (repr. Fort-de-France, 1941).

8. Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, préface de Jean-Paul Sartre (Paris: Maspéro, 1961 [1967]), 145; *The Wretched of the Earth*, preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963 [1977]).

POETRY: LIVRES D'ARTISTE

France d'Hier/Yesterday's France, with original drawings by Koschmider, poèmes. (Paris: Eric Coisel, 1999.)

Coulée de blanc, poèmes art work by Joël Leick (Paris: Eric Coisel, 1999).
Je hurle ton nom, poèmes art work by Joël Leick (Paris: Eric Coisel, 2000).
Entre bouche, poèmes art work by Joël Leick (Paris: Eric Coisel, 2000).

En terre, poèmes art work by Joël Leick (Paris: Eric Coisel, 2000).

Partage du silence, poèmes art work by Joël Leick (Paris: Eric Coisel, 2000).

La tangente du m, poèmes art work by Joël Leick. (Paris: Eric Coisel, 2000.)

Était-ce le vide, poèmes, art work by Fulvio Testa (Austin, Texas: Bradley, Hutchinsonson, 2001.)

On l'écume, poèmes art work by Jean Anguera (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2002.)

À vue lè par le vide, poèmes art work by Michaela Andrea Schatt (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2002.)

Double or Nothing, poems, art work by Tony Soulié (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2002.)

Equivaloir (a), poèmes, art work by Tony Soulié (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2002.)

"Des x en Agonie," poèmes, art work by Joël Leick (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2004).

"Quand vient le jour," poèmes, art work by Zuzanna Hulka (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2004).

"What Pleasure Remains" poems, art work by Yvan Koschmider (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2005).

"Breton checked out" poems, art work by Yvan Koschmider (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2005).

"Le verbe ne me détruisait..." poèmes art work by Jean Anguera (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2005).

"Peu de mots" poèmes, art work by Jean Anguera (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2005).

"Pâle lumière" poèmes, art work by Ricardo Mosner (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2005).

"Let me go..." poèmes, art work by Ricardo Mosner (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2005).

"L'enjeu de l'ombre" poèmes, art work by Ricardo Mosner (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2005).

"Moi qui..." poèmes, art work by Jean Anguera (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2005).

"Plutôt la ligne" poèmes, art work by Jean Anguera (Paris: Collection Mémoires, 2005).

"A la ligne le pli" poèmes (-36° edition, 2009).

Selected Articles

"American Slavery and the French Liberals," The Journal of Negro History, January 1966.

"Warhol's Underground," Cahiers du cinéma (New York), 1968.

"Robert Natkin: American Painter," IKON, Spring 1968.

"Négritude: Theories and Illustrations," Chelsea Magazine, Spring 1972.

"The Translator's Progress," Substance, Special Issue on French Poetics, Spring 1973.

"From Piety to Cannibalism," Substance, 1977. (Translated into German: Der Besetzer.

Stuttgart, Germany, June and July, 1978.)

Nietzsche ou l'arrière texte pongien," Francis Ponge, Décade de Cerny, Paris: Les Editions

Général, coll. 10/18, 1977.

"The Linguistic Aspects of Francophone Literature," The French Review, May 1978.

Among these exhibitions:

In 1956 in Paris, the First Congress of Writers and Artists of the Black World.

In 1959 in Rome, the Second Congress.

It was during this Second Congress that Sekou Touré, the late president of Guinea, delivered his speech on "The political leader as the representative of a Culture" and declared: "There is no place for the artist or for the intellectual who is not totally mobilized with the people in the great struggle of Africa and suffering mankind."⁹ Such sentences become very ironical when one knows of Touré's ulterior active imposition of suffering on the Guinean people. However, despite these reservations there was a wonderful, generous dream in those days. The dream of a black world which would not be broken up into distinct nations by the colonial languages, and the various colonial systems of governments. A black world which would speak through one voice, through the univocal voice of its poets and writers. A black world which would recover its dignity and pride.

All that was soon to disappear. The end of World War II marked the beginnings of decolonization in Africa. Year after year, through a series of reforms and conflicts, the African countries arrived at political independence. The African poets and writers who had been close to the *Société Africaine de Culture* and to *Présence Africaine* became heads of state, prime ministers, ministers, thus completing the collusion between politics and literature. The islands of the West Indies, however, became and remained "French Overseas Departments." The black Americans went to fight racism at home. Thus the dream of a united black world was shattered.

Just before the end of the war the posthumous novel of the Haitian writer Jacques Roumain, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* [*Masters of the Dew*], was published.¹⁰ If one compares this novel to *Return to my Native Land* by Césaire, one cannot help being struck by the structural similarities. In both cases, we have two messianic male heroes (Manuel and the Poet) whose ambition is to change their societies and thus rehabilitate the exploited Black Man. On the literary scene, these two

9. Sekou Touré, *The Political Leader as the Representative of a Culture*, 2d Congress of Black Writers and Artists (Rome: 1959); *The Political Leader Considered* (Newark, N.J.: Jihad Productions, 1975).

10. Jacques Roumain, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (Paris: Editeurs français réunis, 1946); *Masters of the Dew*, trans. Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook (London: Heinemann, 1982).

Curriculum Vitae
Novels & Poetry

The German Friend, a novel (New York, SUN, 1984.)
 Serge Gavronsky (trans.), Henri Michaux, Telegram from Dakar. (New York, Red Ozier Press, 1986.)
 Ecrire l'homme, essais critiques, (Rome: Bulzoni, 1986.)
 L'Amica tedesca, a novel, Italian trans., by Franco La Polla, with preface by Harold Bloom. (Milan, Spirali, 1988.)
 Même-la suivi de Geste, poèmes, Xanrupt/Longemer (France: Aencrages, 1992.)
 Il nome del padre, a novel, Italian trans. by Anna Spadafora. (Milan: Spirali, 1993.)
 Louis Zukofsky, "L'homme poète," Introduction and co-translator with François Dominique, "A" 1 - 7 (Dijon: Ulysse Siècle, 1994.)
 Toward a New Poetics: Contemporary Writing in France. (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1994.)
 Parlons de lui, 6 dessins de Scanreigh (Paris: Editions Pierre Annette, 1995.)
 Je le suis, poème, NY: Limited artist's edition with corrosive and rusted paper cover by Michael Kanter, 1995.
 Joyce Mansour, Cris/Screams, trans. with an Introduction by Serge Gavronsky (Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 1995.)
 Réduction du triptyque, poème (Paris: Philippe Millereau, 1996.)
 L'interminable discussion, poème 6 original woodcuts by Scanreigh (Paris: Editions Philippe Millereau, 1996.)
 Six Contemporary French Women Poets. (Carbondale, IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1997.)
 L'obscur d'ici, poèmes (Paris: Pierre Delangle, 1998.)
 Mallarmé spectral ou Louis Zukofsky au travail. (La Souterraine, France. La Main courante, 1998.)
 Joyce Mansour, Déchirures/Torn Apart, Trans. with an Introduction by Serge Gavronsky. (Fayetteville, NY: The Bitter Oleander Press, 1999.)
 Francis Ponge à New York (La Souterraine, France, 2001.)
 Louis Zukofsky, Introduction et traduction avec François Dominique de "A" 1 - 6, (Dijon: Ulysse fin de siècle, 2001.)
 Sixty-six For Starters, poetry (Jersey City: Jensen Daniels, 2002.)
 Temps mort, poème (Dijon: Ulysse fin de siècle, 2002.)
 Une toute autre histoire, poème (Paris: Al Dante, 2002.)
 Louis Zukofsky, Introduction et traduction avec François Dominique de "A" 7 - 11. (Dijon: Virgile, 2003.)
 Edited with an Introduction, Louis Zukofsky, The Writing of Guillaume Apollinaire (Westleyan UP, 2004.)
 Co-translator and author of introduction, "Louis Zukofsky's "A" - 12 (Dijon: Virgile, 2004.)
 Après Flaubert: Hip Hop poèmes (Paris: Al Dante, 2006.)
 L'Identità, novel (Milan: Spirali Publisher, 2006.)
 Co-translator and author of introduction, "Louis Zukofsky's "A" - 13 - 18 (Dijon: Virgile, 2007.)
 Translator and author of introduction, Joyce Mansour Essential Poetry and Prose (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2008.)
 ANDORTHE, poetry (NJ: Talisman, 2008.)
 The Sudden Death of..., novel (NY: Spuyten Duyvil, 2009.)
 Remake - Le Couple, prose (La Souterraine: La main Courante, 2009.)
 Silence of Memory, a novel (Spuyten Duyvil, under contract, 2014.)

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 WLF
 Co-Translator with François Dominique
 Louis Zukofsky (Dijon, Virgile)
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works were to have the same effect: obliterate for years to come any literary production prior to themselves. Like *Return to my Native Land*, *Masters of the Dew* became a sacred text, a fundamental text. According to a Guadeloupean critic, every West Indian novel is nothing but the rewriting of *Masters of the Dew* and *Return to my Native Land*. The reason for the critical acclaim of *Masters of the Dew* cannot be purely aesthetic. As Alain Robbe-Grillet puts it: "There are no masterpieces for eternity; merely works marked by their time."¹¹

With less obscurity and incandescence than Césaire, with a lesser concern for the black world, now limited to the islands, *Masters of the Dew* provides the West Indians with a perfect image of themselves and their islands. Freud said that the finality of art is to reconcile the people with a reality which they don't like. If this is true, in this extraordinary poetic novel the West Indians have everything they can dream of. *Master of the Dew* established a model which is still largely undisputed to this day.

1. The framework should be the native land.
2. The hero should be male, of peasant origin.
3. The brave and hardworking woman should be the auxiliary in his struggle for his community.
4. Although they produce children, no reference should be made to sex. If any, it will be to male sexuality.

I cannot resist the pleasure of quoting the passage in *Masters of the Dew* where Annaïse and Manuel make love for the first time:

"Yes," she says, "I shall be the mistress of your house. I shall serve you at table and I shall stay standing while you eat and you will tell me 'I thank you, my woman' and I shall tell you 'As you like it, my master.' At night, I shall lie by your side. You will not say anything, but to your silence, to the touch of your hand, I shall reply 'Yes, my man,' because I shall be the servant of your desire." [131]

5. Of course, heterosexuality is the absolute rule.
6. Society should be pitied but never criticized. All its errors should be redeemed by the male hero. In *Masters of the Dew*, Manuel has been compared to a black Christ giving his life for the small community of "Fonds Rouges."

It is the privilege of Edouard Glissant to have united all these tendencies: the end of the Pan-African dream and the desire for a national

11. Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), 131.

Poems and Texts: An Anthology of French Poems, Translations and Interviews with Francis Ponge, Jean Follain, Guillevic, André du Bouchet, Yves Bonnefoy, Denis Roche and Marcelin Pleynet with an Introductory Essay: From Surrealism to Structuralism. (New York, October House, 1969.)
Le Moyen Age (with Jean-Marc Blanchard). (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1972.)
Lectures et compte-rendu, poèmes. Paris, Coll. "Textes," Flammarion, 1973.
Modern French Poetry (with Patricia Terry). (New York, Columbia University Press, 1975.)
Francis Ponge: The Sun Placed in the Abyss and Other Texts, with Translations, an Interview and an Essay: Crisis in Culture/Crisis in Language. (New York, SUN, 1977.)
Francis Ponge and the Power of Language. (Berkeley, California, The University of California Press, 1979.)
Serge Gavronsky (trans.), Le Mécanisme du sens, by Arakawa and Madeline Gims. (Paris, Editions Maeght, 1979.)
Serge Gavronsky (trans.), Crafts and the Arts of Living in the Cameroon, by J.E. Nugue. (Baton Rouge, Louisiana University Press, 1980.)
Culture/Ecriture, essais critiques. (Rome, Bulzoni, 1983.)
Ten Poems, Dix poèmes de Francis Ponge. San Francisco, California, Greenwood Press, 1983.

Books

The French Liberal Opposition and the American Civil War. (New York, The Humanities Press, 1968.)

PUBLICATIONS

1976-78	Director, Freshman Seminars Columbia University
1978-85	Co-Director, Studies in the Humanities, Barnard College
1965-66, 1974-75,	Instructor and Professor, Columbia University Summer School
1977, 1979, 1983	1982, 1984, 1986
1983-2000	Director, International Conference on Translation
1984, 1986, 1992	Professor, Bryn Mawr Summer Program, Avignon, France
1990	Visiting Lecturer, International School of the Arts, Umbria

POSITIONS

2001	Awarded a Littauer Grant by Barnard College
2001	Grant from the Centre National des Lettres for work on Louis Zukofsky
2003	Co-organizer, Rockefeller Foundation at Bellagio, Italy on "Antilles in NY; Antilles in Paris"
2004	Received a grant from the Centre National des Lettres for his work on Louis Zukofsky
2004	Was appointed to the Board of Directors for Marsh Hawk Press.

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literature to build a theory which slightly improved upon the existing order. It seems to me that the differences between Césaire and Glissant have been exaggerated. It is a fact that Glissant never really adopted the Pan-African ideal. However, his close connections with *Présence Africaine* and the Société Africaine de Culture illustrate a definite concern for the future of the black world. He shares with Césaire the confusion between political and poetic ambitions and the belief in the importance of the community. (In *Le Discours antillais* he says: "The question any Martinican should ask himself is not: 'Who am I?' which is meaningless, but 'Who are we?'").¹²

Glissant's most important contribution to West Indian literature is the introduction of a new dimension, the one of language. Language is the cord which links the West Indian to his land, to his past, to his history. The cord which links the West Indian to the West Indian. "The Theory of *Antillanité*," he explains in *Le Discours antillais*, "aims at exploring all aspects of the African element, which is modified but always present in our societies, and the root of language, which is reinforced through multiplication. Derek Walcott perverts the English language in the same way that Nicolás Guillén perverts Spanish, in the same way that V. S. Naipaul asserts his origin while denying it. Maybe we don't all speak Creole. However, we speak variants of the same language" (Glissant, 182).

Glissant was certainly the first West Indian intellectual to stress the linguistic dimension of colonialism and the problem of diglossia in the islands. But more important than this analytical contribution is his stress on the relationship between the writer, his people, and language. The reproach of obscurity and abstruseness which is constantly hurled at him is but the consequence of his essential belief: language for the West Indian writer is the only way of shaping the future. Glissant is also responsible for the reintroduction of nature and the environment in the West Indian novel. But not nature *per se*. The description of nature remains symbolic if not ideological, symbolic. In his own words, he associates the hills with the habitation where the white master used to live, and the plain with the daily life of the black man. Political consciousness is thus a symbolic journey through the island. That is the reason why rivers play such a major role in Glissant's works. They flow across flat lands and highlands. Like language, they unite men to men, then ultimately merge with the sea which is the

12. Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

SERGE GAVRONSKY

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Ph.D. 1965, Columbia University, European Intellectual History

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 1958-59 French Government Fellowship and Fulbright Travel Grant
- 1967, 68, 71, 84 Barnard Faculty Research and Travel Grants
- 1971-72 Post-Doctoral French Government Fellowship
- 1975 French Government Research Grant (Summer)
- 1977 Dorothy Spivack Grant (co-winner)
- 1978 Sterling Currier Grant, Columbia University
- 1979 National Endowment for the Humanities, Pilot Grant (co-winner)
- Fellow, John Simon Guggenheim Foundation
- Fellow, the Camargo Foundation
- French Government Grant
- Mellon Faculty Grant
- 1981 French Government, Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques
- 1982 National Endowment for the Humanities, Implementation Grant (3 yrs.), Co-Director
- 1983 Visitor, National Humanities Center
- 1988 Five Year Mellon Grant for French Department
- 1990 Sole judge appointed by the Academy of American Poets for the Harold Morton Landon Prize in Translation
- 1991 Mellon Faculty Grant
- French Government, Officier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques
- New York State Council on the Arts, Translation Grant
- 1993 Centre National des Lettres (CNL) Translation Grant
- 1994-99 Olin Professor of French
- 1997 Barnard College Senior Faculty Research Leave
- 1997 French Government, Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres
- 1997 Appointed to a 3-year term by the MLA to the Selection Committee for the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Translation of a Literary Work
- 2000 MLA Appointed Chair for two literary translation prizes: the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione prize and the Lois Roth prize

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symbol of freedom, reconciliation with oneself, and political consciousness.

As I said earlier, Glissant tries to provide future writers with what he thinks will be a more elaborate model for fiction:

1. Characters should not be individuals, but the collective expression of the West Indian soul. In a recent discussion in an undergraduate class at Berkeley, he explained why in *Malemort* the characters are grouped by three (Dlan-Médellus-Silacier) and speak collectively.
2. Nature should be part of the story just like another character. This is particularly obvious in *Le Quatrième siècle*.
3. However, it is language itself which can be regarded as the main object of the novel. The cohabitation of Creole and French creates a new language, the adventures of which are the real subject of the novel. For Glissant, the question is not Creole *or* French, but Creole *and* French.

However elaborate and attractive this model may be, it has not been adopted by the majority of West Indian writers, who remain attached to such things as characters, plots, realistic descriptions of people and places, and who, above all, reject the very complexity of Glissant's language. Therefore, for many years, although "antillanité" has been accepted as a theory perfectly suited to the realities of the islands, the literary model it implies has not been able to impose itself.

Then came Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau, the two writers who, together with the linguist Jean Bernabé, call themselves "Le Groupe de la Créolité." Like their elders in "Légitime Défense," they signaled their entrance into the literary world with the publication of a manifesto called *Eloge de la Créolité*. Like Césaire in *Return to my Native Land*, the opening lines possess the violence of a declaration of war: "Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves to be Creoles. This will be a mental attitude. More, a watchfulness, a sort of mental envelope which will sustain our own world in the confrontation with other worlds" (*Eloge de la Créolité*, 13). In these first pages too, although they state what they regard to be the limitations of "antillanité," they pay homage to Glissant, whom they consider to be their inspiration, their model and master. They inherit from Glissant the desire to make the inventory of their West Indian society, perceived as autonomous and complex, and, above all, a concern for language. However, whereas Glissant paid respect to Creole *and* French as the two languages the West Indian possesses, the new writers lay a heavy emphasis on *Créole*, considered to be the sole mother

→ Décrivons la journée précédente à CyberAvenir...

→ policier / venir → *Aucun policier n'est venu.*

1. client / téléphoner → *Aucun client n'a téléphoné.*

2. lettre / arriver de Suisse → *Aucune lettre n'est arrivée de Suisse.*

3. ordinateur / fonctionner → *Aucun ordinateur n'a fonctionné.*

4. stagiaire / être au travail → *Aucun(e) stagiaire n'a été au travail.*

NI l'un NI l'autre ne...

→ Qui travaille au café ? Lucien ? Collignon ? → *Non, ni Lucien ni Collignon ne travaillent au café.*

1. Qui est parti aux Etats-Unis ? Georgette ? Joseph ? → *Ni Georgette ni Joseph ne sont partis aux Etats-Unis.*

2. Qui surveille Amélie ? Gina ? Hippolito ? → *Ni Gina ni Hippolito ne surveillent Amélie.*

3. Qui tombe amoureux de Nino ? Madeleine ? Suzanne ? → *Ni Madeleine ni Suzanne ne tombent amoureux de Nino.*

4. Qui rend Amélie heureuse ? Son père ? Sa mère ? → *Ni son père ni sa mère ne rendent Amélie heureuse.*

tongue. "Whenever a mother did everything she could to get her child to learn French and in doing so repressed his Creole tongue, what she did was to strike a mortal blow to his imagination and to exile his creativity forever" (ibid., 14).

However, it would be simplistic to believe that "créolité" is the mere rehabilitation of the Creole language. It is the reappropriation of oneself, of that "formidable migan" which created the West Indian personality. It is an aesthetic. Moreover, it is the future of the world. "The world is moving towards a state of *créolité*" (ibid., 52). In their novels, Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau give an illustration of their theory. There is no doubt that both writers produce very good fiction. But apart from the sumptuous invention of a language (especially in the case of Chamoiseau), we see only minor changes in the prevailing West Indian model, minor changes in the order. Here are the most striking innovations:

1. The characters are not confined to the usual trilogy: *béké*, (white planter)/black man/mulatto. (For instance, Raphaël Confiant introduces an East Indian, up to now the forgotten soul of Guadeloupean and Martinican literature.)
2. Sexuality (especially in Confiant's novel)¹³ is no longer absent, but is exclusively male sexuality.
3. The male characters (women remain confined to stereotypical or negative roles) don't have the messianic ambition to modify their world, like Manuel for instance. On the contrary, in *Chronique des sept misères*, Patrick Chamoiseau presents a deliberate satire of the "revolutionary behavior" of a *female* student:

It is around this time that a revolutionary student arrived who goaded us with her ideal as if it were a whip. Her voice covered the cries of the market women calling to customers and worrying about their bread-fruits ripening or their "caimites" opening up in the heat. . . . She used to shout also: "You must organize yourselves, rationalize your production, gather your energies into a cooperative . . ." ¹⁴

Maybe it is too early to ask these writers to illustrate their theory fully. As a rule, theory comes before practice. Therefore, we have to refer ourselves to their manifesto *Eloge de la Créolité* in order to imagine fully the themes of the literature to come. In this respect, *Eloge de la*

13. Raphaël Confiant, *Le Nègre et l'amiral* (Paris: Grasset, 1988).

14. Patrick Chamoiseau, *Chronique des sept misères* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 118.

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Créolité gives an impression of *déjà vu* or *déjà entendu*. Moreover, reading it, one seems to witness the emergence of a new order, even more restrictive than the existing one.

The tedious enumeration of the elements of popular culture which is made in the first pages of the manifesto leaves very little freedom for creativity. Are we condemned *ad vitam aeternam* to speak of vegetable markets, story tellers, "dorlis," "koutem" . . . ? Are we condemned to explore to saturation the resources of our narrow islands? We live in a world where, already, frontiers have ceased to exist. Guadeloupe and Martinique, for better or for worse, have entered the European Common Market and welcome on their soil thousands of men and women from all sorts of countries. Half of the population of each island lives abroad. Part of it no longer speaks the Creole language, although they remain Creoles, since a damaging simplification, albeit made by a school of sociologists, equates identity with language. In new environments one faces new experiences which reshape the West Indian personality. For those who stay on the islands, changes occur also. As Glissant himself puts it, the Caribbean Sea, which he opposes to the Mediterranean, is not a closed area. On the contrary, it opens onto the world and its varied energetic influences.

West Indians should be as changing and evolving as the islands themselves. Above all, creativity is a complex process which obeys no rules. A writer confined to a small and isolated village of the West Indies is free to dream of "Another Land" and make of it the subject of his/her fiction. Creative imagination goes beyond the limits of reality and soars to areas of its own choice. In fact, dream is a factor which has always been neglected in West Indian literature. It constitutes the object of some of the most magnificent writings of the world.

Does its power frighten the West Indian writer?

DISORDER

In a Bambara myth of origin, after the creation of the earth, and the organization of everything on its surface, disorder was introduced by a woman. Disorder meant the power to create new objects and to modify the existing ones. In a word, disorder meant creativity.

Apart from one or two names, the female writers of the West Indies are little known. Their works are forgotten, out of print, misunderstood. The best example of incomprehension remains the criticism

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of Mayotte Capécia's *Je suis martiniquaise*¹⁵ by Frantz Fanon. In *Black Skin, White Masks*,¹⁶ he singled her out to illustrate what he calls "le complexe de la lactification," the desire to be white and thereby to go down in history. First of all, Frantz Fanon takes a very dangerous stand. He deliberately confuses the *author* and the *object of her fiction*. Although Mayotte says *Je*, nothing proves that she was writing about herself. And even if she were! Let us recall that this novel was written in 1948. At that time, all the societies which had suffered from the wrongs of slavery and colonial exploitation were alienated in the same way. In *Masters and Slaves*, Gilberto Freyre explains the desire to "wash one's blood" which affected the blacks as well as the mulattoes in multiracial Brazil.¹⁷ Mayotte Capécia was simply no exception to the rule. This unjust criticism has forever cast a slur on the book and overshadowed its other interesting aspects. For instance, it contains a deep and penetrating picture of Mayotte's father, whose irresponsibility and mistreatment of her mother might well be partially responsible for Mayotte's hatred of the black man. Contrary to what Frantz Fanon thinks and says, *Je suis martiniquaise* is a precious written testimony, the only one that we possess, of the mentality of a West Indian girl in those days, of the impossibility for her to build up an aesthetics which would enable her to come to terms with the color of her skin.

At the beginning of the century, long before Césaire desperately tried to redeem the black man's image, Suzanne Lacascade in her only novel, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, constructed a theory of the climates in order to prove the superiority of the colored woman over the white one.¹⁸ It is obvious that neither Suzanne Lacascade nor Mayotte Capécia had a particular gift for writing, but the oblivion in which they have unfortunately been relegated is not due to their lack of literary skills.

Whenever women speak out, they displease, shock, or disturb. Their writings imply that before thinking of a political revolution, West Indian society needs a psychological one. What they hope for and

15. Mayotte Capécia, *Je suis martiniquaise* (Paris: Cornéa, 1948).

16. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Harkmann (New York: Grove Press, 1982 [1967]).

17. Gilberto Freyre, *Masters and Slaves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

18. Suzanne Lacascade, *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* (Paris: E. Figuière, 1924).

men do have vivid experiences in which such things as ghosts or pink elephants appear before them; but only the hopelessly credulous will without further ado count such experiences as establishing the existence of ghosts and pink elephants. To establish the existence of such things, evidence is required that is obtained under controlled conditions and that can be confirmed by independent inquirers. Again, though a man's report that he is suffering pain may be taken at face value, one cannot take at face value the claim, were he to make it, that it is the food he ate which is the cause (or a contributory cause) of his felt pain—not even if the man were to report a vivid feeling of abdominal disturbance. And similarly, an overwhelming feeling of being in the presence of the Divine is evidence enough for admitting the genuineness of such feeling; it is no evidence for the claim that a supreme being with a substantial existence independent of the experience is the cause of the experience.

4

Thus far the discussion has been concerned with noting inadequacies in various arguments widely used to support theism. However, much atheistic criticism is also directed toward exposing incoherencies in the very thesis of theism. I want therefore to consider this aspect of the atheistic critique, though I will restrict myself to the central difficulty in the theistic position which arises from the simultaneous attribution of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence to the Deity. The difficulty is that of reconciling these attributes with the occurrence of evil in the world. Accordingly, the question to which I now turn is whether, despite the existence of evil, it is possible to construct a theodicy* which will justify the ways of an infinitely powerful and just God to man.

Two main types of solutions have been proposed for this problem. One way that is frequently used is

* The term "theodicy," from the Greek *theos* (God) and *dike* (righteous), was coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716). The expression describes attempts to show that the existence of evil does not preclude the existence of God.

to maintain that what is commonly called evil is only an illusion, or at worst only the "privation" or absence of good. Accordingly, evil is not "really real," it is only the "negative" side of God's beneficence, it is only the product of our limited intelligence which fails to plumb the true character of God's creative bounty. A sufficient comment on this proposed solution is that facts are not altered or abolished by rebaptizing them. Evil may indeed be only an appearance and not genuine. But this does not eliminate from the realm of appearance the tragedies, the sufferings, and the iniquities which men so frequently endure. And it raises once more, though on another level, the problem of reconciling the fact that there is evil in the realm of appearance with God's alleged omnibenevolence. In any event, it is small comfort to anyone suffering a cruel misfortune for which he is in no way responsible, to be told that what he is undergoing is only the absence of good. It is a gratuitous insult to mankind, a symptom of insensitivity and indifference to human suffering, to be assured that all the miseries and agonies men experience are only illusory.

Another gambit often played in attempting to justify the ways of God to man is to argue that the things called evil are evil only because they are viewed in isolation; they are not evil when viewed in proper perspective and in relation to the rest of creation. Thus, if one attends to but a single instrument in an orchestra, the sounds issuing from it may indeed be harsh and discordant. But if one is placed at a proper distance from the whole orchestra, the sounds of that single instrument will mingle with the sounds issuing from the other players to produce a marvelous bit of symphonic music. Analogously, experiences we call painful undoubtedly occur and are real enough. But the pain is judged to be an evil only because it is experienced in a limited perspective—the pain is there for the sake of a more inclusive good, whose reality eludes us because our intelligences are too weak to apprehend things in their entirety.

It is an appropriate retort to this argument that of course we judge things to be evil in a human perspective, but that since we are not God this is the only proper perspective in which to judge them. It may indeed be the case that what is evil for us is not evil for some other part of creation. However, we are not this other part of creation, and it is irrelevant to argue

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desire conflicts with men's ambitions and dreams. Why, they ask, fight against racism in the world when it exists at home, among ourselves? There is nothing West Indian society hates more than facing the reality of color prejudice which reminds it of the days of slavery, of the time when to be black was a curse and to possess a fair skin was regarded as a blessing. Color prejudice is precisely the exclusive theme of Michèle Lacrosil's novels. Her first novel, *Sapotille et le serin d'argile*, portrays a girl's internalization of the inferiority complex during her childhood. Her second one, *Cajou*,¹⁹ reads like the diary of a mental patient who cannot come to terms with life and takes refuge in death. It would be too easy to dismiss Michèle Lacrosil, as it is often done, by saying that she portrays a time gone by. West Indian society is not sure it is cured from the alienation Michèle Lacrosil portrays so vividly. Therefore it is forced to question itself. Is today really different from yesterday? Have we really changed? Aren't we at heart still the same people?

At the conclusion of *La Vie scélérate*,²⁰ the young narrator Coco expresses the literary viewpoint of the author when she states:

Maybe I shall have to write this story? Maybe I shall have to pay my debt and so doing displease and shock everybody? Mine will be the story of very ordinary people who in their very ordinary ways had nevertheless shed the blood of others. I must write my own story and this will be my own personal homage to those who are no more. My book will be very different from the ambitious ones that my mother had dreamt of: 'Essay on the Revolutionary Movements of the Black World' and the like. . . . It will be a book without either great torturers or dignified martyrs. But it will, however, be loaded with flesh and blood. The story of my people. [*La Vie scélérate*, 340]

Mental breakdown, madness, and eventually suicide, are common themes among women writers. As I indicated earlier, Cajou commits suicide. Because of the difficulties of their sentimental lives, Télumée in *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* by Simone Schwarz-Bart,²¹ as well as Thécla in *La Vie scélérate*, temporarily lose their minds. The heroines of *Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit* and *Juletane* by Myriam Warner-Vieyra are both mentally disturbed.²²

19. Michèle Lacrosil, *Sapotille et le serin d'argile* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960); *Cajou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

20. Maryse Condé, *La Vie scélérate*, (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1987).

21. Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972).

22. Myriam Warner-Vieyra, *Le Quimboiseur l'avait dit* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1980); *Juletane* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1982).

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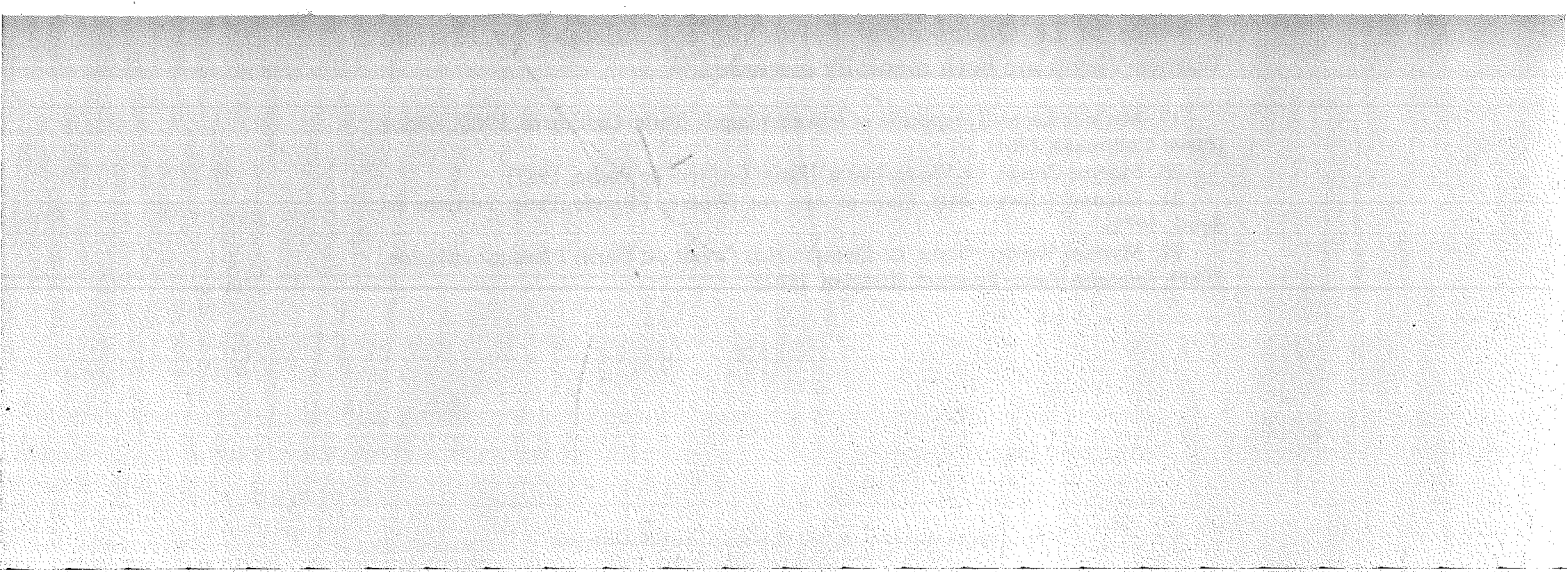
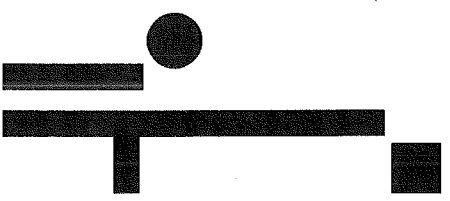
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Sexuality is another taboo in West Indian literature, and when reference is made to sexuality, it is to male sexuality. We have already discussed the portrayal of Annaïse, the servant of Manuel's desire in *Masters of the Dew*. The uproar about my novel *Heremakhonon*²³ was largely caused by Veronica, the heroine, expressing her own sexuality. For the first time a woman had the right to enjoy sex and to say it. But the most striking transgressions of the order imposed by the male writers are related to the image of men and to the image of Africa.

The family system of the West Indies has been the object of intensive studies. In 1928, the Jamaican researcher Edith Clarke wrote an unsurpassed classic, *My Mother who Fathered Me*,²⁴ echoed a few years ago by *Sé kouto sèl*, an essay based upon over seventy interviews of Guadeloupean women conducted by France Alibar and Perrette Lambèye-Boye.²⁵ Although widely set apart in time, both books registered the same complaints. Due to the absenteeism and irresponsibility of the fathers, the victimized mothers are forced to be the breadwinners and to assume the education of the children. However, in spite of this sociological reality, we have been fed upon triumphant portrayals of messianic heroes coming back home to revolutionize their societies. . . .

In *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, Simone Schwarz-Bart was the first to dare to shatter this myth and place West Indian women where they belong—at the forefront of the daily battle for survival. This novel is too well known and the Lougandor dynasty of women too famous to be presented again. We must, however, say that few critics have done justice to the disturbing quality of *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*. Apart from a rejection of motherhood in the novel, we find the portrayal of a "bad mother," Victoire, and of a "bad woman," "a witch," personified by Laetitia. While Télumée is compared to a heliconia of the mountains, Laetitia is compared to a water lily. Thus, Schwarz-Bart associates her with the great goddesses of the West Indian pantheon who derive their powers from water: *Maman dlo*, *Yemanya*. . . . Télumée, creature of the air, "négresse planeuse," "flèche de canne à sucre" fights in vain against her. Before being hailed by the critics

23. Maryse Condé, *Heremakhonon: a Novel*, trans. Richard Philcox (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1982).

24. Edith Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, preface by Sir Hugh Foot, introduction by M. G. Smith (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979 [1966]).

25. *Sé kouto sèl* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes: Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique, c. 1981).

enfin denis roche mort

ou l'enjambement d'outre-mer

La double séance. Il jouait sur un partage
le faux pli de son col écrasé, autrefois
symétrique, réplique presque semblable
l'addition mort/naissance et le service
lentement se tournant sur soi-même, un tic,
hésitation. La crise de quelle longueur ?
Il repousse la fleur maîtresse en livre
ouvert, observons la bordure à la lumière
entre le dehors et le dedans. Mimographe
je le regarde à travers les bois traçant
sur la surface son anagramme qu'il assassine,
question de propreté. Sexuelle ? Il tenait
à une distance obligeante l'écorce ici le
dernier mot sans reflet, écho, cette fois-ci
ayant noirci les blancs cette armature
que le texte frotte et fait briller
en silence contre le temps futur contre
l'apparence du présent annulé ce soir
à l'ombre de l'entre/acte excès de la phrase
fantôme noir comme le miroir de sa maîtresse,
figure lisse, écrite au singulier sur son corps
tout négatif, champs libre après ses heures
de service, de présence, transcription de sa
volonté, transparence. Demain l'empêchera de lire
l'opacité de sa fiction. Donc cher domestique
vous ne serez plus matériel, vaporisé, un rappel de
l'eau bouillante, et moi, la femme, la fente
l'hymen. Men will cut the meat.

abroad, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* received a great many adverse comments at home. It was thought to be pessimistic, negative, and fatalistic since it contained no elements of the conventional revolutionary bric à brac. The only allusion to social turmoil ends abruptly with Amboise's death. Eventually *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* was recuperated by some West Indian university critics who turned it into a female version of *Gouverneurs de la rosée*. By so doing, they deprived it of all its irreverence and could therefore celebrate it as a feminine masterpiece.

However, transgressing the image of the male is nothing compared with transgressing the traditional image of Africa. We shall not recall the quarrel over *Heremakhonon*, *Ségou*, and other novels about Africa written by myself and Myriam Warner-Vieyra. Those who want to veil their faces before the harsh realities of Africa cannot accept *our* truth. Let us quote Julio Cortazar, a Third World novelist who has fought all his life for the freedom of creativity: "It is the destiny of literature to provide for beauty. It is its duty to provide for truth in this beauty."²⁶

FREEDOM

As we can see, we are far from this permanent questioning of text and context which characterizes literature today. In *Le Livre à venir*, Maurice Blanchot declared:

The essence of literature is to escape any fundamental determination, any assertion which could stabilize it or even fix it. It is never already there, it is always to be found or invented again.²⁷

On the contrary, in the West Indies, literature seems to exist to provide the reader with a few reassuring images of himself and his land. Although West Indian literature proclaims to be revolutionary and to be able to change the world, on the contrary, writer and reader implicitly agree about respecting a stereotypical portrayal of themselves and their society. In reality, does the writer wish to protect the reader and himself against the ugliness of the past, the hardships of the present, and the uncertainty of the future? Can we expect the liberation of the West Indian writer in the years to come?

Eloge de la Créolité gives a negative answer. However, other forces

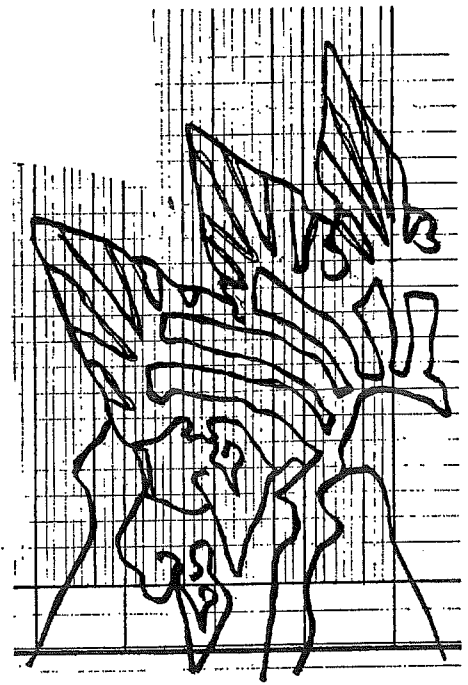
26. Julio Cortazar, Lecture given at the University of California, Berkeley (1977).

27. Maurice Blanchot, *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, Idées, 1971 [1959]), 293.

1
même ainsi il déclame
le nombre son bras
sa propre naissance

2
l'obscur d'ici
à là rien ne va
transparences
une voix se risque
dans le passage

3
des murs des fontaines
le monde nous guette
dans la prison on chante
c'est le grand-père
la route s'éloigne
plus loin il s'engage



4
j'ai vu des femmes accroupies
le soleil brûlait la terre
pages temps récitatif
un débordement initial
où vont-ils dans la nuit

are at work, such as the new mentality of our youth and our increased contacts with the rest of the world, especially the Americas. Among the writers themselves, a few dissenting voices, not just female voices, although still covered by those of the majority, make themselves heard and give cause for hope.

