Nicole Simek

Eating Well, Reading Well

Maryse Condé and the Ethics of Interpretation

FRANCO*POLY*PHONIES

Eating Well, Reading Well

Maryse Condé and the Ethics of Interpretation

Nicole Simek

Rodopi

Amsterdam - New York, NY 2008

Cover design:
Pier Post

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of 'ISO 9706: 1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents - Requirements for permanence'.

Le papier sur lequel le présent ouvrage est imprimé remplit les prescriptions de "ISO 9706:1994, Information et documentation - Papier pour documents - Prescriptions pour la permanence".

ISBN: 978-90-420-2327-7

Printed in The Netherlands

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION:

INTERPRETING THROUGH EXAMPLES

> But can any example ever truly fit a general proposition? Is not its particularity, to which it owes its intelligibility, a necessary betrayal of the general truth it is supposed to support and convey?
>
> —Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*

> The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the nonliving, man or animal, but since *one must* eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there is no definition of the good [*du bien*], *how* for goodness' sake should one *eat well* [*bien manger*]?"
>
> —Jacques Derrida, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject"

At the heart of the reading practice, and at the heart of any ethics of reading, lies the problem of exemplarity—the tactical deployment and elusive reception of examples. When one reads, one reads through examples, interpreting relations between part and whole, sign and context, particular and general. The function of the example, and its epistemological status, has long been debated in the fields of rhetoric and moral philosophy. As various critics have noted, in Western tradition this history has been marked by a tension between two competing definitions of exemplarity, one Platonic and oriented toward ontology, and the other Aristotelian and oriented toward rhetoric. Plato's conception of the example, or *paradeigma*, is related to his theory of Forms (*eidos*), and relies on a deductive mode of reasoning: the example is a transhistorical model or standard, a paradigm toward which objects strive. For Aristotle, however, examples are instances—or samples, a meaning present as well in the Latin *exemplum* (from *eximere*, to take out)—that function inductively to point to a more or less coherent whole. The normative use to which examples have been put in rhetoric and literature draws, then, on a more Platonic conception of paradigms, while the emphasis on the contingency of relations between examples in Aristotle's sense (and

the capacity of newly encountered examples to modify the conception one has of the whole), has served to counter this static model and put into question the boundaries marking categories and identities.

The last few decades have produced a number of studies on exemplarity in the early modern period. Taking their cue from Michel de Montaigne's assertion that "tout exemple cloche," critics have detailed the "crisis" of exemplarity that began to take place in the late sixteenth century.[1] More recent scholarship has continued to deepen our understanding of exemplarity. Such books as Irene Harvey's *Labyrinths of Exemplarity: At the Limits of Deconstruction* and Alexander Gelley's edited volume *Unruly Examples. On the Rhetoric of Exemplarity*, consider how examples—in all their divergent manifestations—work by examining the ways they frame, shape, and, at times, forestall the production of meaning. Taking as her point of departure Jean-Jacques Rousseau's use of examples in his pedagogical treatise *Emile*, Harvey's study meditates on the complex nature of the example, and the challenge exemplarity's undecidability poses to philosophical discourse. Alexander Gelley's multidisciplinary volume expands further the parameters of exemplarity, touching on its multiple use and discursive elasticity in a variety of philosophical, legal, and historiographic discourses from the Hebrew midrash interpretive tradition to twentieth-century theories of representation. Including analyses of Kant, Kafka, and Nietzsche, along with articles addressing the place of examples in narrative theory and ethics, Gelley has drawn attention to the centrality of exemplarity across a wide range of periods and debates. This study is in part an attempt to build on and extend Alexander Gelley's project to formulate "a modern tropology of exemplarity"[2] through an examination of exemplarity in a different literary context: the postcolonial—or, some would contend, neocolonial—context of the French Antilles.

---

[1] Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, tome III, ed. Pierre Michel (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 359. On the problematic of exemplarity in the early modern context, see, in particular, John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), and Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: the Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[2] *Unruly Examples: On the Rhetoric of Exemplarity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 6.

Debates within postcolonial studies, focusing on the relation between the general and the particular, have in a significant way been organized around the problematic of exemplarity. Indeed, one of postcolonial criticism's fundamental tasks has been to make visible the normative and ideological underpinnings of a European colonialist rhetoric of exemplarity (examples, after all, are rarely innocent or value-neutral), to scrutinize the "model" status Europe claimed for its culture and institutions, often in the name of universal principles, and to draw attention to the ethical and intellectual failings of a political project based on a belief in the superiority of European worldviews and morals. Arguing that "it is the realm of representation and the process of signification that constitute the space of the political,"[3] Homi Bhabha places language at the center of postcolonial criticism, stressing the importance of textuality, the domain of linguistic representations, as a site at which these models can be critiqued and resisted. While this critique of colonialism's representation of, and pretension to universality is by now well established in Francophone literary studies, the articulation of new conceptions of sameness and difference has been, and remains, one of the largest concerns and sources of debate in the field.[4] The problematic of exemplarity links a number of disparate questions central to Francophone postcolonial literature, questions that address the relations between identity and alterity, part and whole, description and prescription. The construction of individual and collective identities; the relation between the marginal or the local and the center or the global; the status of history as an example with or without hermeneutic value for the present; how the example of the real shapes the literary; and, conversely, whether literature should serve as an example on which to predicate ethical or

---

[3] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 190. Similarly, Iain Chambers observes: "If what passes for knowledge emerges within language, then, critical knowledge involves an exploration of language itself" (*Migrancy, Culture, Identity* [New York: Routledge, 1994], 32).

[4] Aesthetic criteria favoring works characterized by an insight into exemplary or "universal" themes and values continued to exert influence on postcolonial literature through the 1960's and often beyond, and have thus remained a significant subject of analysis over the last few decades. See, for example, Chinua Achebe's critique of colonialist criticism in his *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (London: Heinemann, 1988), and Christopher L. Miller's discussion of Western criticism and its limits in *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

political action, are all rich and contested topics that have occupied a large place in Francophone literature and criticism.

Throughout her career as a novelist, Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé has engaged these problematics.[5] Well-known for her deviation from literary trends such as *Créolité* that have marked the French Antillean literary scene, Condé has displayed throughout her work a sustained concern for, and resistance to, the concept of exemplarity as it has been articulated and promoted in this tradition. This resistance, which is present in her novels, and thematized in her 1993 essay "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer,"[6] stems mainly from what she views as the heavily prescriptive character of Antillean literary theories, and, in particular, the prevalent opinion that the Antillean writer should strive to speak for a people, for a collective "we." In different ways, the *Négritude*, *Antillanité* and *Créolité* movements have all articulated their goals around the question of exemplarity, and valorized certain rhetorical uses of the example. As envisioned by these movements, maintains Condé, the writer has a responsibility to represent, in the two senses of the term, Antillean reality and the Antillean people. In this view, writing has both a descriptive and a prescriptive function: the Caribbean writer must provide *samples* of Caribbean reality through his or her choice of characters, setting, language, and aesthetics, and act as a spokesperson for the people, expressing their collective ethos and setting out *models* for collective political and cultural change.[7] These movements differ widely from one another, notably in their poetics, versions of essentialism, and emancipatory politics, yet all share, to a certain extent, a belief in literary commitment, that is, in literature's ability—and duty—to act as an agent of social change.

Condé's dissatisfaction with the vision of the writer as spokesperson, epitomized by Aimé Césaire's declaration, "Ma bouche sera la bouche des malheurs qui n'ont pas de bouche, ma voix, la liberté de celles qui s'affaissent au cachot du désespoir,"[8] stems from

---

[5] To date, Condé has authored 14 novels, two autobiographical narratives, and numerous plays, short stories, children's books, and critical works.

[6] Maryse Condé, "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," *Yale French Studies* 83 (1993): 121-36.

[7] Condé, "Order, Disorder, Freedom," 121-30.

[8] Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983), 22.

her conception of identity (both individual and collective identity) as multiple and constantly shifting, and thus difficult to generalize or to make exemplary without betraying its singularity or irreducibility. Through their form, Condé's novels privilege fragmentation, indeterminacy, paradox, the constructed nature of identity and culture, and the reader as co-producer of meaning, features that have lead critics to identify them as postmodern.[9] As a current broadly defined by its skepticism of exemplarity, or the possibility of producing any generally applicable narrative or abstraction, postmodernism, like the deconstructive approaches that often inform it, has alternately been deemed apolitical, anarchic, and relativistic—and thus at odds with postcolonialism. This is the basis on which Kwame Anthony Appiah distinguishes the postmodern from the postcolonial, whose delegitimization of universalizing colonial projects, he argues, coincides with postmodern critiques, but diverges in that it is founded on ethico-political, humanist principles.[10] Leah Hewitt makes a similar argument with respect to Condé's texts, reading Condé's postmodern "flavor" as a result of her decision to work from *within* a postcolonial literary tradition that emphasizes particularity, the inadequacy of Eurocentric histories, and the fragmentation of cultural and linguistic identities. This postmodern bent, she continues, is tempered by this tradition's continuing belief in literature's power to account for the complexity and ambivalence of these phenomena.[11]

Despite the affinity for anarchy and historicist relativism Condé has confessed in her interviews and critical works,[12] her novels do

---

[9] See Nara Araujo, Preface to *L'Œuvre de Maryse Condé: A propos d'une écrivaine politiquement incorrecte* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1996), and Leah Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tightropes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) for two discussions of Condé's relation to postmodernism.

[10] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 353. For other discussions of the relation between postmodernism and postcolonialism, see Homi K. Bhabha, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency," in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 171-97; Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonialism, Postmodernism, and the Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23 (1988): 169-81; and Simon During, "Postmodernism or Post-Colonialism Today," *Textual Practice* 1 (1987): 32-47.

[11] Leah Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tightropes*, 166-67.

[12] "Au fond de moi, j'ai beaucoup de sympathie pour l'anarchie," Condé states in an interview with Ina Césaire (Condé, *La parole des femmes. Essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française* [Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1993], 128). On

display a profound ethical concern with questions of violence, trauma, and justice that complicates her staging of narrative aporia. Hewitt has suggestively situated Condé's literature between "militantism and nihilism," an ambivalent position manifested textually by the deployment of both "self-referential" and "mimetic" techniques.[13] A number of critics have made similar statements about the slipperiness or "in between-ness" of Condé's texts, that is, their location between or outside any pre-established categories. "There is all the difference between, on the one hand, a negative but committed form of thought and, on the other, a nihilism that must dead-end," writes Christopher Miller. "Tempted by nihilism, which she does not wholly reject, Condé nonetheless opts for 'difficulty,' for the labor of reconstruction."[14] Commenting on Condé's 1989 *Traversée de la mangrove*, Raylene Ramsey maintains that the text's polyphony should not be read as "an egalitarian jostle of intersecting voices, or juxtapositions, of the type postmodern notions of intertextuality evoke," nor as "a Derridean free-play of differences," but as a staging of individual singularity and collective commonality.

Taking this line of thought even farther, Françoise Lionnet interprets the unruliness of Condé's fiction as a return to humanist principles and to the concern or search for an "ethical universal" that Appiah describes as the defining characteristic of postcolonial literature.[15] Instead of contrasting Condé's "postcoloniality" to an exterior, opposing "postmodernity," however, Lionnet suggests that Condé plays the two off each other, merging insights from both while using these insights to deconstruct the points with which she takes

---

aesthetics and history she approvingly cites Alain Robbe-Grillet's statement, "There are no masterpieces for eternity; merely works marked by their time" ("Order, Disorder, Freedom," 126).

[13] Leah Hewitt, "Rencontres explosives: les intersections culturelles de Maryse Condé," in Araujo, *L'Œuvre de Maryse Condé*, 45-56, and "Inventing Antillean Narrative: Maryse Condé and Literary Tradition," *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature* 17, 1 (1993), 86-87.

[14] Christopher L. Miller, "After Negation: Africa in Two Novels by Condé," in *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers*, eds. Mary Jean Green, Karen Gould, Micheline Rice-Maximin, Keith L. Walker and Jack A. Yeager (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 175.

[15] Françoise Lionnet, "Toward a New Antillean Humanism: Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove,*" in *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 69. See Chapter 4 for a more sustained discussion of Lionnet's claims.

issue (postmodernity's "explosion of the subject," for example, or postcolonialism's rigid identity politics).[16] Lionnet accurately situates Condé within this "new" turn away from earlier postcolonial trends, ones that emphasized the political while ignoring or bracketing the ethical. But if there is a turn to ethics in Condé's novels, it would be helpful first to assess the nature of this turn in the wider field of literary studies: "What kind of a turn is the turn to ethics? A Right turn? A Left turn? A wrong turn? A U-turn? Whose turn? Whose turn is it to turn to ethics? And why? Why now?"[17] As the editors of *The Turn to Ethics* aptly recall, this latest turn in criticism does not entail a monolithic approach to literature, or to ethics in general. A brief overview of the context within which these sometimes complimentary, sometimes contradictory ethical claims have been made within the debate about ethics will prove useful to assessing Condé's particular brand of commitment and critique.

Appiah's humanist call for an "ethical universal" that is at once "provisional, historically contingent, anti-essentialist (in other words, postmodern) and [yet] demanding" speaks to the paradox at the heart of postcolonial debates over ethics, namely the problem of positing a foundation for ethics that can be reconciled with postcolonialism's critique of foundations themselves.[18] Postmodern and postcolonial theorists alike seek an alternative to the universalist model of discourse, such as the one informing Satya P. Mohanty's claim, "Perhaps the most powerful philosophical ally of modern anticolonial struggles of all kinds is this universalist view that individual human worth is absolute: it cannot be traded away, and it does not exist in

---

[16] Lionnet, "Toward a New Antillean Humanism," 79, 73. Postmodernist thinkers, perhaps in part as a response to the growing influence of postcolonial theory and cultural studies, have made their own important contributions to the revival of ethics—or the "Ethical Turn" in literary criticism—in the 1980's. As Daniel R. Schwarz observed in 2001, "We are in the midst of a humanistic revival or at least a neohumanist burst of energy" ("A Humanistic Ethics of Reading," in *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*, eds. Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001], 3). On this topic, see also Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

[17] Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds., *The Turn to Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), vii.

[18] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 155.

degrees."[19] This renewed appeal to a universalist ethical framework (and to timeless values) is not confined to the Left but resonates with two of the leading theorists of ethical criticism as well: Wayne Booth and Martha Nussbaum.

Writing from a neo-Aristotelian perspective, Wayne Booth promotes a model of ethical reading based on the metaphor of *books as friends*, where friendship implies an intimate bond with characters of literary texts, through whose example readers can improve or perfect themselves. The activity of reading is not a solitary one for Booth, but involves a community of readers, who are essential to the process of "coduction," the conversation about texts through which humanist ethical values can be established.[20] Drawing from Booth, Martha Nussbaum also stresses the usefulness of literature for the community. While it takes us outside ourselves, helping us make an "imaginative leap into the life of the other,"[21] moral literature, in Nussbaum's view, also "speaks about us"; great literary works "are moral achievements on behalf of the community," and their aims are "ultimately defined in terms of a 'we,' of people who wish to live

---

[19] Satya P. Mohanty, "Colonial Legacies, Multicultural Futures: Relativism, Objectivity, and the Challenge of Otherness," *PMLA* 110 (1995), 116. See also Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). I share Maureen Moynagh's concern that positing such a universalist framework is itself "fraught with contradictions in a postcolonial context" ("The Ethical Turn in Postcolonial Theory and Narrative: Michelle Cliff's 'No Telephone to Heaven,'" *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 30, 4 [1999], 109).

[20] Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Coduction, or "what we do whenever we say to the world (or prepare ourselves to say): 'Of the works of this general kind that I have experienced, comparing my experience with other more or less qualified observers, this one seems to me among the better (or weaker) ones, or the best (or worst). Here are my reasons'" (*The Company We Keep*, 72-73) is Booth's answer to the opposition between an ethics that claims a transhistoric foundation as its ground and one that is purely subjective. On Wayne Booth's neo-Aristotelianism and his position in contemporary debates, see Simon Stow, "Unbecoming Virulence: The Politics of the Ethical Criticism Debate," *Philosophy and Literature* 24, 1 (2000): 185-96, and Charles Altieri, "Lyrical Ethics and Literary Experience," in *Mapping the Ethical Turn*, eds. Davis and Womack, 30-58.

[21] Booth describes this imaginative process of identification as the reader's "submersion in other minds" (*The Company We Keep*, 142).

together and share a conception of virtue."[22] Moral literature, contends Nussbaum, should not simply propose abstract, self-contained ethical models; on the contrary,

> Schematic philosophers' examples almost always lack the particularity, the emotive appeal, the absorbing plottedness, the variety and indeterminacy, of good fiction; they lack, too, good fiction's way of making the reader a participant and a friend; and we have argued that it is precisely in virtue of these structural characteristics that fiction can play the role it does in our reflective lives.[23]

Yet, for Nussbaum, the particular must somehow transcend the divisions of race, class, and gender, and be recuperated into a *shared* conception of community and communal values.[24]

It is precisely the definition of the "we" that constitutes one of the primary objects of suspicion and inquiry for postcolonial critics and authors like Condé. Defining who belongs to this "we" has historically implied the forceful rejection or inclusion of others whose likeness to, or difference from, the "us" is denied. As Christopher Miller points out in his analysis of the apparent opposition between an investment in ethics (a search for universality) and a focus on ethnicity (cultural specificity), there are "sound reasons" behind the desire "to abandon all notions of difference or otherness" on the part of those who have been victimized because of their perceived "otherness."[25] Nussbaum would agree, but her proposed solution to the problem of marginalization and oppression relies on a questionable understanding of the reader as an ahistorical figure. According to this view, we are all timeless humanist readers with an inherent potential for moral personhood, a potential that literature—as moral philosophy—helps to actualize. Although Nussbaum does acknowledge the presence of difference in literature—she privileges works that bring the reader to empathize with those who appear to be different from "us"—her conception of empathic identification requires a pre-existing moral

---

[22] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 132, 171, 167, 14.
[23] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 46.
[24] See Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," in *For Love of Country?*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 2-17.
[25] Christopher L. Miller, *Theories of Africans*, 31 (italics in the original). See Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 202.

sameness: we are moved only when we realize that these others are in fact like us.

Condé would not object to the pathos of literature or its ability to move readers to imagine the world otherwise, but her works do reject, or at least question, the structural homogeneity underlying Nussbaum's ideal community. Although her novels engage readers who share assumptions about exemplarity and literary commitment, they also seek to unsettle attempts to define this coherence as fixed or ideal. Condé's approach not only sets her apart from ethical critics like Nussbaum, but also, conversely, sets her at odds with writers like Martinican Patrick Chamoiseau, who upholds divisions between a "Caribbean" readership based on a shared, local Caribbean condition and external "others" whom the Caribbean writer should disregard. Chamoiseau's argument that Condé should abandon, for instance, the use of clarifying footnotes stems from his desire to ground Caribbean aesthetics in sameness. "Self-explication is not, it seems to me, appropriate," he writes in his response to *Traversée de la mangrove*. "[...] Let us leave to the echo the task of reaching others; our task is to speak to ourselves, for ourselves, with an authenticity acquired from inside, by virtue of our own conscience."[26] Condé's continued attempts to alter the function of examples, questioning the coherence of the whole to which they supposedly point, reflect her resistance to sameness or an "ancestral past"[27] as an "appropriate," and desirable, basis for community. Rather than conforming to a ready-made, or more authentic, Caribbean aesthetics, Condé's novels aim to reshape her readers' horizons of expectations, and thus to bring about a certain type of receptivity.[28] Refusing to address exclusively any one pre-existing "interpretive community," to use Stanley Fish's words, Condé

---

[26] Patrick Chamoiseau, "Reflections on Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove*," trans. Kathleen M. Balutansky, *Callaloo* 14, 2 [1991], 394). Chamoiseau has since sought to clarify his position, refuting claims that *Créolité* is a sectarian movement overly invested in authenticity and rootedness (Lucien Taylor, "Créolité Bites: A Conversation with Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Jean Bernabé," *Transition* 74 [1998], 150).

[27] Chamoiseau, "Reflections on Maryse Condé," 393.

[28] In *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing: Césaire, Glissant, Condé* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), Jeannie Suk has also drawn attention to Condé's resistance to exemplarity, although she defines Condé's relation to exemplarity narrowly as her refusal to be "representative" of a generation of Antillean writers (171).

posits an "ideal" reader who is better conceived in relational terms, not as a reader defined by his or her place in a community that precedes the text, but one that is formed in a significant way through the act of reading, through the exposure and response to singular fictions.

Imagining ethics as a response to difference (an openness to alterity) rather than a search for sameness has had great appeal for critics such as Christopher Miller, who, echoing Derrida, has pointed out that "*the ethical is indebted to the ethnic*. [...] A self relating to itself has few ethical problems. In this sense, *there is no real ethics without ethnicity*, without the disquieting, untidy presence of the other."[29] Homi Bhabha has similarly looked to Emmanuel Levinas's notion of proximity,[30] with its emphasis on "the disjunctive and disrupted temporality of the encounter," as an alternative to the concept of "abstract universality" (that is, the reduction of the other to the order of the Same) and the political structure of the nation that takes it as its basis,[31] while Edouard Glissant's famous injunction to respect alterity—"Je réclame pour tous le droit à l'opacité"—is firmly inscribed in this line of thought as well.[32] At the heart of Condé's writing lies a similar concern for the particular, that is, for the irreducibility of the other and the opacity of the example. Indeed, Condé has repeatedly emphasized literature's ability to "disturb" habitual norms, to introduce a sense of estrangement in the reader's horizon of intelligibility, to probe the truth, and, perhaps even more importantly, its power to retain an opacity that prolongs the reader's interaction with the text.[33] As she claims, citing Blanchot, "The

---

[29] Miller, *Theories of Africans*, 59, 63.

[30] See Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 131-44.

[31] Homi K. Bhabha, "Editor's Introduction: Minority Maneuvers and Unsettled Negotiations," *Critical Inquiry* 23, 3 (1997), 439, 438. See Moynagh, "The Ethical Turn," 109.

[32] Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 71. For a highly informative discussion of Glissant's work in relation to Anglophone postcolonial critics, see Celia Britton's *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999).

[33] Condé comments on her desire to disturb readers' preconceptions and to uncover unpleasant truths in a number of interviews (see, for example, Mohamed B. Taleb-Khyar, "An Interview with Maryse Condé and Rita Dove," *Callaloo* 14, 2 [1991], 360). Stressing literary imagination and the power of dreaming in "Order, Disorder,

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."[34]

Ending with the importance of invention, this statement also suggests that recognizing the fundamental opacity or inexhaustibility of literature does not amount to renouncing interpretation, even if interpretation entails betraying this inexhaustibility. Since reading is by definition a relational act, inevitably involving digestion and incorporation, the question is not, as Derrida has pointed out, whether one should "eat or not eat, eat this and not that," but "*how* for goodness' sake should one *eat well*?"[35] As an ethical practice, eating well seeks to overcome the binary oppositions of digestion and exclusion, or absorption and expulsion. Eating well or reading well in this definition goes beyond an evaluation attempting to distinguish "correct" readings from "incorrect" ones; it entails a relation to the text in which the reader remains open to the questions raised by reading and listening.

Likewise, while rejecting the notion of literature as moral philosophy (that is, as a heuristic device for imparting particular morals to the reader through exemplary characters and plots), Condé valorizes literature's ethical value as critique—if critique is understood as "the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."[36] In this view, critique resists and alters the logic of exemplarity, the expected function and deployment of examples; it interrupts the cognitive "transaction," as de Man puts it, from the particular to the general.[37] As critique, literature disturbs, but also allows the reader to "dream," to go "beyond the limits of reality," a power which should

---

Freedom" (130), she has also expressed, in reference to Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Ti Jean L'Horizon*, the need to respect the opacity of literary texts (seminar at Princeton University, 3 Nov. 2003).

[34] Condé, "Order, Disorder, Freedom," 134. See Maurice Blanchot, *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 293.

[35] Derrida, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. Peter Connor and Avital Ronell, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 282.

[36] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 50.

[37] Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 276.

not, Condé argues, be underestimated.[38] Accordingly, an ethical approach to Condé's novels should take into account the singularity of her literature and its engagement with various readerships, according particular attention, in the words of Geoffrey Harpham, to "the point at which literature intersects with theory, the point at which literature becomes conceptually interesting and theory becomes humanized."[39]

The study that follows examines the specificity of Condé's use of examples, the critical, aesthetic reworking of prior models that one might call "altered exemplarity."[40] For Condé, the concept of exemplarity is not simply a bankrupt one that must be dismissed. Condé continues to make the interpretation of examples central to her fiction. Yet rather than seeking to provide new, more refined or appropriate examples reflecting an extratextual Caribbean reality, Condé engages the very logic of exemplarity, attempting to counter or modify the ways in which relations between part and whole are conceived, constructed, and perpetuated. Organized around four specific problematics present in Condé's work—history and globalization, intertextuality and reception, trauma and subjectivity, community and ethics—this analysis proposes to elucidate how, and to what ends, Condé engages, and alters, modes of exemplarity and interpretation, staging the problematic, yet pragmatic, need to make ethical judgments in the absence of absolute knowledge and infallible criteria.

In Caribbean literature, history occupies a privileged position as an object of inquiry, a primary force in the formation of Caribbean identity, and a paradigm elucidating present socio-political realities. Chapter 1, Reading History: The Example of the Past after Globalization, explores Condé's complex, intense engagement with the problematic of history and its perceived disappearance in the age of globalization. Examining Condé's staging of hybridity, nomadism, and the breakdown of temporal distinctions in two of her novels, this chapter juxtaposes Condé's postcolonial commitment to rereading

---

[38] Condé, "Order, Disorder, Freedom," 130.

[39] Geoffrey Harpham, *Shadows of Ethics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 3.

[40] I am indebted to Jill Robbins, whose study *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1999) provided me valuable insights into the way the ethical force of literature lies in its alteration or transgression of pre-existing norms of readability, in its ability to attest to what is irreducibility to meaning, or in Levinasian terms, the language of the Said. See also Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

history in *Moi, Tituba sorcière...noire de Salem* (1986) with her literary representation of globalization in *La Belle Créole* (2001).

Chapter 2, Rusing with the Canon: Insolent Imitation, Parodic Intertextuality, examines Condé's continued critical engagement with postcolonial discourse from the perspective of her reception. Reading Condé's recent "turn" to middlebrow or popular literary genres as a self-reflexive act of rusing, a rusing with her readers' expectations, this chapter studies Condé's use of parody in *La migration des cœurs* (1995) and *Célanire cou-coupé* (2000), two novels that foreground the problematic of imitation and invention. Taking their inspiration from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, respectively, these two works ostensibly participate in one of the most influential traditions in Caribbean literature, the revisionist rewrite of canonical European works. At the same time, they playfully distance themselves from this sanctioned "postcolonial" mode of contestation by multiplying their intertexts, sampling popular forms such as the fantastic, and modeling a tactical form of critique—the ruse—that diverges from strategic denunciation or ideological statement. Central to this examination is a broad conception of parody as "repetition with critical difference," that is, a mode of imitation that does not necessarily deride a master intertext, but unsettles readerly expectations through the recontextualization and alteration of various literary antecedents.

The persistence of dominant frameworks of interpretation serves as the focus of Chapter 3, Writing Violence: Collective Traumas, Singular Pasts. Raising the question of the distinction between the apparent erasure of the past as a category of existence and the absence of collective Antillean memory that Edouard Glissant and others view as the product of the historical traumas of slavery, colonization, and assimilation, the chapter discusses the effects of trauma and violence on subjectivity formation as depicted in two of Condé's works: *Heremakhonon* (Condé's first novel, published in 1976), and *Desirada* (1997). Both novels, which deal with the identity quests of two Guadeloupean women and their problems of self-representation, bring to light the disruptive effects of violence on memory and representation, and foreground a key problem in literary studies of trauma, namely, literature's role in accounting for unsettling experiences, forging new identities in their wake, and fostering or problematizing the reader's empathic identification with characters

and plots. Moving from a consideration of race in contemporary trauma theory to the discourse of victimization in Antillean literature, Chapter 3 addresses the complex relations between past and present violence, and the ways in which violence inherent in the schemes of representation that have formed a social group can be worked through, particularly when these frameworks remain the primary or exclusive examples on which this group relies to define itself. This chapter focuses in particular on the singularity of individual victims who ostensibly *stand for* a collectivity, yet *exceed* the group identity ascribed to them.

Finally, Chapter 4, The Cannibal Reader: Digesting the Other, Interpreting Community, expands upon the questions brought to light by *Heremakhonon* and *Desirada*, shifting focus however from subjectivity to the problem of imagining community. Taking the cannibal—an exemplary figure of Caribbean identity—as its point of departure, this last chapter looks more closely at Condé's representation of community, while interrogating the role that writing itself may play in shaping the collective. Stressing the difficulty in resolving historical conflict on the social level—by focusing, for instance, on racial tensions, gender hierarchies, class divisions, and tendencies to mythify and seek a return to origins—the novels studied here (Condé's 1989 *Traversée de la mangrove* and her 2003 *Histoire de la femme cannibale*) remain open-ended, refusing to prescribe a specific political course of action for Guadeloupeans or Caribbeans to follow. Yet they also propose a model of appropriation—one that recognizes the problems inherent in relating to alterity, and attempts to go beyond them—that suggests that literature's role in imagining community is perhaps an ethical one. Condé's initial move to demystify exemplary models of community does not result, then, in a wholesale dismissal of exemplarity *per se*, but invites the reader to conceive of community outside of its prescribed limits.

Interpretation—the act of translating, so to speak, a literary example into other terms—always carries in it the potential for betrayal, the cognitive reduction of the particular to the general. Any study of Condé that does not purport to be exhaustive inevitably confronts this dilemma, and requires a justification of its selection. The novels studied here should be seen first as singular samples of a body of work that is constantly changing, reworking themes, and entering new terrain. Yet I have also chosen to focus on novels that

embody certain ethical concerns in Condé's writing that I view as underpinning her work as a whole. In each of the following chapters, I have paired works from across Condé's career that, when placed in dialogue, reflect her ongoing engagement with exemplarity and its normative logic. By structuring this study around four sets of problematics, I have sought to concretize Condé's critique of and commitment to exemplarity, pointing to her concern for the particular, that which escapes, tests or unsettles any given process of categorization. Yet what the following study underscores is not simply how Condé demonstrates that categories are always constructed and examples always contingent (and hence resistant to moral exemplification), but the ways in which her works illustrate and enact the ethical and political need for exemplarity while urging that norms remain alterable, or open-ended and subject to imaginative and critical revision.

CHAPTER 1

READING HISTORY: THE EXAMPLE OF THE PAST AFTER GLOBALIZATION

Globalization can not only be controlled but used to our benefit. It may become the creation of a universe where the notions of race, nationality, and language, which for so long have divided us, are re-examined and find new expressions; where the notions of hybridity, metissage, multiculturalism are fully redefined.

—Maryse Condé, "O Brave New World"

On ne change aisément ni de pays ni de langue. Seuls les naïfs le croient [...].

—*La Belle Créole*

Globalization, a concept having come into fashion in the late twentieth century, mainly after Marshall McLuhan's popularization of the idea of the "global village" in the 1960's, has sparked much debate over not only when it began, but whether it exists at all, and how precisely it can be defined. In general, globalization theories seek to explain tendencies toward the transnationalization of capital and communications networks, recent increases in population migrations across the globe, and the shifts in conceptions of the nation and identity that result from such movements. Disputes over the definition of globalization have often centered on the perceived "newness" or unprecedented nature of such trends, as well as the extent to which they indicate increasing cultural homogenization (spreading outward from a powerful center) or, conversely, a de-centering of imperialist powers, a breakdown of center-periphery logic, and thus the empowerment of previously "peripheral" and marginalized populations.[1] Whether globalization represents a turn toward exemplary

[1] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue for example in *Empire* that while the currently emerging structure of "Empire" has not been created *ex nihilo*, it is a "new

political and economic systems to be encouraged and enhanced, or on the contrary a detrimental trend toward increased dispossession and exploitation of the majority has constituted the ethico-political question underpinning much intellectual inquiry into the topic.

As Maryse Condé points out in her suggestive article "O Brave New World," it is the "countries of the Third World, especially the Caribbean countries," who, because of their vulnerable political and economic position, have the greatest anxiety regarding emerging global structures and flows, and the greatest stake in preventing globalization's "supposed [...] effect of suppressing authentic culture and subsuming everything into one vast, boundless mass."[2] With the negative effects of colonialism still very present in the lives of Caribbean peoples (Condé has voiced her hesitancy to accept for herself the label of "postcolonial" writer, on the grounds that Martinique and Guadeloupe remain French colonies[3]), such concerns about new forms of imperialism are understandable, she continues. Yet, while recognizing that "today's globalization is very different from what I dream of,"[4] Condé insists on the positive potential of globalization to demystify notions of authentic identity, language and culture. Linking globalization mainly to migration, she maintains that rather than viewing all migrant communities as "dysfunctional [...],

---

regime" that "has nothing to do with the juridical arts of dictatorship or totalitarianism [...] in other times" (*Empire* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000], 26). Arjun Appadurai asserts that "a merest acquaintance of the facts of the modern world" is sufficient "to note that it is now an interactive system in a sense that is strikingly new" (*Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996], 29), while Enrique Dussel ("Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi [Durham: Duke University Press, 1998], 3-31), views today's world-system on the contrary as governed by a center-periphery logic that has been operative on an "interregional" level since at least 762 C.E., and that is at the root of today's rationalist "practices of domination and exclusion" of the periphery (5, 19). See also Simon Gikandi, "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, 3 (2001): 627-58, for a discussion of disciplinary lines in globalization debates.

[2] Maryse Condé, "O Brave New World," in *Multiculturalism and Hybridity in African Literatures*, eds. Hal Wylie and Bernth Lindfors (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2000), 29.

[3] Maryse Condé, "Postcolonial Women Writers in New York: A Reading and Roundtable with Meena Alexander, Maryse Condé, and Assia Djebar," MLA Convention, Sheraton New York Hotel and Towers, New York, 28 December 2002.

[4] "O Brave New World," 35.

having no roots and no means of expressing a confused identity," we should recognize that such communities, under the proper conditions, can become—and already have been—the "seat of an extraordinary creativity" and new, hybrid forms of cultural production.[5]

Such a forward-looking stance might seem to coincide with claims by some globalization theorists that history, and by extension postcolonial theory (with its emphasis on deconstructing and re-reading narratives about the past), is no longer pertinent to the analysis of current global conditions—or even that a concern for history is counterproductive, retarding the development of a society modeled on a postidentitarian conception of subjectivity: a conception of the subject as fluid, constructed, and deterritorialized, as, in other words, beyond the confines of fixed, originary identity. Indeed, globalization proponents Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri contend that the global subject is no longer rooted in a nation, nor marked by history. Naming the structure that produces such global subjects "Empire," Hardt and Negri describe it as a ubiquitous, "new regime," a "new notion of right, or rather, a new inscription of authority and a new design of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion," brought about by the "radical transformation" of key concepts and characterized by its "lack of boundaries."[6] These fluctuating boundaries include not only spatial frontiers, but temporal distinctions as well, since "the concept of Empire presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity."[7] Given the qualitative change in the configuration of power—the paradigm shift from a center-based national sovereignty to Empire, "a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers"[8]—the past is now said to lack any explanatory and emancipatory value.[9] And along with this recognition comes a double imperative, addressed to

---

[5] "O Brave New World," 32.
[6] Hardt and Negri, 9, 26, xiv.
[7] Hardt and Negri, xiv.
[8] Hardt and Negri, xii.
[9] Fredric Jameson equates globalization with postmodernism and observes in both the theory of "the disappearance of History as the fundamental element in which human beings exist" ("Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, 55).

postcolonial critics in particular, to turn away from the past and to look toward the present and future.[10]

To be sure, a critique of history's value is hardly new. The humanist belief that "history is philosophy teaching by example" was already beginning to deteriorate in the late sixteenth century.[11] Yet the claim of the authors of *Empire* goes somewhat farther, putting the relevance of the past itself at stake. The assertion that a sense of passing time is disappearing represents a more radical view, throwing into question the scope and applicability of any historiographical or postcolonial project that emphasizes the deconstruction (and re-construction) of narratives about the past. In her novels, as in "O Brave New World," Condé certainly raises the hermeneutical value of the past—that is, its exemplarity—as a problematic. Yet in these works she demonstrates a complex and intense inquiry into history as well, bringing to light the historical roots and fluctuations of seemingly new and invincible global trends.[12] In the following pages, we will explore Condé's literary engagement with the question of the past's relevance for the present—and the usefulness and limits of

---

[10] According to Hardt and Negri, "postcolonial theorists [who] combat the remnants of colonialist thinking" ultimately "fail to recognize the new form that is looming over them" (137-8). Commenting approvingly on the goals of *Empire*, Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman conclude that "the challenge we collectively face today is to make sense of this shift so that critiques engage with the present and the future, and not with the past" ("Introduction: The Globalization of Fiction/The Fiction of Globalization," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, 3 [2001], 609).

[11] The Renaissance crisis of exemplarity, in many ways, prefigures the postmodern suspicion of History as grand narrative. "Worked over by postmodernism," writes Arif Dirlik, "the past itself seems to be up for grabs, as though it can be made to say anything we want it to say" ("Is There History after Eurocentrism? Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History," in *History after the Three Worlds: Post-Eurocentric Historiographies*, eds. Arif Dirlik, Vinay Bahl and Peter Gran [Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000], 25).

[12] In her article "O Brave New World," Condé implicitly cautions against the totalizing aspirations of theorists like Hardt and Negri, and attempts to dispel fears of homogenization by linking globalization to earlier movements: "A certain measure of globalization was in fact initiated after the Second World War when black America, Africa, and the Caribbean came into close contact in Paris. [...] What was Negritude, what was Pan-Africanism if not forms of globalization, the implied project of a complete identity and an active solidarity among the black peoples? [...] In the same way, Marxism, embraced enthusiastically by the majority of the black intellectuals, was little else but the dream of a world without borders whose foundation was no longer Race but Class" (29, 31).

postcolonial or globalization theory for elucidating this question—in two particular novels. The first, *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem* (1986), takes up the figure of the seventeenth-century slave, Tituba, tried for witchcraft during the Salem witch hunts, and, moving from plantation society in Barbados to colonial, Puritan Massachusetts, deals with the beginnings of geographically global commerce and massive—forced—migrations. The second, *La Belle Créole* (2001), moves to the present. Set against the dismal background of a civil servants' and workers' strike in 1999 Guadeloupe, the novel recounts the tragic story of Dieudonné Sabrina, following his trial for the murder of his *békée* employer and lover Loraine.[13] It is tempting to view *Moi, Tituba sorcière* as a direct expression of postcolonial theory, given its subject matter and putative project: to reclaim what has been described as "the small voice of history,"[14] here, the marginalized and silenced Tituba, who is given the chance to speak. Conversely, *La Belle Créole*, anchored firmly in a contemporary Guadeloupe whose identity is increasingly transformed by an influx of migrants and cultural objects, might be said to represent a turn in Condé's work away from the concerns of postcolonialism as it stages Dieudonné as a global subject, for whom history (especially the colonial history of race and class struggle) simply no longer matters. This chapter contends, however, that these novels demonstrate in singular ways Condé's longstanding commitment to historicizing differently. Condé's novels neither affirm the "end of history," or, on the contrary, history's firm determination of the present, but critically probe the relations between the general and the particular at work in history or narratively constructed by historiography, while questioning the validity of experience as evidence of the disjunction between past and present. Rather than serving as unequivocal examples of or for postcolonial or globalization studies, Condé's texts challenge some their most fundamental assumptions by interrogating the past's elusive relation to the present.

---

[13] Maryse Condé, *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), and *La Belle Créole* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2001). Henceforth, all references to these two works will be stated parenthetically in the text.

[14] Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," in *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 2.

Borders, Nomads, Hybridity

Readers familiar with Condé will recognize in her stance on globalization's potentially liberating effects a refrain common to her critical texts, that of the benefits of nomadism and the need to overcome outmoded, reductive, or essentialist paradigms of identity governed by a logic of sameness and based on categories such as place, race, ethnicity, language, or gender.[15] Throughout her career, Condé has set herself at odds with various literary movements and schools dominating the French Antillean literary scene, resisting what she views as the restrictive models—or, as she terms it, "order"—proposed thus far by practitioners of *Négritude* and *Créolité*, and insisting rather on the freedom of the creative writer to explore and imagine the objects of his or her choice.[16] Her objections center on the masculinist dimensions of these movements, their tendency to reproduce cultural stereotypes, and their advocacy of a politics rooted in identity. Viewing *Créolité*—a movement that claims to value hybridity, *métissage*, and fluidity—as identitarian is a contested stance, and one that calls for closer scrutiny if we are to understand how hybridity can be renewed, or altered, through globalization, as Condé suggests.[17]

---

[15] On the term identity and its various uses in the humanities and social sciences, see Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1-47.

[16] Referring to Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant's famous 1989 manifesto, *Éloge de la Créolité*, Condé comments, "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 [...]. In new environments one faces new experiences which reshape the West Indian personality. For those who stay on the islands, changes occur also [...]. West Indians should be as changing and evolving as the islands themselves. [...] Creative imagination goes beyond the limits of reality and soars to areas of its own choice" ("Order, Disorder, Freedom," 130). See also Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, eds., *Penser la créolité* (Paris: Karthala, 1995), and Kathleen Gyssels, "Maryse Condé on *Créolité*," *Matatu* 27, 1 (2003): 301-320.

[17] The emergence in cultural studies of the negatively charged term "identitarian" is symptomatic, Christopher L. Miller argues, of a recent shift toward a more radical view of "identity" as not merely a social construction, but an "identitarian 'prison,'

Condé's character Tituba, a slave from Barbados who enters into the service of a Puritan minister and his family, in certain ways exemplifies practices of hybridity. The novel itself, which is prefaced by a statement from the author describing Tituba's collusion in the project ("Tituba et moi, avons vécu en étroite intimité pendant un an. C'est au cours de nos interminables conversations qu'elle m'a dit ces choses qu'elle n'avait confiées à personne"), practices *métissage* as defined by Martinican theorist Edouard Glissant, that is, the weaving together of oral and written traditions in order both to recover suppressed or ignored histories and to move toward developing "nonhierarchical modes of relation among cultures."[18] Defining *métissage* thus, as a cultural reality (the historically constructed mixture of Western and African literary traditions found in the Antilles) but also as a calculated practice with political effects is, Glissant argues, to negate the nineteenth-century conception of *métissage* as the combination of two "pure" racial or cultural sources, a combination that was commonly looked on as a form of degeneration.[19] This move is analogous to Homi Bhabha's reworking of the term *hybridity* to designate a site or technique of resistance,[20] and is

---

from which we might or must escape. [...] By rhyming with 'totalitarian,' it [the term 'identitarian'] suggests mistrust and critique; its emergence in print—in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, most notably—signals the repudiation of discrete, categorical identities as the necessary building blocks of criticism" (Christopher L. Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 172).

[18] Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 4-5. See Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 792-94.

[19] Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices*, 9.

[20] See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. The terms "hybridity," "métissage," and "Creolization" both overlap and diverge in usage. "Hybridity" and "métissage" both share the sense of cultural and racial mixture (the Spanish *mestizo*, however, dates to the early contact between Spanish and Portuguese settlers and indigenous American peoples prior to the arrival of African slaves, and has retained a connotation of indigeneity). Originally referring to the mixture of tame and wild animals, "hybridity" came to be heavily associated with biological racism and miscegenation in the colonial context. "Creole" was originally used to describe a person of European ancestry born in the colonies, and came to apply to other inhabitants of the colonies, their languages, and, later, their culture. "Creolization" has been used to emphasize process and flux, as well as the complex multiplicity of cultures involved in that process. To avoid the racial connotations of these words certain critics have adopted the term "transculturation" to describe processes of cultural exchange.

dramatized in *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem*. As the daughter of an Ashanti woman and an English sailor, who is adopted after her mother's death by "une Nago de la côte, dont on avait créolisé en Man Yaya, le nom de Yetunde" (22), Tituba exemplifies the cultural hybridity characteristic of Caribbean populations. Instructed in the healing arts by Man Yaya, Tituba also becomes an expert at cross-breeding plants to enhance her supernatural therapeutic powers: "je m'essayai à des croisements hardis, mariant la passiflorinde à la prune taureau, la cithère vénéneuse à la surette et l'azalée des azalées à la persulfureuse" (26). Tituba's practice of hybridity can be likened to that of *bricolage*, as she pieces together new combinations of plants for the purpose of healing. This hybridizing technique is further developed as Tituba migrates; once she has arrived in New England, which is to her a "pays inconnu et inclément" (78), she successfully substitutes new plants for the ones she has known: "Un érable dont le feuillage virait au rouge fit office de fromager. [...] Des fleurs jaunes et sans parfum se substituèrent au salapertuis, panacée de tous les maux du corps et qui ne pousse qu'à mi-hauteur des mornes" (78). Yet, as Bruce Simon points out,

> Condé has planted an additional intricate joke in these scenes, for the *passiflorinde*, the *prune taureau*, the *azalée-des-azalées*, the *persulfureuse*, and the *salapertuis* are each, according to the novel's glossary, "a literary invention by the author." Not only is there always mixing and substituting going on in *Tituba*, but it turns out that the 'originals' being mixed are usually inventions. Hybridity, for Condé, is not simply the mixture of opposites but also the exposure of the myth that pure opposites exist in the first place.[21]

Hybridity thus functions here as a demystifying tool; it works to unsettle the racist logic of the colonialist. Like Tituba's plants, the people who inhabit the novel—Tituba herself, her half-Arawak, half-Nago husband John Indien, the Jewish merchant Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo who buys her way out of prison, the heterogeneous

---

[21] Bruce Simon, "Hybridity in the Americas: Reading Condé, Mukherjee, and Hawthorne," in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States*, eds. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 425-26. The glossary to which Simon refers is found in the English translation, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, trans. Richard Philcox (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 185-186.

population of Massachusetts—are *always already* in a state of hybridity.

Focusing on Tituba's life in Massachusetts and the violence that is done to her there (most of the novel's action takes place in Puritan Salem) serves to highlight the role of slavery, and commerce more generally, in the formation of an American identity, an identity popularly traced to one originary moment: the Pilgrims' achievement of religious freedom upon landing at Plymouth Rock. While taking the Puritan community as an important founding element of American culture, Condé's novel seems to alter or inflect this portrait by recalling the dubious character of this monocultural legend. Tituba points out that at the time, "il y avait dans la ville de Salem comme dans celle de Boston et toute la Bay Colony, un grand nombre de Noirs" (198), while her husband, John Indien, comments after being hired to work in a Boston tavern:

> Ma reine, si tu savais la vie qui se mène dans cette ville de Boston, à deux pas des censeurs d'Église comme notre Samuel Parris, tu n'en croirais pas tes yeux ni tes oreilles. Putes, marins, un anneau à l'oreille, capitaines aux cheveux gras sous leurs chapeaux à trois cornes et même, gentilshommes connaisseurs de la Bible avec femme et enfants au foyer. Tout ce monde se soûle, jure, fornique. Oh! Tituba, tu ne peux comprendre l'hypocrisie du monde des Blancs! (80)

Placing a commercial logic based on racism and exploitation squarely at the center of America's foundation further draws attention to this hybridity. In the figure of Samuel Parris, the Puritan minister into whose service Tituba and her husband enter, Condé points to the link between Protestantism and capitalism that has become a commonplace since Max Weber: Parris is not only a minister, but a businessman, forced to leave Barbados when his commercial venture fails, and who, after arriving in Boston, constantly haggles with his parish members over the terms of his salary. Highlighting commercialism allows Condé to reexamine inter-American migration and the cultural interdependence that has resulted from it—an interdependence often obscured today by national and linguistic divisions—and to draw attention to the Caribbean as an indispensable point in the circle of trade and a site of contestation and exploitation on the part of colonial British/American entrepreneurs. In Condé's rendition of Tituba's story, then, capitalism's exploitative and divisive

function shapes the characters' lives and underlies Tituba's highly personal narrative.

Tituba's story has clear pedagogical implications for Condé. She maintains that the inspiration for the book was a sense of injustice before Tituba's obscurity as a historic figure: "I was mainly interested in the *racism affecting this Black woman*, who had been completely forgotten, crossed out of history. Tituba was not rehabilitated, whereas all the other women were. [...] All of this seemed revolting to me, and I wanted to give a life to this obscure and forgotten woman."[22] *Moi, Tituba sorcière* thus not only demystifies fantasies of pure origins, but also foregrounds the persistence of racism, revealing the importance and degree to which the colonial past inhabits the global present: "Writing *Tituba* was an opportunity to express my feelings about present-day America. I wanted to imply that in terms of narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy, and racism, little has changed since the days of the Puritans."[23] Yet Condé, in a typical self-reflexive moment, disrupts the next logical, readerly move, which would be to view her Tituba as an exemplary, heroic figure: "Since I am not the kind of writer who creates *model characters*," she affirms, "I quickly destroyed what might appear *exemplary* in the story by rendering Tituba rather naive and sometimes ridiculous."[24] Condé would prefer her reader interpret the novel as parodic, rather than read it straight: "the element of parody is very important if you wish to fully comprehend *Tituba*."[25]

Reading *Moi, Tituba sorcière* as parody invites a reconsideration of the way the novel performs its critique. If Condé's text discredits the moral purity and ethnic homogeneity of colonial New England by underlining its capitalistic greed and morally condemnable exploitation of slaves like Tituba, it does not develop a credible counter-history that exemplifies the intricacies of American hybridity. Instead it produces further stereotypes, caricaturing the Protestant work ethic, the bawdy ship captain and crew in full pirate attire, and the

---

[22] Françoise Pfaff, *Conversations with Maryse Condé* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 60, emphasis added.
[23] Ann Scarboro, Afterword, in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, 203.
[24] Françoise Pfaff, *Conversations*, 60, emphasis added.
[25] Scarboro, Afterword, 212.

wandering but financially successful Jewish entrepreneur.[26] What is the rhetorical function of such caricatures in Condé's fiction? Is Condé indulging in stereotypes rather than critiquing them? As Mireille Rosello has insightfully pointed out, every quotation of, or reference to, stereotypes participates to some extent in their perpetuation, regardless of how such a quotation is intended.[27] Isn't Condé's novel similarly dangerous and duplicitous, since *Moi, Tituba sorcière* seems both to legitimize and subvert the stereotypes that it parodies?

That Condé places a critique of America's supposedly pure, Puritan origins ("Oh! Tituba, tu ne peux comprendre l'hypocrisie du monde des Blancs!") in the mouth of a character like John Indian is significant. As a dispossessed slave, John Indian creates pathos, disposing the reader to accept his line of thought (especially if the reader's own preconceptions correspond to his description). On a rereading however, the extent to which John Indian's portrait of Massachusetts society remains a caricature—like the others which abound in the text—becomes more clear. John Indian is unable to analyze New England culture except in binary terms. He refutes the pretensions to moral superiority of the "censeurs d'Église," but does so by simply reversing their claims, betraying his dependence on the colonists' derogatory language of clichés, caricatures, and stereotypes. In place of a community of austere believers, he creates an equally extreme image of "white" society as homogeneously hypocritical, godless, and lawless. Consequently, from the reader's standpoint, these counter-stereotypes problematize John Indian's demystifying account, his privileged status as an insightful and reliable observer.

Mixing caricature with the historical novel genre, and with the tragic subject matter of slavery and racial-religious oppression—creating mock-heroic effects—further hybridizes the novel itself, denying its categorization as a straightforward postcolonial re-

---

[26] See Kathleen Gyssels, *Sages Sorcières? Révision de la mauvaise mère dans* Beloved *(Toni Morisson),* Praisesong for the Widow *(Paule Marshall), et* Moi, Tituba, sorcière noire de Salem *(Maryse Condé)* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), 120-22, for an analysis of this last figure, represented in the text by the character Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo.

[27] Mireille Rosello, *Declining the Stereotype. Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures* (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1998), 38-39. For an overview of current literary criticism on the stereotype, see also Christian Garaud, ed., *Sont-ils bons? Sont-ils méchants? Usages des stéréotypes* (Paris: Champion, 2001).

writing.[28] Rather, the novel as a whole can be described as a parody of postcolonial or feminist rewriting, employing what Linda Hutcheon has identified as one of the most frequent techniques of self-reflexivity in modern and postmodern art.[29] As "repetition with critical distance," parody can both discredit and reinforce the models on which it is built.[30] It both gestures toward authorial intent (an intent to demystify or recontextualize an artwork or genre) yet depends, in order to function as irony, on the reader's familiarity with the models it alters, as well as the reader's assessment of the degree to which a text either "repeats" or "differs" from its predecessor. *Moi, Tituba sorcière* embodies these paradoxes. Condé's own comments on the text reflect these ambiguities as well. The novel, in her words, is both "a pastiche of the feminine heroic novel, a parody containing a lot of clichés" that is difficult to read "with any seriousness,"[31] and an ethical response to Tituba's forgotten voice. This response renounces, however, any attempt to speak *for* Tituba, and renders problematic the attempt to speak *about* her; as Kathleen Gyssels observes, "la portée et la visée de l'auteure est de nous interroger sur la possibilité de traduire une vie

---

[28] See Chapter 2 for an extended discussion of Condé's parodic treatment of the postcolonial rewrite.

[29] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody. The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 1-3.

[30] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 6, xii. See also Robert Phiddian, "Are Parody and Deconstruction Secretly the Same Thing?" *New Literary History* 28, 4 (1997): 673-96. Phiddian views parody as similar to deconstruction in the way it demonstrates that language "is an impure medium, and that pure referentiality is a crazy and often dangerous dream," but contends that parody manages to break out of "the deconstructive impasse that treats language as an endless and odorless play of differences" through a "supplementary movement [...] which returns the reader to something resembling the world. Through it, the play of differences in language is also defamiliarized, disrupted by physical realities and social, moral, and political imperatives" (691).

[31] Here pastiche should not be understood in terms of Fredric Jameson's polemical modernist definition, where pastiche—unlike parody which affirms and relies on "some healthy linguistic normality" after its critique—is said to be devoid of any critical force, a mere "blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs" ("Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 [1984], 65). Rather, Condé's use of pastiche (and parody) invites, if not compels, the reader, in Chris Bongie's formulation, "[to] learn how to 'see' things, as it were, with blind eyeballs—with a lack of conviction in the 'healthy' alternatives that make Jameson's 'potent' distinction between parody and pastiche possible" (*Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], 375).

qui n'est pas la sienne, de ré-emboucher les paroles d'une femme autre."[32] Condé is, of course, writing about Tituba in her novel, but *her* Tituba is not a figure that lends itself easily to hermeneutical mastery. As parody, *Moi, Tituba sorcière* reflects on its own transmission of Tituba's story, complicating the novel's epigraph and its claim to legitimacy and authenticity: "Tituba et moi, avons vécu en étroite intimité pendant un an. C'est au cours de nos interminables conversations qu'elle m'a dit ces choses qu'elle n'avait confiées à personne." Moreover, as parody, Condé's novel comments on the *reception* of Tituba, that is, on revisionist accounts that claim to produce a more authentic portrait of her life, accounts that rely on overly rigid conceptions of identity, perpetuating in turn a problematic logic of exemplarity. The desire to take Tituba seriously—to unearth or discover the "true" Tituba—is coterminous with the desire to make her into an exemplary heroine.

This type of "serious" reading, for instance, is illustrated by Angela Davis, who, in the foreword to the English translation of *Moi, Tituba sorcière*, writes: "In the final analysis, Tituba's revenge consists in reminding us all that the doors to our suppressed cultural histories are still ajar" (xiii).[33] For Davis, Condé's intervention is beyond (self)parodic play; Tituba is an exemplary figure, one who opposes hegemonic (racist and misogynist) discourses and "dies as a revolutionary" (xii-xiii). Davis generalizes Tituba's voice, which in her reading comes to stand for "the voice of a suppressed black feminist tradition" (xii). But if we interpret Condé's multiplication of stereotypes precisely as a parodic move, any decisive or "serious" political reading of her work is necessarily interrupted. Going against readerly expectations of sensitive historical reconstruction—a reconstruction that would appear to enable *the subaltern to speak*, as

---

[32] Kathleen Gyssels, "L'intraduisibilité de Tituba Indien, sujet interculturel," *Mots pluriels* 23 (2003), http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP2303kg.html.

[33] Similarly, Pascale Becel interprets Condé as engaged in the ethical project of restoring Tituba to her rightful place in history: "*Moi, Tituba sorcière...* specifically restores to history the figure of a black Caribbean woman, either suppressed, or stereotyped, or weakened by previous accounts" ("*Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem* as a Tale of *Petite Marronne*," *Callaloo* 18, 3 [1995], 609). Elisabeth Mudimbé-Boyi comments as well: "*Tituba* is a statement against effacement, exclusion, and reduction to invisibility. [...] Within Condé's oeuvre, *Tituba* takes on a political significance and resonates as a powerful counterhistory" ("Giving a Voice to Tituba: The Death of the Author?" *World Literature Today* 67, 4 [1993], 751).

Angela Davis believes the novel does: "Maryse Condé lends [Tituba] the words that assist her to tell you and me her story, speaking her life in her own voice" (xi)—Condé's stereotypes should alert the reader both to Tituba's ultimate alterity and inaccessibility (by pointing to the text's refusal to tell Tituba's story unproblematically[34]), and, more generally, to the process through which one-sided or stereotypical depictions are often taken up as exemplary.[35]

In *La Belle Créole* Condé stages a similar critique of the stereotyping process, but does so by creating indeterminacy, a "bar," in Geoffrey Hartman's terms, that "separate[s] understanding and truth."[36] Pointing to the gap between the desire to understand and the availability of knowledge are the multiple the "verdicts" reached by popular opinion regarding the central character Dieudonné's trial for the murder of his employer-mistress, Loraine. The accusation of the black gardener, portrayed by his expert lawyer as a mistreated slave who rebelled against his white oppressor, creates a media frenzy and intense speculation. Among the many narratives that circulate through the public explaining why Dieudonné has shot Loraine, however, none can sufficiently account for the act, whose causes are never disclosed to the characters, and only revealed to the reader late in the novel. The majority of these narratives situate Dieudonné and Loraine within

---

[34] In *Proceed with Caution: A Rhetoric of Particularism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), Doris Sommer innovatively reframes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's well-known question "Can the subaltern speak?" as "Can we listen to the subaltern?" To listen to Condé's Tituba is to be attentive to the novel's textual resistance to making Tituba exemplary.

[35] In this respect, *Moi, Tituba sorcière* diverges from Condé's earlier "historical" novel, *Ségou*, in which the author, as she explains in an interview, made historical reconstruction her goal: "For me, *Segu* was a reflection on the history of Africa and the reasons for the present-day situation of decay and decline. Once powerful and beautiful, now there are people starving, fighting, rioting; and so I asked the question: what happened?" (Barbara Lewis, "No Silence: An Interview with Maryse Condé," *Callaloo* 18, 3 [1995], 548). In the novel's acknowledgements, Condé reiterates this intent, thanking a number of historians and scholars: "Grace à eux," she states, "cette fiction ne prend pas trop de liberté avec le réel." Yet as in *Moi, Tituba sorcière*, Condé alters the conventions of historical reconstruction here as well, blending genres and various modes of apprehending history. In *Ségou*, as Chinosole puts it, "Condé crisscrosses 'myth' and demystification by combining the critical stance of a griot's epic with the subjective realism of contemporary Western novels" ("Maryse Condé as Contemporary Griot in *Segu*," *Callaloo* 18, 3 [1995], 593).

[36] Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 272.

well-established, reductive paradigms, attributing the crime to society and the effects of colonization ("ce brouet trop rabâché" that Dieudonné's lawyer manages to spice up just enough to obtain a light sentence of community service, comments the narrator [14]), or to Loraine's own provocative cruelty, explained in turn by her class, race, or gender. "[C]'était une békée qui buvait et ne faisait rien de ses dix doigts!" states one young girl, who follows the trial with interest (202).[37] Strike leader and poet, Boris, inscribes Loraine in a misogynist, essentializing discourse, warning Dieudonné to avoid her when he hears of their relationship:

> La femme a été créée pour la perdition de l'homme, c'est connu. Plus encore que les noires, les blanches sont vicieuses, dangereuses, des serpents à sonnette. [Boris] accumulait les exemples. —Ève a perdu Adam. Hélène a causé la guerre de Troie. Cléopâtre a fini Antoine et César. La Malinche a baisé avec Cortés et ça a été la débâcle pour les Incas. Qu'y a-t-il exactement entre vous? (71)

Certain characters present a more nuanced view, putting into question the social categories in which Dieudonné and Loraine are classed. One woman remarks, "Je crois qu'elle a mérité de mourir comme elle est morte. [...] Ce n'est pas parce que c'était une békée, malgré tout le mal que ces gens-là nous ont fait et qu'ils n'ont pas reconnu. [...] Si je dis cela, c'est parce que c'était une mauvaise personne" (193). Another, reflecting on Dieudonné's release, weighs Loraine's negative status as a békée against her positive status as a woman, and draws a different conclusion:

> [...] à l'évidence ses sympathies penchaient vers Dieudonné. [...] En même temps, Loraine était femme et quoique békée, à ce titre, elle s'inscrivait dans l'interminable liste des victimes de la toute-puissance mâle. Femmes battues, femmes violées, femmes trompées. On pouvait donc mettre à mort une femme et poursuivre sa vie, les mains libres. Elle suffoqua devant tant d'injustice. (122)

This multiplication, and deconstruction, of perspectives creates indeterminacy for the reader attempting to interpret the events portrayed. From the reader's perspective, Dieudonné and Loraine

---

[37] The word *béké* designates white plantation owners and their descendents.

might be seen as *hybridized* (following Bakhtin's use of the term[38]), or freed from what could be described as the identitarian confines in which their fellow Guadeloupeans interpretively enclose them. For Dieudonné, however, this indeterminacy is experienced as an estrangement from society, a keenly disturbing evacuation of identity, or void of meaning. Meeting stares wherever he goes, he reflects: "Désormais, il faudrait vivre sa vie, objet d'admiration pour les uns, objet de haine et de terreur pour les autres. Il n'avait pas de vérité, il n'était rien, qu'un bwa-bwa de carnaval, habillé d'oripeaux, travesti des fantasmes de ses compatriotes" (52). Dieudonné's association of his new state with *carnaval* is telling. Such a comparison translates his feeling that the "order of things" has been uncomfortably interrupted; his relation to the world has been turned upside down. Moreover, the signification of *carnaval*—traditionally cited as a transgressive moment of resistance to hierarchy and reigning social values—is itself ironically reversed in this passage. Rather than gaining consciousness of the potential for social change and his own potential to act as an agent of that change, Dieudonné feels stripped of agency, reduced to a puppet in the hands of others.

This passage raises questions regarding the celebration of hybridity as an unproblematized site of resistance—as an alternative, or exemplary, model of identity. Both *La Belle Créole* and *Moi, Tituba sorcière* situate hybridity within power relations, exposing its limitations. For Dieudonné and Tituba both, hybridity is not an end in itself, nor is it always a choice, to be promoted uncritically or unconditionally. Hybridity can be imposed, and, in Tituba's case, can originate in violence. *Moi, Tituba sorcière* situates the origins of hybridity in the rape of Tituba's mother en route to Barbados aboard an English slave ship: "Abena, ma mère, un marin anglais la viola sur le pont du *Christ the King*, un jour de 16** alors que le navire faisait voile vers la Barbade. C'est de cet acte d'agression que je suis née. De

---

[38] For Bakhtin, intentional hybridization (a politicized construction deployed by the author in order to contest a given discourse) entails "[t]wo points of view [that] are not mixed, but set against each other dialogically." "[T]he novelistic hybrid," he continues, "is an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another" (M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981], 360-61).

cet acte de haine et de mépris" (15). Slavery, the condition from which Tituba's form of creativity stems, is described throughout the book as a brutal, widespread, and overpowering presence. Accordingly, Tituba is depicted foremost as a vulnerable subject; her supernatural powers allow her to heal wounds, but not to escape them, and she lives out her life with a constant, fatalistic feeling of foreboding that can be seen in part as an effect of early traumas, but that is also confirmed by events: the violent circumstances surrounding her birth are replayed when she is raped herself by Puritan ministers attempting to extort a confession of witchcraft from her; the incidents of torture she witnesses as a child follow her to Massachusetts; and she is haunted by the scene of her mother's hanging, which she had witnessed at the age of seven—a scene she relives in Salem at the sight of another "witch's" execution, a scene that comes back again when her friend, Hester Prynne, hangs herself in prison, and a scene she is doomed to repeat herself when, having returned to Barbados, she is hung for her participation in planning a slave rebellion.

Tituba's malleability—her openness to change—does not always produce desired outcomes; her cross-breeding art, in other words, has its limits. It cannot help her overcome her strong longing for Barbados, nor does it provide adequate resistance to the violent rhetoric of the Puritans, whose fears and oppression attack her like a poison (162). Tituba's stay in Salem village ages her prematurely (at 30, she passes for an elderly woman [221]), and alters her mind as well. In addition to incorporating the Puritans' fears (of animals and natural elements that had once seemed friendly to her in Barbados),[39] Tituba begins to associate the sexualized female body with evil. This transformation in Tituba illustrates the subtle and damaging effects of power, the non-conscious integration of a set of beliefs as theorized by Foucault: "Power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representations. If power takes hold on the body, this isn't through its having first to be interiorised in people's consciousness."[40] If Tituba is active and *self-forming* in her practice of hybridity (her witchcraft), she also needs to seen as *formed* by the dominant Puritan ideology.

---

[39] Cf. Faye Ringel, "Reclaiming the Invisible World: Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*," in *Into Darkness Peering: Race and Color in the Fantastic*, ed. Elisabeth Anne Leonard (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997): 131-141.
[40] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 186.

Despite her strong conviction that sexual desire should be celebrated—"Quoi de plus beau qu'un corps de femme! Surtout quand le désir d'un homme l'anoblit" (75)—she notes that Abigail Williams, the adolescent ringleader of the panic that grips the town, is older than the more innocent Betsey Parris, and more capable of dissimulation and violence. Watching Abigail and her friends, she begins to doubt "la pureté de l'enfance," and to wonder whether "les discours de Samuel Parris sur la présence du Malin en chacun de nous" might touch on some truth (98). When Betsey and Abigail are undressed and examined for signs of Satanic possession, she distinguishes between Betsey's beauty and Abigail's older ugliness, viewing the former as a sign of innocence, and the latter as a sign of malevolence: "les corps des fillettes apparurent, celui de Betsey *parfaitement enfantin*, celui d'Abigail, guetté par l'adolescence avec la *vilaine toison* du pubis et les auréoles rosâtres des mamelons" (132, emphasis added).

While Tituba's hybridity poses a number of drawbacks, the novel's depiction of migration also underscores the limits of this malleability, and the difficulty with which one's cultural identity can be radically modified. Tituba lives her stay in Massachusetts as an "exile," commenting, "Il est étrange, l'amour du pays! Nous le portons en nous comme notre sang, comme nos organes" (82). Conversely, her presence among the Puritans serves mainly to reinforce the identity of the community, which, condemning her as a witch, defines and consolidates itself through the constitution of a threatening Other. Like Tituba, those who have chosen Guadeloupe as their home in *La Belle Créole* are pervaded by loneliness or a persistent sentiment of "foreignness." With respect to the German-American student Ana, for instance, the narrator comments:

> Tant qu'elle vivait en Iowa, Ana s'était voulue étrangère aux Etats-Unis, pièce rapportée parmi les pièces rapportées. Elle avait appris le français, ensuite le créole, idiome d'un peuple dominé pour se désolidariser de l'anglais qui l'avait agressée quand elle était enfant. Pourtant, il avait suffi qu'elle aborde à ce pays pour découvrir à quel monde elle appartenait en fin de compte. (92-93)

Union leader Boris similarly comes to the realization that cultural identities are not easily altered while reflecting on his pregnant wife, an Italian journalist who had espoused both him and his cause:

> [Boris] savait combien Carla redoutait son accouchement. Le prétexte avoué était qu'elle n'était plus très jeune [...]. Boris, un temps dupe, comprenait à présent qu'il s'agissait de tout autre chose. On ne change aisément ni de pays ni de langue. Seuls les naïfs le croient et la solitude de sa femme qu'il avait découverte avec des mois de retard le bouleversait. (240)

Much of the text is marked by moments of inward reflection such as these, which detail the characters' personal experience of linguistic and national boundaries. To use Pierre Bourdieu's terms, these characters embody on a practical level what can be theorized as the conservative function of *habitus*, that is, a set of durable dispositions, constructed disproportionately, though not entirely, on early experiences, that frame the way subjects perceive and move through the world.[41]

Condé's novels complicate, then, her frequent comments in interviews and critical works on the positive impact of "wandering" on the creativity and lucidity of the writer.[42] Nomadism, as elaborated in her fictional works, leads not to a glorification of mobility, nor a liberating play of constantly mutating identities, but rather, as Kathleen Gyssels has remarked, "openly undercuts any comfortable sense of homeland and belonging," initiating a desire and search for rootedness that remain unsatisfied and endlessly deferred. Gyssels cites Spéro's reflections in *Les derniers rois mages* as emblematic of this quest:

> Après tant et tant d'années d'exil, est-ce qu'une terre est toujours natale? Et est-ce qu'on est toujours natif? On arrive dans le pays et on ne connaît plus ni sa parole ni sa musique. On cherche sans jamais le trouver le *piébwa* de son placenta.[43]

Referring to the practice of burying the placenta and umbilical cord at the foot of a tree to connect a newborn to the land, Condé draws attention here to the tenuous nature of that connection, all the while recalling the *persistence of desire* for such an attachment, or for

---

[41] See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), for an in-depth discussion of *habitus*. We will return to this concept in Chapter 3 as well.

[42] See, for example, Françoise Pfaff, *Conversations with Maryse Condé*, 47.

[43] Kathleen Gyssels, "Maryse Condé on *Créolité*," 317. Condé, *Les derniers rois mages* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1992), 173.

what has been called "arborescent" identity. Following Deleuze and Guattari, postcolonial and globalization critics alike have privileged the figure of the nomad, and opposed "arborescent" structures (based on a single tap root) to "rhizomatic" ones (a term taken from botany to describe root systems that spring from several sources, and spread transversally, rather than downward). While the rhizome and the nomad have proven to be valuable analytical concepts for rethinking postcolonial identity and relations of power,[44] Hardt and Negri, for their part, generalize such postcolonial insights, transforming the "postcolonial hero"—the nomad—into a quasi-revolutionary figure, mobilized for a more democratic form of globalization:[45] "Nomadism and miscegenation appear here as figures of virtue, as the first *ethical* practice on the terrain of Empire. […] The real heroes of the liberation of the Third World may really have been the emigrants and the flows of population that have destroyed old and new boundaries."[46] For Hardt and Negri, the rhizomatic identity of the multitude (a model of being and thought born in the Caribbean world, as some would suggest[47]) becomes exemplary of an Empire still to come.

Yet debate has arisen regarding the use and abuse of the rhizome and the nomad in cultural studies. Two years prior to the publication of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, Christopher Miller, in *Nationalists and*

---

[44] See, for example, Bill Ashcroft, "The Rhizome of Post-Colonial Discourse," in *Literature and the Contemporary*, eds. Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks (New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 1999): 111-25.

[45] "A new nomad horde, a new race of barbarians, will arise to invade or evacuate Empire" (213).

[46] Hardt and Negri, 362-3, emphasis added. Homi K. Bhabha has taken issue with this overtly romanticized portrait of nomadic migration: "Migrants, refugees, and nomads don't merely circulate. They need to settle, claim asylum or nationality, demand housing and education, assert their economic and cultural rights, and come to be legally represented within legal jurisdictions" ("Statement for the *Critical Inquiry* Board Symposium," *Critical Inquiry* 30, 2 [2003], 347). Ernesto Laclau has similarly expressed strong reservations about the political effectiveness of the multitude's putative "*will to be against*" (*Empire*, 210): "Today… the very ubiquity of Empire—which is no longer an *external* enemy—would make it difficult to identify those whom the multitude is against" ("Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?" *Diacritics* 31, 4 [2001], 7).

[47] For Raphaël Confiant, it is the hybridized Caribbean self that becomes the exemplary subject of globalization: "Nowadays more and more Antilleans see that blending and impurity are fundamental values—and that these values are in the process of spilling out over the whole world. In a sense, we are in the vanguard of a worldwide movement" (Lucien Taylor, "Créolité Bites," 137).

Nomads, provided an extensive critique of the "free" or "rhizomatic" nomadology proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in their 1980 *Mille Plateaux* as an alternative to identitarianism.[48] Analyzing Deleuze and Guattari's reliance on anthropological sources in a work that claims to be purely virtual, or nonreferential, Miller exposes some of the dangers involved in the contemporary enthusiasm for and prescription of nomad thought. Conceived within an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist context, nomad thought, as Deleuze and Guattari envision it, is an attempt to go beyond the "identitarian prisons" evoked earlier. It entails a resistance to representation and ethnographic authority, an authority that is, however, both present and problematic, as Miller demonstrates:

> The problem is not the presence of authority within *A Thousand Plateaus*; the problem is the *denial* of authority, the claim to be nonauthoritarian, and the consequent failure to come to terms with the consequences of the authority that the authors put into practice. Like certain real nomads described by anthropologists, Deleuze and Guattari prefer to think of coercive authority as being beyond their means, leaving it to an alien "State" with which they are not complicit, so that they won't have to be responsible for it.[49]

The consequences of this denial of authority are serious, Miller argues, given the origins of anthropology (a discipline whose authority they "borrow") in the colonialist "project of controlling by knowing" (190). Through their borrowing, Deleuze and Guattari make sweeping generalizations, obliterating or ignoring the specificities of actual people and communities. If their motivation stems from a "de-territorialized" logic, a desire to step out of "ordered interiorities," Miller finds in their "literal *indifference* to the interiorities within which many people live" a kind of "cosmopolitan arrogance" and concludes: "If the question at issue for cultural studies must be that of finding a way to think through constructed borders and identities, it will have to decide how to deal with the inscribed or projected reality of those borders" (191).

---

[48] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), and Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads*, Chapter 6, "Beyond Identity: The Post-identitarian Predicament in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaux*."
[49] Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads*, 190.

This discussion is of key importance here because Maryse Condé's works center precisely on the problem of prescribing models, and the obstacles to, or dangers in, moving between referential statement (e.g., a description of nomadic people) and prescriptive critique (where nomadism functions as a metaphor and a mode of being). As we have seen thus far in her treatment of identity, Condé offers a critique of origins, revealing the fundamentally hybrid nature of identity, yet remains skeptical of hybridity as a potentially exemplary state or practice (or, to use Miller's description of nomadism, as "an ethical utopia" [185]), focusing rather on the ways territoriality—the actual persistence, or perpetuation, of cultural and identitarian borders—affects her characters' lives.

Condé's complex treatment of hybridity in her two novels contrasts here with Hardt and Negri's wholesale dismissal of "a politics of difference, fluidity, and hybridity."[50] Under Empire, they argue, "sovereign power no longer resides on pure identities but rather works through hybridization and multicultural formations."[51] For Hardt and Negri, hybridity is therefore inefficient as a mode of resistance. Though critical of hybridity, Condé is far less confident in asserting a radical break with the past. Writing her novel *Moi, Tituba sorcière*, in part, as a response to the persistence of racism, to the fact that "little has changed since the days of the Puritans," suggests that binary thinking (informing oppositions like us and them, self and other) continues to exert considerable influence on people's thoughts, although it does so in a more insidious manner. Accordingly, hybridity as a demystifying tool may still have a role to play in postcolonial and globalization studies. Yet Condé's novels constantly remind us of the danger of embracing this (or any) concept uncritically. Boris's realization, for example, that "on ne change aisément ni de pays ni de langue" works to qualify the optimism regarding the transformative force of hybridity, *métissage*, and multiculturalism that the author expresses in "O Brave New World" and elsewhere. Self-reflexive moments such as Boris's, hinting at a change in consciousness or evolution of identity over time, are bound up however with vexed questions regarding the type of alternative interpretive paradigms needed to "read" one's present self and current events with respect to

[50] Hardt and Negri, 138.
[51] Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman, "The Global Coliseum: On *Empire*: An Interview with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri," *Cultural Studies* 16, 2 (2002), 182.

the past. Turning to the novels' use of intertextuality and attention to literary and historical exemplarity may elucidate what is at stake in posing such questions, and how Condé's works answer them with an altered model of prescription.

History as Model, or Remodeling History

Drawing on sparse archival evidence about Tituba's life—her deposition during the Salem witch trials of 1692, and her purchase the following year by an unnamed party[52]—Maryse Condé attempts in *Moi, Tituba sorcière* to offer Tituba "une fin de mon choix" (276). Although she has been lauded for rectifying a wrong and making a place for Tituba in history, Condé, as we have seen, cautions the reader not take Tituba at face value. In fact, if read through the lens of radical feminist thought (which is parodied within the novel by the insertion of an anachronistically feminist Hester Prynne [160]), Tituba is a decidedly unexemplary role model. Driven by sexual desire, at times vindictive, and incapable of deciphering the signs pointing to her unhappy destiny (failing, for example, to heed Man Yaya and Abena's warnings from the spirit world to avoid John Indien, "un nègre creux, plein de vent et d'effronterie" [32]), Tituba falls short of a certain feminist ideal. Her disquieting evocation of *jouissance* while imagining her mother's violent rape, comparing it to her own experience of masturbation and orgasm—"Je m'entendis râler dans la nuit. Était-ce ainsi que malgré elle, ma mère avait râlé quand le marin l'avait violée?" (32)—effectively rules her out as a feminist model.[53] Passages such as this, as well as Tituba's assimilation of Puritan beliefs, complicate her moral exemplarity.

---

[52] No further record exists of the remainder of Tituba's life. On past and present racism in literary and historical accounts of Tituba, see Veta Smith Tucker, "Purloined Identity: The Racial Metamorphosis of Tituba of Salem Village," *Journal of Black Studies* 30, 4 (2000): 624-34.

[53] Angela Davis's recuperative reading of Tituba's sexuality strikes me as one-sided: "Because of her defense of her sexuality, she is reluctant to call herself a feminist. From our contemporary vantage point, feminists of all cultures may find enlightenment in her ambivalence" (xii). While Davis does draw attention to Tituba's ambivalence, it is all but negated through her transmutation of Tituba into an exemplary or illuminating figure.

Further disrupting readers' expectations are the liberties taken with the genre of the historical novel and its paradigmatic representation of time. Tituba's story is not governed by an evolutionary logic; rather, her life unfolds cyclically, as a series of repetitions. The major events of her life reproduce those of her mother's—both are raped, and both are executed by hanging for supposed crimes against whites. The repetitive, episodic nature of her suffering underlines the gratuitousness of the violence done to her, and disrupts Christian hermeneutic models of redemption through pain.[54] More generally, linear representations of time are interrupted throughout the novel. At once highly specific in time and place (seventeenth-century Salem and Barbados), *Moi, Tituba sorcière* collapses centuries together in its rewriting of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester, and confounds Western rationalist views of causal relations between historical events through the important role given to the supernatural in the development of the plot through the constant spirit presence, and prescience, of Man Yaya and Abena. The entire story is related in the first-person by Tituba herself from the afterlife, a realm that, contrary to the undecipherable living world, is characterized by an access to total knowledge and happiness. "Oui, à présent je suis heureuse," Tituba reflects in the epilogue. "Je comprends le passé. Je lis le présent. Je connais l'avenir" (271).

Again, as with the question of hybridity as a model of identity and resistance, Condé's text problematizes the exemplarity of historical narrative. Deploying invention and open-endedness—Tituba asserts that the end of her story is only the beginning (referring to the "chanson de Tituba" that will circulate orally among the living, she states, "Mon histoire véritable commence où celle-là finit et n'aura pas de fin" [267])—enables Condé to "undermin[e] the concept of a settled historical account and a History rooted in Sameness."[55] Literature here seems to serve as a counter to the shame manifested by Tituba through her constantly expressed regrets at being unable to "read" history according to a Western model, that is, to situate the events of her life between two clear points in time and discern the future consequences of her actions—a task only suited, as we have seen, to those who are outside of time. Yet the narrative's ironic

[54] Cf. Françoise Lionnet, "Inscriptions of Exile: The Body's Knowledge and the Myth of Authenticity," *Callaloo* 15, 1 (1992): 30-40.
[55] Becel, "*Moi, Tituba* as Tale of *Petite Marronne*," 611.

overtones, its anachronisms, its parody of the historical novel, and the distance it creates between the reader's knowledge of current events and Tituba's own affirmation that the end of oppression will eventually come ("A présent, je sais pourquoi il y a tant de souffrances, pourquoi les yeux de nos nègres et négresses sont brillants d'eau et de sel. Mais je sais aussi que tout cela aura une fin" [271]), all serve to highlight the limits of such literary rewriting. Moreover, as Michelle Smith puts it, Tituba's insertion in her story of the transcript of her deposition far exceeds "the limits of the reader's suspended disbelief. It is in no way credible that Tituba herself should include the written record of her trial verbatim."[56]

This last aspect of the novel points to one of its central points: Tituba's anxiety regarding written history and her place in (or absence from) it. She remarks more than once on the sense of injustice she feels in realizing that she will be wiped from the historical record, as in the following passage:

> Je sentais que dans ces procès de sorcières de Salem qui feraient couler tant d'encre, qui exciteraient la curiosité et la pitié des générations futures [...], mon nom ne figurerait que comme celui d'une comparse sans intérêt. [...] Aucune, aucune biographie attentionnée et inspirée recréant ma vie et ses tourments! Et cette future injustice me révoltait! Plus cruelle que la mort! (171-72)

After such impassioned declarations, Tituba's assertions in the epilogue that she does not belong to "la civilisation du Livre et de la Haine," and that it is "dans leurs cœurs que les miens garderont mon souvenir, sans nul besoin de graphies" (268), as well as her nonchalant remark, "Qu'est-ce qu'une vie au regard de l'immensité du temps?" (271), appear "absurdly disingenuous."[57] How are we to read this reversal?

Rather than concluding that the past is *passé* (it is, after all, only from a position outside of time that Tituba is able to view it as such, if indeed this is what she really thinks), mere fodder for novelists who can select bits and pieces from various eras to sew together an entertaining story—or, conversely, that knowledge of the world's origins and telos (what Tituba prides herself on finally achieving after

[56] Michelle Smith, "Reading in Circles: Sexuality and/as History in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*," *Callaloo* 18, 3 (1995), 602.
[57] Smith, "Reading in Circles," 605.

death) should indeed be the goal structuring our inquiry into the past—we can draw from Tituba's vacillations a statement about the limitations of both literary and traditionally historiographic narratives. Condé's stylistically jarring introduction of the archive into her narrative disrupts the reading process. "Ironically," as Mara Dukats notes, "this recontextualization of Tituba's interrogation and of the words that she is recorded as having spoken serves to underscore her voicelessness."[58] The title of part II, chapter 3 reads "Interrogatoire de Tituba Indien" and a footnote informs the reader of the location of the trial documents. Tituba's deposition (which is roughly two pages long) says very little about Tituba herself. The reader is made privy only to *what* Tituba has said, not *why* she said these things; indeed, the meaning of Tituba's act (her decision to testify to her collaboration with witches) is by no means self-evident. That is to say, the historical record does not speak for itself: it requires a hermeneutical supplement. And though the novel refuses to present its narrative as an accurate reconstruction of Tituba's life and motivations, it does propose a compelling explanation for Tituba's dubious confessions: that she performed the role expected of her for reasons of self-preservation (according to the Puritan code, confessing saves you from capital punishment). Nevertheless, the insertion of the archive draws attention to the *fictionality* of Condé's Tituba (whose language throughout the rest of the novel contrasts with that of the deposition). The alterity of the archive interrupts the novel's *effet de réel* and undermines historical *vraisemblance*.[59] Its obtrusive presence underscores the novel's transgressive departure from the conventions of classical realism, a transgression that serves to demonstrate that literature's ability to reconstruct an authentic past is an illusion. "Fantasies of depth," as Carrie Tirado Bramen puts it in her analysis of realism in the postcolonial historical novel, "are just as fictitious as

---

[58] Mara L. Dukats, "The Hybrid Terrain of Literary Imagination: Maryse Condé's *Black Witch of Salem*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, and Aimé Césaire's Heroic Poetic Voice." In Kostas Myrsiades and Linda Myrsidades, eds. *Race-ing Representation: Voice, History, and Sexuality* [Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998], 142.

[59] Cf. Larysa Mykyta, "Sexuality and Female Friendship in Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*," *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 5, 2 (2000), 198.

stereotypes."[60] In this light, to claim to recover Tituba's voice fully (through the illusion of realism) would, in effect, erase the historical Tituba by replacing her with an invention. Angela Davis, for her part, tacitly accepts this formulation. She admits that her Tituba, Condé's Tituba, is only "one possible version" (xiii). The example of Tituba does not (and need not) conform to a historically accurate referential reality. It is rather her affective potential that matters most.

This reading admirably resists the interpretive temptation to conflate the historical Tituba with Condé's representation of her, yet, at the same time, the process by which Tituba is transformed into an exemplar of black female subjectivity, or a trope for the subversive other (who speaks for all marginalized others, "remind[ing] us that all the doors to our suppressed cultural histories are still ajar"), precludes a full appreciation of Condé's paradoxical figuration of Tituba. More than simply attesting to the limits of any historical reconstruction of Tituba's real life (which remains irrecoverable as a whole), Condé's text, in a self-reflexive move, points also to the potential violence of literary rewriting (by making visible the assimilative thinking inherent to the logic of exemplarity).

La Belle Créole further purses this reflection on the complex relation between the literary and the real, exploring in particular literature's ability to account for historical discontinuties. Beginning with Dieudonné's release from prison upon his victory in court, the text relates the events of his last night and death. In the vein of classical tragedy, the action of *La Belle Créole* unfolds over the course of only twenty-four hours. The specificity of the present is evoked from the start of the novel: the opening pages describe in detail the exceptionally hard times on which Guadeloupe has fallen as crime rates rise, city services disappear, and an unprecedented heat wave—"pire que celle du carême des vingt dernières années se plaignaient ceux qui avaient la force de garder mémoire" (13)—grips the country. The arrival of a seemingly new and ominous state of affairs is summed up and framed by the book's epigraph as well, "Voici le temps des assassins." Yet this epigraph, a line excerpted from Arthur Rimbaud's "Matinée d'ivresse," not only reflects the attitude of a

---

[60] Carrie Tirado Bramen, "Speaking in Typeface: Characterizing Stereotypes in Gayl Jones's *Mosquito*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 49, 1 (2003), 148. See Bramen for an insightful discussion of the burden of realism and the imperative to exemplify ethnicity in the context of minority writing in the United States.

population fed up with "cette jeunesse qui ne savait que tuer, braquer, violer, incendier, cette jeunesse dont les rêves avaient la démesure des effets spéciaux des films," but also renders such a reading of the present's specificity problematic. Rimbaud's verse, once it is freed of its original interpretive context, identifies "le temps des assassins" as exemplary of "this" era: the time of the assassins is no longer a specific time of day (morning), but "now" more generally, and the current moment is distinct because it belongs to assassins. Yet the invocation of a sentence written over 100 years before, if taken as useful for elucidating the story that follows, also raises doubts about any claim that the present is significantly new or radically other, rather than a perpetuation of the Same.

This temporal ambiguity is doubled by a referential one, further casting doubt on the epigraph's hermeneutical function. Rimbaud's line, we recall, plays on the etymological sense of the word assassin, which in the nineteenth century was thought to have originally meant "hashish-eaters." While Dieudonné will be labeled an "assassin" at one point in the book, and will also internalize this label, his status as a murderer, like the identity of Rimbaud's assassins, remains unclear, and must be continually reassessed and reconfigured as the novel progresses. The ambiguity of the phrase is mirrored not only by the uncertainty of Dieudonné's guilt (we will learn that he killed Loraine accidentally, in self-defense), but also by the uncertain extent to which he exemplifies a plural collective. *Who* the assassins are (Dieudonné and his generation? Loraine and the *béké* class? France? Society? History?) is debatable, especially in light of Dieudonné's death at the end of the book. This referential ambiguity resembles that of the book's title itself: although *La Belle Créole* could be taken to refer to Loraine, or to represent a personified Guadeloupe, it is primarily the exotic name of a boat on which Dieudonné takes refuge, a boat adored by its French owners yet abandoned when they return to Europe, and the boat on which Dieudonné will die.

The question of the past's explanatory value remains central to the novel, as various characters attempt to reconstruct Dieudonné's actions and decipher their meaning. If the defense given by his lawyer during the trial, unproblematically assimilating racial discrimination and class struggle motifs, appears old-fashioned and overly simplistic to many of the characters, most of them are still sympathetic to this portrait. Local artists view Loraine's patronage as a resource to be

exploited and discarded, with the reasoning that she was only paying "une partie de la dette considérable, accumulée vis-à-vis de la Race" (219-20). Others perceive Dieudonné's love for Loraine as either a mark of alienation, or a calculated strategy of social ascension. For his part, Dieudonné refuses to view himself as in any way exemplary of his race and its specific history in Guadeloupe: "Benjy et Boris [leaders of the independence movement] l'ennuyaient avec leurs discours. Toujours à lui seriner qu'il appartenait à la classe des opprimés. Opprimé par qui? Par quoi? Il était né dans un mauvais berceau, manque de chance! La chance, cela ne se discute pas. C'est affaire de hasard" (75). While the past is not completely unknown to Dieudonné, its authoritative status is flatly denied. In his view the past has little bearing on the present:

> Quand il voyait d'autres noirs, africains ou américains, au cinéma, à la télévision, il n'ignorait pas qu'une parenté singulière les unissait. Il n'ignorait pas que dans le temps-longtemps, ils avaient été frères et sœurs, sortis du même ventre avant qu'une force cruelle ne les disperse aux quatre coins du monde. Comment cela s'était-il produit exactement? Il l'ignorait et ne s'en préoccupait guère. Ce passé-là ne valait pas le présent qu'il vivait avec ses affres et ses manques. (220)

Refusing to grant any privileged hermeneutic status to the historic past, Dieudonné suggests that his mode of being is more or less self-explanatory: his miserable condition needs no abstraction or theorization since it is simply lived. The passage of time is itself an oppressive force from which Dieudonné longs to be free. He achieves a semblance of this desired mode of being only once, escaping the here and now in a moment of transcendence that takes place, significantly, on New Year's Eve (at once a temporally uncertain, transitional time between end and beginning, and the most explicit and celebrated marker of time's progression): "[Dieudonné] cessa d'avoir conscience du temps, de l'endroit où il se trouvait. Il ne fut plus qu'un patchwork d'impressions, de sensations. Des éclairs de lumière l'aveuglaient, des sons, des éclats de voix, de rire l'assourdissaient. Ce goût âpre dans la bouche était celui du bonheur" (215).

On one level this passage may be read as a simple cliché, a passing sentiment of blissful atemporality. Yet the dissolution of both temporal boundaries and the contours of fixed, monadic identity that takes place in this moment should not simply be dismissed, but taken

> Il faisait une exception pour deux tableaux. L'un petit, tout dans les tons de brun. Qu'est-ce qu'il représentait? Il croyait reconnaître un poisson d'argent. Ou était-ce un croissant de lune? Le moutonnement de la mer. Ou étaient-ce des nuages? L'autre, plus grand, très grand, représentait une feuille d'arbre. Une feuille de bananier géant. Ou était-ce un visage, ses nervures symbolisant des traits, un nez, une bouche? (58)

Again other characters turn to literary and cinematic models to inform their interpretation of Dieudonné out of dissatisfaction with Serbulon's "équation manichéiste," as they describe the lawyer's reductive and outdated historical narrative (122). "Maîtresse, esclave, c'était du passé," reflects one man. "La société avait changé et, en plein vingtième siècle, personne ne croyait plus à ces bêtises-là" (193). Yet characters' reliance on fictional films, television shows, and even the media—such as the newspapers *France-Caraïbe* and *France-Antilles*, which interpret and sensationalize Dieudonné's story as a "crime passionnel" (202)—also seems to reflect what Arjun Appadurai has described as the "new role for the imagination in social life" today, "something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as social practice* [...] a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility."[63] The new role of the imagination in the global world, Appadurai contends, has significant implications for the way in which the past is experienced:

> The past is now not a land to return to in a simple politics of memory. It has become a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios, a kind of temporal central casting, to which recourse can be taken as appropriate, depending on the movie to be made, the scene to be enacted, the hostages to be rescued.[64]

In the era of globalization, art, as "a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios," seemingly provides the characters of *La Belle Créole* with an almost inexhaustible resource for making sense of Dieudonné's identity. Yet Condé's novel complicates this interpretive process of reading the (fictional) past into the (real) present. Through her use of intertextuality, and the figure of the *mise en abyme*, Condé

---

[63] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 31 (emphasis in the original).
[64] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 30. See Gikandi, "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality," for a sensitive analysis of the valorization of the imaginary in postcolonial discussions of globalization.

draws attention to the problems inherent in reducing two disparate cases—the fictive and the real—to instantiations of the same. Going back to the comparison of Dieudonné's story to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, we can begin to see how this problematic is underlined. While the book jacket picks up on this quote and presents *La Belle Créole* as a loose adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's text, the details of the plot diverge considerably. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* emphasizes love across class divisions, but ends happily, with Connie Chatterley acting on her principles and leaving her husband for the lower-class man she loves. A more appropriate intertext, and one that Condé introduces obliquely, is another English work, Shakespeare's *Othello*. The play, which stresses racial tensions and violence, is mentioned in passing through another of the novel's key characters, Boris, who admires Shakespeare and "affectionnait tout particulièrement *Othello or the Moor of Venice*, la tragédie d'un homme qui avait eu le courage de tuer celle qui le trompait" (35). Moreover, *La Belle Créole*'s island setting recalls *Othello*'s emphasis on Cyprus as a backdrop for the play's action, while its exposition of Guadeloupean consumerism parallels *Othello*'s treatment of Venetian mercantilism and interest in material wealth. The intertextual reference to Shakespeare's work could be seen then as a critique of or supplement to Ana's model, providing the reader with a framework for understanding both Dieudonné's story and that of his society.

Yet what is striking in this reference is Boris's problematic reading, or misreading, of the play, which highlights Othello's courage, but elides his tragic mistake. The reference then takes on a second function, becoming a *mise en garde* against uncritically assimilating Dieudonné to Othello, or Loraine to Desdemona. As the novel advances Condé multiplies and complicates intertextual references, and *Othello* becomes one of a series of disparate examples, whose effectiveness in elucidating Dieudonné's story is repeatedly called into question. In addition to the hermeneutical imperative to multiply one's perspectives on Dieudonné's life, however, Condé's text raises questions regarding the power of literature to transform the widespread and persistent desire to identify others in clearly defined terms, even in a world where identities have allegedly become unmoored. Only the reader—through the fictional device of omniscient narration—is privy to the ambiguity and multiplicity of Dieudonné's story; Dieudonné's dependence on others' visions of him

creates a feeling of emptiness (of being nothing but a "bwa-bwa de carnaval") and an inability to project himself into a meaningful future that eventually leads to suicide.

While describing Dieudonné's experience of the flattening of time, of a present cut off from a historic past or a future that can lend the present meaning, Condé's text also compels her readers to address the lingering presence of history. Indeed, regardless of the characters' conscious sentiments regarding history, all are haunted by the past. The excruciatingly hot weather and sandstorms which defy memory, as the narrator relates in the opening paragraph, retrace the route of the Middle Passage as they blow in from the coast of Western Africa (13), while the past symbolically resurges in the form of packs of stray dogs that begin to roam the streets and threaten the inhabitants of Port-Mahault once city services cease operations. Dogs, according to the narrator, are heavily charged with negative symbolism in Antillean society:[65]

> C'est une vieille affaire. Au temps de la plantation, les chiens ont poursuivi le nègre en fuite, traqué, fait saigner le marron pour le compte du Maître. En outre, chacun sait que les Esprits adorent se tourner en chiens, prenant, pour jouer leurs mauvais tours, la forme de l'ennemi séculaire. Pis encore, il s'agissait d'un animal tout juste bon à exciter l'hilarité ou la pitié. (68)

Dogs intervene in Dieudonné's personal relationship with Loraine as a source of tension and anguish that Dieudonné attempts to erase. When Loraine's excessive affection for her puppy Lili comes between the two lovers, Dieudonné secretly poisons and disposes of the dog, unknowingly reenacting an earlier event, the death of Loraine's childhood pet (also named Lili), who was run over (ostensibly accidentally) by a friend's unapologetic chauffeur. Dieudonné's refusal to relate what actually happened the night Loraine was killed, his mute acceptance of guilt and insistent denial of what ballistic evidence showed (that there had been a struggle [44]), stems from a similar desire to keep his relationship with Loraine pure, to keep her (mis)treatment of him within his own interpretive control, away from

---

[65] Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau similarly refers to this "haine ancestrale" for dogs in *Chronique des sept misères* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 39. An aversion to dogs is not, of course, a purely Caribbean phenomenon. J.M. Coetzee also makes creative use of the figure of the dog in the South African context in his novel *Disgrace* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

the public eye. To confess that Loraine, drunk and angry, "l'aurait abattu comme un chien" in the course of a dispute, would constitute, to Dieudonné's mind, "l'ultime trahison" (227). Keeping silent preserves Loraine's last words to him ("Tu es un vulgaire rien du tout. Tu n'es qu'un petit nègre rempli d'aigreur et de malice comme tous tes pareils. Il te manque la trique dont tu garderas éternellement le souvenir" [224]) from scrutiny. He is well aware of the historical paradigm into which these words fit (and which his lawyer and the jury have placed him and Loraine); keeping them to himself allows him to maintain his own interpretation of their relationship as one unaffected by this past history of racial relations, as one whose tensions can be better explained through psychological or personal reasons. "Est-ce qu'il n'aurait pas dû comprendre qu'elle déparlait?" reflects the narrator in free indirect style,

> Parce qu'elle avait trop bu. La bouteille de Glenfiddich à moitié vidée en témoignait. Parce qu'elle était trop seule en cette saison des fêtes. Parce qu'elle éprouvait trop de chagrin du départ de Luc. Peut-être qu'elle ne pensait pas un mot des paroles que sa bouche prononçait et le piquait-elle pour qu'il oublie sa constante réserve.
>
> —Tu es comme un bougot, se moquait-elle souvent. Toujours au fond de ta coquille. Je vais t'en faire sortir, moi! (224)[66]

Despite his attempt to efface or reinterpret his own dehumanized or marginalized status as a "dog," dogs continue to haunt Dieudonné throughout his last night, concretely as they follow him through the streets of Port-Mahault, and symbolically, as he is turned away, "comme un chien," by friends and family (78, 109, 112, 213). For the residents of Port-Mahault more generally, dogs, reminiscent of past oppression, reinforce the French administrative hold over the Antilles both on a practical and a psychological level. Representing a threat to life ("une fois même, ils avaient dévoré un bébé endormi dans son berceau" [173]), and to sanitation ("Évidemment, cela n'allait pas sans déjections puantes" [18]), the overpopulation of dogs is the most intolerable consequence of the civil service strikes, seemingly pointing to the breakdown of civil society and the state of chaos that would ensue should the islands be cut off from metropolitan France. Yet their spectacular slaughter at the end of the novel provokes a

---

[66] The *bougot* or *bougo*, as it is often spelled (in French, *burgau* or *burgot*), is a large edible sea snail.

change of heart (at the conclusion of the strikes, Animal Control traps the dogs with lassos and bags of chloroform, then incinerates the bodies, whose ashes and stench rain down on the city): "Du coup," the narrator relates, "les esprits les plus endurcis se mirent à regretter la cavalcade de ces bêtes qui leur avaient causé pourtant tellement de répulsion" (248).

Either reading the dogs purely as a warning of the potential return of the past, or attempting to efface their memory completely is an unsatisfactory solution for elucidating Guadeloupe's and Dieudonné's present. What *La Belle Créole* calls for is arguably something in between: not just a recognition of the limitations of relying too heavily on the past as a tool for constructing the present and future, but a literary and critical practice that attempts to reconcile historicization with an attention to the often divergent experience of history, to read literature for its ability to elaborate the ambiguous presence of the past in the present, but to read it with its explanatory limits in mind.

A humorous reminder against simply conflating the past and the present through the symbol of the dog in *La Belle Créole* comes when the reader learns that among the artists demanding their due from their white oppressor, Loraine, is the actor Élias Reclus, famed for his performance in Bernard Koltès's *Combat de nègre et de chien* (219).[67] In its staging of this racial "combat," however, *La Belle Créole* also takes up a question—the role of death and heroism in this combat—elaborated in another text, Aimé Césaire's 1956 play, *Et les chiens se taisaient*.[68] Treating the question of resistance, *Et les chiens se*

---

[67] Conversely, however, Loraine's inability to recognize or comprehend the historical reasons for her current relative privilege and the attendant resentment against her is equally problematic. Subscribing to the myth of the "good master," Loraine underestimates the past wrongs of her class, and is only able to describe that class, and her own position in the world, in tragic, metaphysical terms. "[P]our mon malheur, je suis une békée. Les békés sont une race maudite," she complains to Dieudonné. "Nous avons fait le sale travail pour les blancs-France: mettre les nègres d'Afrique au travail, cultiver la canne, essayer de sauver les plantations après l'abolition. Quand même, ceux-ci n'ont jamais éprouvé de reconnaissance. Jamais un mot de merci! [...] Quant aux nègres, ils nous détestent. Jusqu'au jour d'aujourd'hui, ils nous accusent de tous les péchés d'Israël. Ils ne veulent se souvenir que des coups et des humiliations des mauvais maîtres. En même temps d'après eux, les bons maîtres, c'était pis encore que les autres, des hypocrites, des paternalistes. En somme, nous perdons sur tous les tableaux" (138). For a discussion of the notion of the "bon maître," see Caroline Bastide, "Pour en finir avec le bon maître," *Dérades* 5 (2000): 41-58.

[68] Aimé Césaire, *Et les chiens se taisaient* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956).

Que de mon sang oui, que de mon sang / je fonde ce peuple"),[76] but rather in a "capitulation to a logic of sacrifice and death."[77]

Dieudonné's death near the end of *La Belle Créole* provokes a challenge to interpretation, both for the other characters, and for the reader. Having resolved to sail off into the ocean rather than continue a life of odd jobs without close family, friends, or Loraine, Dieudonné disappears on *La Belle Créole*, the sailboat once owned by a metropolitan French family that Dieudonné had loved as a child. The boat is discovered wrecked on a rock by a ferry from Martinique. Upon catching sight of the wreck, the passengers enter into an animated debate over how the boat could have run into a well-known, well-marked reef. The question of suicide and heroism soon arises as a contested topic:

> Une seule question courait sur toutes les lèvres. Comment pouvait-on s'échouer sur ce rocher? [...T]ous ceux qui avaient navigué dans la région connaissaient cette mauvaise dent fichée dans la gencive de la mer [...]. Un esprit chagrin osa: ne s'agirait-il pas plutôt d'un naufrage volontaire? De l'acte de quelque désespéré? Impensable, lui répondit-on avec ensemble. Qui serait assez fou pour cela? L'autre insista: pas un natif-natal, ce n'est pas dans nos mœurs, on le sait. Un Européen, un étranger! Ces gens-là ne sont pas comme nous, ils se suicident pour un oui pour un non! Un chagrin d'amour, un échec à l'examen, une querelle de ménage. Il paraît même que la France détient le triste record des suicides d'adolescents. Mais ce peuple est querelleur. Aussitôt quelqu'un contredit celui qui venait de parler et rappela, outré, que le suicide n'était pas l'apanage des blancs. Au temps de leur servitude, les nègres se suicidaient en masse pour échapper à l'esclavage. On continua la route dans ces débats et ces discussions semi-historiques. Quand même, *Fleur des Tropiques* termina sa course sans encombre, rentra à quai, et là, le capitaine alerta la brigade nautique. (251)

Dieudonné's body is never found, and the ultimate cause behind his last act—free will, or deep alienation—remains uncertain. Yet, the text does not merely create a relativistic play of meaning. If Dieudonné's absent body perhaps reflects the inaccessibility of pure causes and origins underscored by the ambiguities of the narrative, the text makes difficult any romantic reading of suicide as heroic or exemplary, in part through the way the reading process is modeled

---

[76] Césaire, *Et les chiens*, 61-62.

[77] Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory*, 73. Nesbitt's argument draws on Walter Benjamin's conception of *Erlebnis* to highlight how the commodification of Delgrès's memory is tied to the general death of communal memory and dialectical experience.

within the text. Dieudonné's act first appears to have a profound impact on the passengers of the *Fleur des Tropiques*. The discovery of the wreck immediately transforms the atmosphere (of "profonde torpeur") on board the ferry: "En un clin d'œil tout changea. Ceux qui somnolaient se réveillèrent et ce fut une cohue en direction du pont supérieur; les affaiblis, les malades retrouvant leurs jambes; les plus chanceux s'armant de jumelles; les plus courts de taille maudissant les plus hauts qui leur barraient la vue" (250). Moreover, the wreck provokes an animated discussion of Antillean identity, resistance, and suicide. Yet the narrative portrays the desire to romanticize suicide as comic and absurd in one passenger's exaggerated description of this ultimate recourse as an "apanage" or "privilege." Additionally, the passengers' hyperbolic—or even miraculous—reaction upon spotting the wreck points not to any lasting transformation, but rather to an avid morbidity akin to that which Glissant identifies as symptomatic of the Antillean's mental enslavement.[78] The passengers' concern for the reasons behind the wreck certainly seems to have no immediate transformative effects on social reality. Despite the profusion of "débats" and "discussions semi-historiques" among the passengers, the course of the voyage, like that of history itself, remains unaltered: "Quand même, *Fleur des Tropiques* termina sa course sans encombre." The questions the passengers raise presumably remain "semi-historiques," and ultimately ineffective, because of their abstraction and failure to interrogate the relations between past models of resistance and current socio-political conditions. They evoke only the continuities between past and present "mœurs" while ignoring the historical discontinuities that also shape Antillean culture.

The effectiveness of the text's own critique—its ability to disrupt its readers' similarly morbid interests—is raised as a question as well in the pages following Dieudonné's departure on *La Belle Créole*. The story appears to approach its climax as Boris, racked with guilt for having turned his one-time friend away from his home, becomes more and more anxious about Dieudonné's unknown whereabouts and wonders how to alert the authorities to Dieudonné's disappearance on the boat. The text then begins a new chapter with the words, "Les faits

---

[78] Glissant, "Le vécu antillais," in *Le discours antillais*, 141-218. The narrator evokes this morbidity earlier in *La Belle Créole* as well in describing Boris's passionate interest in the "avis d'obsèques que des speakers lisaient matin, midi et soir sur toutes les chaînes de radio et qu'il suivait religieusement comme chacun dans le pays" (169).

qui suivent appartiennent à l'histoire" (236). Rather than moving as expected to the last scenes of Dieudonné's life, however, the text shifts abruptly to a discussion of written history ("car il y a belle lurette que notre histoire n'est plus orale," the narrator specifies) and revolution ("Arrêtons-nous un instant sur ce mot: révolution! Il est beau. Il est redoutable. Il inspire la terreur"). Before returning to Dieudonné, the novel details Boris and Benjy's fall from union leadership and the subsequent end of the strikes. This shift creates ironic distance between the reader and Dieudonné's story, perhaps critically pointing out that the reader's interest lies not so much in revolution, but in the other, personal drama unfolding at the same moment. Yet this shift also draws attention to the fact that Dieudonné's particular life has no place in a general history such as *Mars 99*, the work in which, we learn here, "deux historiens, deux universitaires de grand talent" later relate the story of the strikes, or "'révolution' avortée," that has been paralleling Dieudonné's tale throughout the novel (236). Dieudonné's death, like his absent body, leaves no historical trace. This passage develops, then, a multifaceted message, highlighting the reader's collusion in a type of semi-historical debate without immediate social effects, while also highlighting the need for an inquiry into the personal, into that which History omits or obscures.

Condé ties historical marginalization to death in *Moi, Tituba sorcière* as well, rather than romanticizing heroic death as a motor of history. In sharp contrast to Le Rebelle's heroism, Tituba's death in the cause of freedom is recounted in somber, rather than glorifying, terms.[79] Tituba herself is so pained by it, despite the pleasures of the afterlife, that she resists narrating it. "Est-il nécessaire que je termine mon histoire?" she asks.

> Ceux qui l'ont suivie jusqu'ici n'en auront-ils pas deviné la fin?
> Prévisible, si aisément prévisible?
> Et puis à la raconter, est-ce que je n'en revis pas, une à une, les souffrances? Et dois-je souffrir deux fois? (255)

[79] Cf. Daniel Maximin's critique of heroic death in *L'Isolé Soleil* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981). On this novel, see also Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole*, 51-60, and Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory*, chap. 5.

Once she decides to proceed, she relates the painful details of her denunciation, the "traitement spécial" to which she is subjected on the day of her execution, including the recitation of what her accusers believe to be her crimes, "tous mes crimes, passés et présents," and the punishment of being the last of the dozens of captives to be killed (263). Despite the presence of her invisible spirits, waiting to guide her passage to the world beyond, the chapter ends on a grave note, recalling, through an allusion to the somber Billie Holliday/Abel Meeropol song "Strange Fruit," the unnatural character of Tituba's death: "Je fus la dernière à être conduite à la potence. Autour de moi, d'étranges arbres se hérissaient d'étranges fruits" (263).

In problematizing heroic death, Condé rejects the identification of heroism with annihilation marking previous conceptions of literary commitment, revealing once more the extent to which her examples exceed pre-existing interpretive models. As we have seen, these recalcitrant examples point to the limitations of settled historical accounts and literary writings as explanatory or emancipative tools, while suggesting that literature's flexibility and ambiguity still make it a vital means for elucidating the present. While warning against the unproblematic application of previously valorized historic models to current social relations, Condé's examples repeatedly call attention to the ways the past continues to shape the present, even in an era of Empire—an era of mutable identities, fading borders, and accelerated or disappearing time. Condé's literary practice does not jettison, then, postcolonial theory's noted attention to specificity of the past, but attempts to engage methods of historicization precisely in order to better analyze the experience of globalization important to any apprehension of the present.

CHAPTER 2

RUSING WITH THE CANON: INSOLENT IMITATION, PARODIC INTERTEXTUALITY

How does newness come into the world? How is it born?
Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?

—Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

Je crois en effet qu'on peut changer en échangeant avec l'autre, sans se perdre soi-même.

—Glissant, "Métissage et créolisation"

Examining Maryse Condé's engagement with globalization theory allowed us in chapter one to better situate her work within the field of postcolonial literature, highlighting both her continued commitment to "postcolonial" questions as well as her resistance to its regressive and totalizing tendencies. Continuing our study of Condé's critical dialogue with postcolonial discourse, the following chapter considers one of the novelist's preferred modes of critique: the ironic ruse. As we have seen, Condé's uneasiness with postcolonialism's norms does not take the form of a straightforward rejection. Rather than voicing her reservations by positing a new set of political and aesthetic models, the author opts for a more *oblique* poetics, one that seeks to alter prior examples without reproducing the authoritative gestures of her predecessors. In Michel de Certeau's terms, Condé's approach is more tactical than strategic. A "tactic," as opposed to a "strategy," according to de Certeau, does not emanate from a Cartesian subjectivity, a "sujet de vouloir et de pouvoir,"[1] who can be clearly and distinctly isolated from its environment. Lacking an "espace

[1] Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 59.

bound up with the definition of its audience. As Condé recalls in the opening paragraph of "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," Edouard Glissant and the Creolists Raphaël Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Jean Bernabé all assert that Antillean literature, because of its lack of audience, has not yet come into being: "I don't believe that West Indian literature exists yet since literature supposes an action and a reaction between a public and an audience," says Glissant, while the authors of *Éloge de la Créolité* note, "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."[13] "Nobody reads in Guadeloupe," Condé similarly states in a 1995 interview. "It is very frustrating to be a West Indian writer. When you go abroad, people know you and pay more attention to you. But at the same time, they are foreigners, and they don't completely understand what you wanted to put in your book, what matters for you."[14] Dedicated to a non-reader, *Célanire cou-coupé* ruefully laments this lack.

As Mireille Rosello has shown, however, a statement such as "la littérature antillaise n'existe pas" cannot be taken at face value. First, the very performance of the statement paradoxically negates what it apparently intends to say, "car pour le dire efficacement, il aurait précisément fallu ne pas le dire, ne rien dire du tout."[15] Claiming that Antillean literature does not exist breaks a negating silence, a void of inexistence surrounding such a literature; it presupposes a consensus about what Caribbean aesthetics "is," thus affirming its existence as a concept—as well as inciting readers alert to processes of canonization and marginalization to resoundingly refute the contention that the works of Césaire, Schwarz-Bart, Glissant, Condé, and the Creolists themselves fail to merit inclusion in this category.[16] At the same time, such a statement, when penned by some of these same authors, does cast doubts on the way "Antillean literature" has been conceived,

---

[13] Quoted in Condé, "Order, Disorder, Freedom," 12. In *Le discours antillais*, Glissant describes Antillean literature as a "poétique forcée" (versus a "poétique naturelle"), a poetics brought into existence as a result of an absence or failure to attain full self-expression: "Il y a poétique forcée là où une nécessité d'expression confronte un impossible à s'exprimer" (402).

[14] Barbara Lewis, "No Silence," 546-47.

[15] Mireille Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole aux Antilles* (Paris: Karthala, 1992), 19.

[16] Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole*, 19-21.

suggesting that the criteria used to define this literature somehow fail to describe it.[17] Lacking a space and criteria of its own, Antillean literature finds itself at an impasse. To affirm that "Antillean literature exists" is to falsify its character by forcing it into accepted but inadequate categories ("Antillean" and "literature"); yet working with the terms of the dominant discourse is this writing's only means of gaining recognition.[18] Rusing is a response to this aporia. "En face à ce refus de se voir approprié par le discours dominant, il ne reste souvent que le recours à une autodescription négative et réactive," a tactical re-appropriation and subversion of the discursive terms in question.[19]

Like the negative assertion "la littérature antillaise n'existe pas," Condé's "Pour Racky, qui ne me lira pas" performs a kind of ruse in that it too does something more than it says. The dedication draws attention to an impasse, an unbreachable distance between the text and its intended reader, between the text's desired effect and its real impact. Rather than shedding light on the work to come, this dedication on the contrary obscures the novel's purpose, suggesting that it is not meant for, and perhaps cannot be understood by, those who (unlike Racky) are about to lay eyes on the text. Read as a humorous challenge to these "uninvited" readers, the dedication piques curiosity, daring the reader to seek out Condé's "hidden" intentions.

In addition to this furtive dedication, the author includes a more straightforward note recounting the book's origins that seems to clarify these intentions: "Cette histoire est inspirée d'un fait divers. À la Guadeloupe, en 1995, un bébé fut trouvé, la gorge tranchée, sur un tas d'ordures. Les imaginations allèrent bon train, à travers le pays. La mienne, comme les autres." Like the novel's subtitle, "roman fantastique," this note situates *Célanire cou-coupé* in the realm of fantasy, a genre—like the "fait divers" with which it associates itself—often deemed "popular" and lacking in the literary qualities of

---

[17] Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole*, 23.

[18] "Dans un système qui fait du canon le filtre par lequel passe la circulation des œuvres littéraires, la 'littérature antillaise,' pour exister, a évidemment besoin de se faire reconnaître. Or [...] de l'intérieur du canon, la littérature antillaise n'a pas de voix, mais de l'extérieur du canon, si elle a une voix, le canon ne l'entend pas" (Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole*, 27).

[19] Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole*, 24.

canonized works. Like the "fait divers" that inspired it, *Célanire coupé* seeks to appeal to a wide audience and to set imaginations working. In light of this statement, Condé's dedication to Racky takes on a different signification, signaling this particular work's desire to be different from what a young generation suspects a novel to be: an antiquated and elitist artistic form that pales in comparison to the type of topical films and television shows that interest most of the characters of *La Belle Créole*, for example. Condé has spoken of the need to broaden Antillean literature's range of concerns on several occasions, linking this need to the inclusion of a younger readership:

> One day, an Antillean colleague and I were speaking about our books, and a student said, "All your stories are boring because they have nothing to do with the issues that concern me." By now, we should already have been writing about the present. That is, getting rid of old myths, or else creating a new mythology based essentially on the lived reality of today.[20]

Célanire seems to respond to this critique by turning to a more popular, less "boring" form, making her literature, as a result, more accessible to a new generation of readers. Condé confirms this intent in a 1998 interview:

> Currently, I am working on a novel for my granddaughter. She is seventeen and she doesn't read. I am writing something that will be attractive to her and motivate her into thinking of race and origin. I want something where *la forme* will attract her. Her generation isn't interested in books. So I'm hoping to find something that will bring her to the story, a story of someone like her.[21]

Condé's adoption of the fantastic can be read, then, as an attempt to infuse the literary with mass appeal. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 1, Condé's stated intentions about her works, while provocative and often enlightening, do not exhaust the force of her literary creations. Similarly, a desire to be more "popular" through the fantastic does not play out textually in any straightforward way, in part because of the

---

[20] Vera Broichhagen, Kathryn Lachman, and Nicole Simek, "A Conversation at Princeton with Maryse Condé," in *Feasting on Words: Maryse Condé, Cannibalism and the Caribbean Text* (PLAS Cuadernos, 2006), 24-25.

[21] Keidra T. Morris and Sydney Reece, "Interview with Maryse Condé," Cultural Studies in the African Diaspora Project, 1998-2001, http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/caas/diaspora/research_topics/caribbean_literature.htm.

nebulous character of the fantastic itself. What constitutes the fantastic, how it should be understood in relation to other genres such as the Gothic, science fiction, fantasy, and magic realism, and whether it is indeed a genre at all, has long generated great interest and debate among literary critics. Like the term "monstrous," the fantastic is linked etymologically to the act of showing or making visible (*phainein*); more specifically, the fantastic refers to the manifestation of ideas in the mind or the imagination, the realm of the unreal. By extension, the fantastic comes to signify that which exists outside the natural order of things. In Western literary tradition, studies of the fantastic have tended to focus on the nineteenth century, a post-Enlightenment period in which the rational is taken to be the norm and the irrational or supernatural as a deviation from, or subversion of, that norm. From this perspective, the fantastic is a symptom of lingering superstitions or abnormal states of mind: "Le fantastique se caractérise par une intrusion brutale du mystère dans le cadre de la vie réelle; il est généralement lié aux états morbides de la conscience qui, dans les phénomènes de cauchemar ou de délire, projette devant elle des images de ses angoisses ou de ses terreurs," writes Pierre-Georges Castex.[22] Associated with the thrills of horror and suspense, or simply with escapism, the fantastic has often been dismissed as a formulaic genre with wide appeal but little merit. Brian Attebery sums up the prevalent rudimentary definition of fantasy thus:

> Fantasy is a form of popular escapist literature that combines stock characters and devices—wizards, dragons, magic swords, and the like—into a predictable plot in which the perennially understaffed forces of good triumph over a monolithic evil.[23]

Due to its radical departure from history and reality, the popular fantastic has come under scrutiny from Marxist critics and others who object to its nostalgic, humanist, and reactionary tendencies.[24]

Conversely, numerous prominent critics have hailed certain forms of the fantastic for their hermeneutical complexity and experimental

---

[22] Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: José Corti, 1951), 455.

[23] Brian Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," in David Sandner, *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 293.

[24] See China Miéville, "Marxism and Fantasy: An Introduction," in David Sandner, *Fantastic Literature*, 334-43.

quality. In his highly influential *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Tzvetan Todorov lends support to this position in discriminating between three types of literature commonly subsumed under the genre of the fantastic: the marvelous, a literature in which supernatural events are clearly attributed to supernatural causes; the uncanny, a contrary move in which seemingly supernatural events are eventually explained through rational causes; and the fantastic proper, which is characterized by a sustained *hesitation* between these two poles.

> Le fantastique occupe le temps de cette incertitude; dès qu'on choisit l'une ou l'autre réponse, on quitte le fantastique pour entrer dans un genre voisin, l'étrange ou le merveilleux. Le fantastique, c'est l'hésitation éprouvée par un être qui ne connaît que les lois naturelles, face à un événement en apparence surnaturel.
>
> 'J'en vis presque à croire': voilà la formule qui résume l'esprit du fantastique. La foi absolue comme l'incrédulité totale nous mèneraient hors du fantastique; c'est l'hésitation qui lui donne vie.[25]

Reiterating and expanding upon Todorov's definition of the fantastic as a genre marked by hermeneutical ambiguity or indecision between two competing modes of rational and supernatural explanation, critics have highlighted the fantastic's self-reflexivity, its anti-mimetic "vitality and freedom," and its affinity with "contemporary ideas about sign systems and the indeterminacy of meaning."[26] In this view, literary fantasies are profoundly unruly texts, bewildering and unsettling their readers in their interpretive challenges; they elicit praise for their subversion of bourgeois aesthetics (based on an epistemological preference for mimetic realism dating back to Aristotle) and Western rationality (the legacy of

---

[25] Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970), 29, 35.

[26] Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, quoted in David Sandner, *Fantastic Literature*, 293-94. Christine Brooke-Rose argues that much of postmodern literature—with its emphasis on undecidabiltiy and metafiction—is best understood as "a displaced form of the fantastic" (*A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 65). For Brooke-Rose, in other words, the supernatural is no longer a precondition for thinking about the fantastic: what defines it is the *irrresolvable hesitation* that it provokes in its readers.

based on the search for rational causes, and characterized by an assimilative, linear and totalizing logic. The now well-known novel relates the death of Solibo, a storyteller who chokes on his own words, and the misguided police investigation into what they mistake to be his murder. The witnesses' inability to respond to the police's questions in combination with the introduction of marvelous or supernatural events all serve to undermine the conventions and normal progression of the detective narrative, which carefully puts together the puzzle pieces of the given crime until its "true" cause is revealed, thus ending the story. Chamoiseau's text frustrates the Western reader's penchant for closure, giving no other explanation of Solibo's demise than the enigmatic "égorgette de la parole" evoked at the novel's very start.[35] Chamoiseau's use of magic realism ultimately serves to turn the reader away from a cause-oriented line of inquiry toward more pressing questions, questions that have no definitive answers, as the chief of police comes to realize: "Après s'être demandé avec peu d'éléments: qui a tué Solibo?... il se retrouvait disponible devant l'autre question: Qui, mais qui était ce Solibo, et pourquoi 'Magnifique'?"[36] Staging the encounter between two worldviews and two interpretive frameworks, *Solibo Magnifique* creates hesitation in focusing the reader's attention on problems of identity and remembrance that neither can categorically resolve.

Rusing with the Postcolonial Rewrite

Condé clearly shares Chamoiseau's concern for cultural specificity, and his critique of the universalist and transcultural assumptions that inform Western conceptions of the real and the supernatural. Her own turn to the fantastic—a turn that *Célanire cou-coupé* makes explicitly in its subtitle, and that *La migration des cœurs* makes more implicitly in its content—arguably gestures toward a reconfiguration of this European genre for an Antillean audience. Both *Célanire* and *La migration* participate in the postcolonial revisionist rewrite of canonical European works. Similarly, both take as their point of departure nineteenth-century British novels (Brontë's

[35] Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnifique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 25.
[36] Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnifique*, 219.

Wuthering Heights and Shelley's *Frankenstein*, respectively) that incorporate elements of the fantastic in their narratives and raise the question of audience in their ambiguous navigation between high and low genres. Yet, like Condé's earlier *Moi, Tituba, sorcière...*, a "popular" but "serious" text that foregrounds the problem of speaking *for* the marginalized other, neither *La migration des cœurs* nor *Célanire cou-coupé* conforms unproblematically to the norms of the postcolonial rewrite. Indeed, *La migration*'s dedication, "À Emily Brontë qui, je l'espère, agréera cette lecture de son chef-d'œuvre. Honneur et respect!" reverses the agonistic stance of the traditional revision, while its plot drifts away from that of its intertext, "wandering into 'new' territory that seems of little or no relevance to (a rewriting of) *Wuthering Heights*."[37] Part detective novel, adventure tale, science fiction, and historical fiction, bursting with intertextual references, *Célanire* similarly cannot be considered a sustained rewrite of any one text or genre. Thus these works at once advertise their status as rewrites, announcing both their dependence on and difference from the novels that inspired them, while refusing to carry out the expected tasks of the rewrite.

How should this stance be read? From Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Caribbean authors have privileged rewriting as a technique for troubling the discursive or semantic field of the original; the postcolonial rewrite "supplements" (in its Derridean sense) the "master('s) discourse,"[38] challenges established "patterns of reading alterity"[39] and attempts to brings into being new, self-fashioned identities. Rewriting classic European works is typically understood as a ruse or a tactic deployed by the "weak," the marginalized and colonized, in order to trouble the hegemony of the West; in the words of Salman Rushdie, this technique allows the Empire to write back to the imperial Center, breaking an imposed silence. By writing back, postcolonial authors

---

[37] Chris Bongie, "Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature," *Postmodern Culture* 14, 1 (2003), §49.

[38] Theo D'haen, "Caribbean Migrations. Maryse Condé on the Track of Emily Brontë," in *Histoire, jeu, science dans l'aire de la littérature. Mélanges offerts à Evert van der Starre*, eds. Sjef Houppermans, Paul J. Smith, and Madeleine van Strien-Chardonneau (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 204.

[39] Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," *Kunapipi* 9, 3 (1987), 23.

aim to dispute Europe's "civilizing mission," to unearth the forgotten voices of history (like Tituba's), or, more generally, to affirm a sense of literary and cultural autonomy. Given this tradition, Condé's failure to fully "subvert the [colonial] text for post-colonial purposes"[40] might appear to be a deferential, conservative move, one that faithfully upholds the literary value of her canonical predecessors.

Yet her playful imitation of and deviance from the politics of rewriting—including her move away from "high" literary devices toward "popular" or broadly appealing themes and narrative strategies—can also, and more productively, be conceived as a ruse, an attempt to gain distance from contemporary postcolonial attempts to theorize, break away from, and revise overdetermining literary and cultural paradigms. While Helen Tiffin is certainly correct to assert that postcolonial rewrites "do not overturn or invert the dominant in order to become dominant in their turn, but to question the foundations of the ontologies and epistemological systems which would see such binary structures as inescapable,"[41] by the 1990's this technique had become a consecrated literary maneuver. In de Certeau's terms, this tactical move had by this point developed into a systematic strategy associated with a set of political and cultural alternatives to the old Western order (such as those promoted by the *Négritude* movement). The "success" of the postcolonial paradoxically endangers its ability to unveil insidious power structures and constraining modes of thought. In ironically participating in this tradition, Condé reclaims the tactical quality of the rewrite, turning its techniques against itself. "The blatant unoriginality of Condé's move," as Chris Bongie writes,

> puts into question, without simply doing away with, the resistant and counterdiscursive energies conventionally associated with the revisionist subgenre of postcolonial literature. [...] We might well read *Migration* as a pastiche of the postcolonial revisionist novel: a work that, by self-consciously exiling postcolonial revisionism to the mainstream, refuses to play along with the evaluative distinctions that undergird the postcolonial ideology, forcing us to confront the modernist limits of that ideology,

---

[40] Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," 22.

[41] Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," 32. See also John Thieme's *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (New York: Continuum, 2001) for an analysis of the rewrite that reevaluates its reputation as adversarial.

> while continuing to inscribe, weakly, the memories of resistance that it assumes.[42]

Condé's banality or "unoriginality" becomes, then, a tactical move, an interruption from within the discursive field not of the colonial text, but of the postcolonial rewrite itself. To ruse with the European canon here is as much to ruse with postcolonialism's "*canonical counter-discourse*,"[43] a discourse that, as it becomes increasingly normative, risks limiting the writer's imagination or ability to "raconter différemment les choses."[44]

But what is Condé (re)writing differently in *La migration*? While the question of revisionism in *La migration* usually focuses on the issue of race (on Condé's substitution of the béké-noir-mulâtre triangle for Brontë's Linton-Heathcliff-Earnshaw struggle for dominance), Condé's *transformation* of the fantastic—a transformation based not on an ideological negation of her predecessor but on a creative translation and ironic recontextualization of the original model—lends to an understanding of the author's general poetics of altered exemplarity, and more specifically to her ethics of interpretation, an ethics profoundly marked by hermeneutical hesitation.

Condé's dedication "À Emily Brontë qui, je l'espère, agréera cette lecture de son chef-d'œuvre. Honneur et respect!" is preceded on the same page by a citation to another canonical female author:

> Sa mort nous sépare.
> Ma mort ne nous réunira pas.
>
> Simone de Beauvoir
> *La Cérémonie des adieux*

This epigraph, referring to Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir's longtime companion, introduces the theme of love, death and separation that obsesses both Heathcliff and his Condean counterpart, Razyé, who spends his life in a desperate quest for the secrets of communication with the dead. Beauvoir's words presage those of Condé's Cathy, who affirms that death is a "migration sans

---

[42] Bongie, "Exiles," § 42-43.
[43] Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," 22.
[44] Lyotard, *Au juste,* 82.