

Representations of Zombis in Emile Ollivier's *La Discorde aux cent voix* and Dany
Laferrière's *Pays sans chapeau*

Helen Camp Matthews

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Approved by:

Dr. Dominique Fisher

Dr. Hassan Melehy

Dr. Ellen Welch

ABSTRACT

HELEN CAMP MATTHEWS: Representations of Zombis in Emile Ollivier's *La Discorde aux cent voix* and Dany Laferrière's *Pays sans chapeau*
(Under the direction of Dr. Dominique Fisher)

Two Haitian authors living and writing in Montréal, Emile Ollivier and Dany Laferrière, use the figure of the *zombi* to represent a long-standing dialogue of interiority and exteriority between the United States and Haiti. Ollivier's 1986 novel, *La discorde aux cent voix*, and Laferrière's 1997 novel, *Pays sans chapeau*, are both narratives that reflect the penetration of exteriority into Haitian identity, employing the *zombi* as an integral part of this reflection. References to the *zombi*, a definably Haitian entity that has captured the fascination of American popular culture, serve as expressions of the voices of exteriority that pervade Haitian literary expression. In this thesis, I propose an analysis of the ways in which intertextual and transtextual readings of these references deepen an understanding of the multifaceted perceptions of an internationally reflected self that permeates Haitian literature.

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Zombis, Cultural and Literary Practices in Haiti

Outside perception of Haitian identity is an amalgamation of several distinct external forces. Though it is not entirely African, French, or American, Haitian culture is often defined in relation to the three, with varying aspects attributed to African roots, French influence, or American geography. Furthermore, its unique national history sets it apart from the rest of the francophone Caribbean. The idea that Haiti, because of its identity as the first successful slave revolt, exists as a unique entity at which the outsider should marvel, is at the crux of a discourse of exoticism surrounding the nation. The fact that Haiti's history has been particularly marred by violence and revolution has served to fuel such a discourse of what was described by J. Michael Dash as "Haitian exceptionalism"¹, which is born of Haiti's identity as the first nation run by freed slaves. Faced with such a disquieting presence, the outsider must affirm Haiti's status as unique. Haitians are thus placed in a permanent position of *otherness*, one that reflects a fundamental exteriority, as established by Bernabé, Confiant, and Chamoiseau in the Caribbean identity manifesto, *Éloge de la Créolité*. As they write,

Nous sommes fondamentalement frappés d'extériorité. Cela depuis les temps de l'antan jusqu'au jour d'aujourd'hui. Nous avons vu le monde à travers le filtre des valeurs occidentales, et notre fondement s'est trouvé 'exotisé' par la vision française que nous avons dû adopter. Condition terrible que celle de percevoir son architecture intérieure, son monde, les instants de ses jours, ses valeurs propres, avec le regard de l'Autre (14).

¹ Dash, Michael J. *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Macmillan, 1997. 27.

Maximilien Laroche takes the idea of a Haitian self-definition plagued by exterior definitions as an act of “se concevoir autre qu’elle n’est”, calling such an experience “bovarysme haitien”². He describes an imagined state of Haitianity, writing that in this vision:

L’Amérique n’était ni plus un désert ni une île mais un grand meeting, grouillant d’une foule que je soupçonnais fort d’être des ‘Carnavaleux’ résolus, même sans avoir ouï parler de Bakhtine ou de Rabelais (Laroche 8).

In order for *créolité* to establish any sort of self-definition that is not strictly determined by exterior elements, it must allow itself to exist as it is without being plagued by comparison. The shift that must be made, and that which is suggested by *Éloge de la Créolité* and Maximilien Laroche, is a shift away from a perspective dominated by, “I am like or unlike the Other” to a perspective that simply states, “I am”. A Creole movement in response to exteriority can be noted as one that interiorizes its own exterior, taking the lens and reins from the Other in its own self-definition. In order to reject the intrusion of the Outsider, his presence must be confronted. The traces of such exterior voices remain ever-present in Caribbean literary expression. The external elements of self-definition have paved the way for the pervasive gaze of the Other that is a constant presence in Caribbean literature. In the case of Haiti, no gaze seems more pertinent, or present, than that of colonial France, the Duvalier regime, and the United States³.

² Laroche, Maximilien, and GRELCA. La Découverte De l’Amérique Par Les Américains : Essais De Littérature Comparée. Sainte-Foy, Québec: GRELCA, 1989. 36.

³ See Lucas, Rafael . “The Aesthetics of Degradation in Haitian Literature”. *Research in African Literatures*, Summer 2004, Vol. 35 Issue 2, 54-74.

Although France and Africa lay strong claim to the traditional conception of the roots of Haitian identity, the United States has gained a powerful presence geographically, politically, and socially in the Haitian imaginary. The United States has kept a watchful eye on Haiti since its declaration of independence in 1804, often in its own pre-abolition days referring to the Haitian revolution as a cautionary tale, warning that an equally powerful slave revolt was imminent⁴. Conversely, as J. Michael Dash explains in *Haiti and the United States*, Haitian literature seemed virtually unaware of the country that existed directly to its north until the American occupation that began in 1918. During and after the American occupation, Haitians grew increasingly conscious of an American presence. Haiti was faced once again with the need to identify and represent itself to the Occidental outside world, a world that was eager to apply its own value system regarding “civilized” and “uncivilized” societies. Haitians became aware of their own status of exotic Otherness, a self-conscious discovery that entered into its literary expression. As Laennec Hurbon writes, Haiti was made to answer the questions set forth by the Other:

‘Avez-vous une loi, une religion, une organisation familiale, un système politique moderne, une langue développée ?’ ... ‘Etes-vous des êtres humains, comme nous les Occidentaux ?’ ... ‘Etes-vous des cannibales ?’ (Hurbon 53).

The questioning voice of the outside world is readily visible in the heap of literature that has been written by the outsider about Haiti since its independence. Numerous accounts such as Sir Spencer St. John’s *Hayti; or the Black Republic (1884)*, W.B. Seabrook’s *The Magic Island (1929)*, and more recently, Wade Davis’ *The Serpent and the Rainbow*

⁴ Brown, William Wells. Saint Domingo, its Revolutions, its Patriots. Boston: Bela Marsh, 1855. 47.

(1985) echo the idea that Haiti is the incomprehensible land of *otherness* that exists as a mystery to be unraveled and interpreted by its white neighbors.

From the 19th century what beckons or revolts Americans is Haiti's impenetrable mystery, its irredeemable strangeness, its unpredictable 'Otherness'. Haitians are meant to be marveled at, studied, converted, rehabilitated, and ultimately controlled (Dash 3).

In these accounts, the outsider is particularly interested in Haitian religious practices, with reports of voodooist cannibals exciting a national and global curiosity surrounding the Black Republic⁵. Though cannibalism, being the ultimate mark of any uncivilized community, seems sufficiently horrifying to satisfy the morbid curiosity of the outsider, it takes place in many cultures considered barbaric, and thus does not serve the purpose of Haitian exceptionalism.

The focus, then, turns to the *zombi*, the salacious indication that Haiti is a mysterious land beyond the grip of human reason. As W.B. Seabrook describes Haitian mythology in his 1929 *Magic Island*, an account of his adventures in Haiti:

I reflected that these tales ran closely parallel not only with those of the negroes in Georgia and the Carolinas, but with the mediaeval folklore of white Europe. Werewolves, vampires, and demons were certainly no novelty. But I recalled one creature I had been hearing about in Haiti, which sounded exclusively local—the *zombie* (Seabrook 57).

The fascination surrounding the *zombi* only grew over time, with various voyagers to Haiti attempting explanations of the *zombi* phenomenon with varying degrees of anthropological and cultural courtesy. As Laennec Hurbon describes the American fascination with the *zombi* in *Le Barbare Imaginaire*:

⁵ The pervasive Caribbean cannibal myth, purportedly rooted in Christopher Columbus' misappellation of "caraib" meateaters as "canibales", is deconstructed by Maryse Condé in her 2003 novel, *Histoire de la femme cannibale*.

Hàiti, ancien ile d'esclaves, devient la république des zombis, et plus exactement le pays où les anciens esclaves ont l'étrange pouvoir de se reproduire en morts-vivants (284).

In Haiti, the land of freed slaves, even the dead would not submit. The writers, outsiders, approach the Haitian zombi through various means: science, witchcraft, metaphor; but all with similar messages. Whether the language attempts to be sympathetic or explicitly sensational, the subtext is the same: something is not right in Haiti. Typically, in American accounts, the Haitian's belief in the existence of the zombi is attributed to Haiti's African roots, right down to the etymology of the word *zombi*, often said to be rooted in the Kongo *nzambi*, loosely defined as "spirit of a dead person"⁶; removing accountability for such a bizarre phenomenon from the hands of the plantation masters.

Through such scientific and cultural exploration, the myth of the Haitian zombi has long been consumed by the outsider, solidifying Haiti's global status as the mysterious other. The American Outsider has thus devoured the Haitian zombi, first borrowing it in early 20th century travel literature as a tool in the establishment of Haitian otherness, then claiming it as its own through the *Hollywoodification* of the zombie. Early Hollywood films such as *White Zombie* (1932) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) place the zombi in a Caribbean context, using the Haitian myth of a body without will to play with the idea of a white woman controlled by a man who cannot possess her in life. Of course, the Hollywood zombie film did not remain in its original mythological context for long, quickly developing into the flesh-eating monster that plagues the screen today. About the relationship between the zombi of Haitian mythology and the zombie of American cinema, Laroche writes,

⁶ This is argued by Wyatt MacGaffey in *Religion and Society in Central Africa* and Wade Davis in *Passage of Darkness*.

L'appropriation du mythe de zombi par le cinéma d'Hollywood relève de ce que l'on dénomme globalisation, laquelle, dans ce cas précis, révèle bien sa nature de nouvelle forme d'exploitation (*Mythologie Haitienne*, 20).

If America's cinematic removal of the zombi from Haiti was exploitative of Haitian mythology, the zombi's return to Haiti in popular American science was even more so. Wade Davis' *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985) and *Passage of Darkness* (1988) brought the zombi back to Haiti in a "scientific" quest for the truth behind the zombi phenomenon. His narrative returns to the proposition that a mysterious potion may actually be at the root of the Haitian myth, a proposition most famously set forth by Zora Neale Hurston in her anthropological look at religion in Haiti, *Tell My Horse* (1936). J. Michael Dash, who writes against the necessity of an external force entering Haiti to "confirm or deny" its mythology, is particularly unforgiving of Davis' look at the Haitian zombi, writing:

Davis' reductionist picture does nothing to transform Haiti as an object, or rather curiosity, in the Western imagination, mastered and controlled by anyone who discovered the secret mastercode that controls social and political reality. Haiti for Davis will always be irretrievably primeval (Dash 144).

Dash links America's obsession with the Haitian zombi to a desire to characterize Haiti as a land of "bodily malfunction" (Dash 141), positing that the return of this obsession in the late 20th century was a response to a movement blaming the island nation for the spread of AIDS in the United States.

America has thus been profiting, socially and financially, from an exploitation of Haitian mythology, and Haiti has long been unable to respond on an international level.

As Maximilien Laroche writes,

En effet on connaît en Haïti le zombi soumis. C'est le plus commun. On l'appelle zombi doux, en haïtien. Il fait ce qu'on attend de lui : il se

laisse exploiter sans mot dire. C'est le grand nombre (Laroche, *La Découverte* 42).

He later concludes that "il vaut mieux être le manufacturier premier-mondiste d'un produit fini que le producteur tiers-mondiste d'un produit brut" (Laroche, *Mythologie Haïtienne* 19).

Through literature, Haiti re-appropriates its zombi as a tool for self-expression, and interjects its own voice into the dialogue that has been taking place for years. Such self-consciousness surrounding American perceptions of Haiti is, as could be expected, especially pervasive in the literature of Haitians living in America, who are surrounded daily by the outsider perception of their own otherness. Endlessly reminded that the world expects their expression to reflect a "mariage heureux de traditions françaises et africaines sous un ciel antillais" (Wingfield 15), the Haitian author must, as Maximilien Laroche writes, "courir vers une autre destination" (*Mythologie Haïtienne* 16).

Two Haitian authors living and writing in Montréal, Emile Ollivier and Dany Laferrière, use the theme of the zombi to represent a long-standing dialogue of interiority and exteriority between the United States and Haiti. Ollivier's *La discorde aux cent voix* (1986) and Laferrière's *Pays sans chapeau* (1997) are both narratives that use transtext⁷ to reflect the penetration of exteriority into Haitian identity, and both employ the figure of the zombi as an integral part of this reflection. Through Gérard Genette's theory of transtextuality as all that sets the text in relationship with other texts, and a consideration of the representations of the *zombi* in Haitian literature, the understanding of literature in the postcolonial context calls for a conception of transtextuality that is exclusive to the

⁷ I use this term as defined by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes*, as the textual transcendence of the text, or all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts: "tout ce qui met [le texte] en relation manifeste ou secrète avec d'autres textes" (7).

body of postcolonial literature, a conception that includes specific cultural referents, representing the pervasive exteriority of postcolonial identities and practices. References to a definably Haitian entity that has been exoticized by the American Other, an exoticization that has subsequently been internalized by the Haitian, serve not only as metaphors for Haitian identity, but also as glimpses into the voices of exteriority that invade Haitian identity. These instances of transtext are fascinating glimpses into the multifaceted perceptions of self that permeate Haitian literature.

Gerard Genette uses the term *transtextualité* in the introduction to his 1982 opus, *Palimpsestes*, primarily as a way to expand the idea of *architexte* set forth by Louis Marin's 1974 *Le Récit évangélique*. Transtextuality, Genette writes, surpasses and includes *architext*,

...l'ensemble des catégories générales, ou transcendantes—types de discours, modes d'énonciation, genres littéraires, etc. —dont relève chaque texte singulier (7).

He proceeds to map out five broad, mutable categories of transtextuality : (1) *intertextuality*, a relationship of copresence between several texts; (2) *paratextuality*, marking a more distant relationship between the related text through the use of a title, footnotes, preface, etc.;(3) *metatextuality*, a relationship that is strictly one of commentary; (4) *architextuality*, a relationship that plays to the reader's perception of genre; and (5) *hypertextuality*, a manner in which text B (the *hypertext*) is grafted upon text A (the *hypotext*) through transformation or imitation, which can be either complex or indirect. In the postcolonial context, transtext does not necessarily establish a relationship strictly between the text in question and another specific text, but the relationship between the text and the multiple voices of exteriority that influence its narrative. This transtextuality can manifest itself through any of the five categories delineated by

Genette, with each element of exteriority being represented by an explicit or implicit hypotext. An examination of this fluid textual relationship between interior (text B) and exterior (text A) is particularly relevant regarding the expression of identity in a postcolonial context. As André Lamontagne argues in *Les voix sous les mots*, intertextuality is at the very crux of postcolonial literary expression, wherein the lines between self and other are eternally imprecise. In this context, what is missing in Genette's delineation of transtextuality is the cultural dimension of the hypotext, both as cultural referent and as genre.

The Haitian, as perpetual Other, is considered barbaric and incapable of governing his own affairs. He is an emblem of violence, black magic, corruption, and hysteria. From the outside, the ultimate symbol of "Otherness" in defining Haiti is the assumption of a universal Haitian belief in the existence of the zombi. This belief represents the stubborn refusal of the primitive society to accept the clean lines between reason and madness, real and imaginary, life and death. It is such a refusal that both justifies the necessity of total cultural domination and prevents the possibility of total domination. Such an unreasonable belief as zombification must be controlled, but remains utterly uncontrollable.

Zombification in traditional Haitian mythology is best contextualized through the vodoun conception of human existence, in which a human being is comprised of three parts: the *ti bon ange*, which directs intellectual and emotional life; the *gros bon ange*, which represents the human's mental understanding of his/her own body; and the *corps*

cadavre, the human's physical body⁸. In Haitian mythology, a person, typically one who has wronged the community, can be disinterred post-mortem by a *bokor*, or *bizango*⁹ priest, and robbed of his *ti bon ange*. These individuals, lacking will, are forced by their masters to work, usually on plantations, and remain in a state between life and death until their masters' demise. After the death of the zombi master, the individuals usually return to their villages and families, often with nearly complete recollections of their experiences as zombies. The Haitian zombi represents a disjunction between life and death, creating an entirely new category of being.

The zombi as a being trapped in a body without will, neither living nor dead, neither person nor non-person, can clearly serve as a convenient mythological metaphor for a body possessed by slavery. Traditionally used solely as a tool of labor, the zombi is entirely controlled by its master. The zombi-slave works long hours on a plantation for its master without any rest and little sustenance. Furthermore, in Haitian mythology, the *bokor* who robs the corpse of its *ti bon ange* does so by repeatedly striking it with a whip. Though many scholars adamantly date the relationship between the whip and the walking dead to pre-slavery African animistic religions, it is unsurprising that this element of animistic mythos would hold strongly in a postcolonial context. Understandably, the fear surrounding the zombi in traditional Haitian mythology is not that of being harmed by a zombi, but rather the fear of becoming one¹⁰.

⁸ Métraux, Alfred. Le Vaudou Haïtien. 114-126

⁹ The *bizango* is often considered the "evil" counterpart of the *houngan*, or voodoo priest.

¹⁰ This fear was often used for political and social exploitation, most famously by Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier during his 1957 to 1971 dictatorship.

An American examination of zombification, starting in the early 20th century and carrying on through present day, generally seeks a scientific explanation for such a mysterious phenomenon. These inquiries center around the existence of a mysterious zombie powder that is capable of inducing a state of false-death, and an antidote that creates a delirium, allowing the victim to be easily manipulated. Most of these accounts were riddled with tones of skepticism, like that of Samuel Williams in his 1949 *Voodoo Roads*:

There is some indication that the natives use a secret drug that induces a trance in which the victims are able to walk, but they are insensate to external influences...I was unable to verify the use of the mysterious drug, but I can testify to the effects of the concoctions which they administered to me, and which created in me considerable doubt of my ability to comprehend happenings of the moment...It may be that the disappearance of corpses from their graves has given rise to the superstition, if that is what it is, and I am strongly inclined to believe that this *is* all that it is (Williams 91-2).

Wade Davis' 1985 look into Haitian zombification, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, although presented as being more scientifically and anthropologically sound than its predecessors, takes part in the same dialogue. This is a dialogue that classifies the zombie phenomenon as mysterious, takes a position as to its existence, and indicates that science is the key to finding the answer. This discourse thus establishes the Haitian imaginary as exceptional, often hysterical, and naïve; needing validation, scientific or anthropological, from an outside source.

The metamorphosis of the Haitian zombi myth from an aspect of voodoo belief to the object of scientific inquiries represents a shift in the collective reality surrounding the myth:

Si l'on considère le discours populaire comme la représentation imagée de la réalité collective, on s'aperçoit que pour être mythique ce

discours ne demeure pas moins conscient de la complexité et même des contradictions de cette réalité (Laroche, *Mythologie* 14).

The American zombie myth has accordingly been interiorized by a modernized version of the Haitian myth, creating an expression that reflects a powerful voice of exteriority.

Both *La discorde aux cent voix* and *Pays sans chapeau* use the theme of zombification as a metaphor for colonial and social oppression, including scientific inquiries into the existence of the zombi that make reference to the exploitative American discourse surrounding the phenomenon.

Zombis and Transtext in Two Haitian Novels

Emile Ollivier's 1986 novel, *La discorde aux cent voix*, centers on the fictional village of Cailles, the name itself being a phonetic transformation of the real Haitian city of Les Cayes, which serves as a microcosmic Haiti. Ollivier's text relies on transtextuality to carry the perspective of exteriority, establishing itself as a dialogue between worlds. Before the text even begins, Ollivier has included a contract of fiction, which first declares the proceeding tale to have been inspired by the recounted story of "Madame veuve A. Augustin" and her daughter, "Lina, veuve Gustave Galand":

La coïncidence entre certains faits qu'elles ont vécus et une nouvelle du Péruvien Roman Ribeyro, *Tristes querelles dans la vieille résidence*...Cependant, cette ville de Cailles, telle que décrite, n'existe nulle part ; elle est le fruit de mon imagination (Ollivier i).

Thus, the reader is informed from the very beginning that, not only is the author relying upon his own imagination to tell the story, it is born of a mélange of oral testimony and written literature. In situating himself in the midst of all three, not entirely connected to one, Ollivier establishes the elements of exteriority that surround his narrative. For example, the text itself opens with, "On vous connaît, spectateurs!" (Ollivier 13), a transformed reference to Baudelaire's call to his readers at the beginning of *Les Fleurs du Mal*: "Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat, Hypocrite lecteur, - mon semblable, - mon frère!". Such a classical literary reference, combined with a divergent tone of theatricality, mixes canonical French literature with the distinct orality of a postcolonial narrative pushed to the limit between theater and novel. Having transformed Baudelaire's words, Ollivier sets himself in relation to his themes and tone.

Furthermore, the fluid narrative of *La discorde aux cent voix*, often shifting narrational perspectives and relying upon a collective *nous*, highlights the idea of identity as an amalgamation. The *nous* implies a collective identity at the same time that it indicates the presence of an *autre*. Through this first-person plural collectivity, the presence of exteriority thus finds its way into the novel. Diogène Artheau, the novel's cranky protagonist, stands at the center of an existence defined by exteriority, peppering his writing with invented Latin phrases and wanting to be compared to Louis Pasteur. Artheau, in his insistence upon defining himself as distinct from the people who surround him, exists in a position of exteriority to his own community.

The text's multiple narrative voices reflect a shifting of identities much like that seen in many postcolonial novels, with identity lying in between varying elements of influence. However, in *La discorde aux cent voix*, the story is not led by a singular narrator who has returned from the outside world with a changed perspective. In this case, it is the microcosmic community that exists in a sea of the exterior. Outside influences come and go, tugging the narrative in one way or another. Although an exterior American presence is not physically imposing, as we will later see in *Pays sans chapeau*, the conflict between the United States and Haiti is often called into play. For example, Diogène Artheau's play, *L'Adieu supreme*, one of *La Discorde*'s many meta-texts,

rappelait les émeutes sanglantes dont la ville de Cailles avait été la scène, sous l'occupation américaine. Des paysans armés de machettes, de pics, de coutelas, de serpettes, s'étaient installés aux portes de la ville et, pendant trois jours et trois nuits, harcelèrent l'occupant (Ollivier 23-4).

Ollivier's Haiti counts the dead as ever-present participants among the living, but with an ominous undertone:

On cohabite avec ses morts: leur place est réservée à la table familiale; on leur verse, même à la plancher, les trios gouttes rituelles destinées à éteindre leur soif. Malheur à celui qui ne s’y conforme pas ; la vengeance des morts prendra des formes inattendues... (Ollivier 59).

The practice of “sciences de la nuit” is also pervasive, described by Ollivier as a “source de revenus” (Ollivier 59) to make ends meet. In Cailles, even the mayor is caught up in the corrupt world of black magic:

On accède ou on se maintient au pouvoir grâce à des pratiques occultes. Une fois, au cimetière de Quatre-Chemins, on surprit le maire lui-même en train de violer le sépulcre d’un ancien président de la République, fils de la ville. Les gardiens du cimetière racontent que ce maire, au demeurant personnage fort énigmatique, excentrique souvent, cette nuit-là, une bouteille de sirop d’orgeat à la main, évoquait l’esprit de la mort près de sa tombe béante (Ollivier 60).

The mayor, leaning over the gaping tomb with a mysterious potion in his hand, calling the spirit of the dead out of its rightful place, is implicated in the practice of creating a zombi, echoing the political implications of zombification pervasive in Laferrière’s text.

References to zombis and zombification are found at several points throughout *La discorde aux cent voix*, serving similar social or political purposes. The most pertinent passage, however, is that which places the zombi in the very middle of an exchange between Diogène Artheau and the American presence in Haiti. In midst of the inquiry into the crying statue of the Virgin Mary, a break in the narrative recounts Diogène Artheau’s involvement with American researchers who are trying to analyze “une potion qui avait le pouvoir de transformer les vivants en morts-vivants” (Ollivier 73). Artheau sends the potion to two “célèbres chercheurs” who have told him that they plan to use the powder for the benefit of modern medicine. As Artheau explains,

Ce n’est plus un secret que certaines cellules cancéreuses cessent leur prolifération à des températures particulièrement basses de l’organisme humain, il ne fait plus aucun doute qu’une application immédiate de cette substance sera faite dans le traitement du cancer. Elle pourra aussi être

employée au cours d'opérations à cœur ouvert et même remplacer d'autres produits pour contrôler les problèmes de rejet dans les greffes d'organes (Ollivier 74).

This entire scenario plays upon the train of American writers and researchers who entered Haiti to “figure out the zombi phenomenon”, and most specifically with Wade Davis’ recent inquiry into the potential scientific benefits of a “zombi powder”, the fruits of which had been a best-seller¹¹ the year before Ollivier’s novel was published. Ollivier could thus rely upon his readers’ recognition of the scenario. Those familiar with Davis’ books and articles might even recognize the figure of the *houngan*¹² who sells the secret formula, depicted as greedy and corrupt.

Artheau, swept up in the promises of the American researchers, imagines his own greatness. He is primarily concerned with the financial gains of his “discovery”, and being eternally remembered for his contributions to mankind. He even goes so far as to imagine that in his great magnanimity, “il accepterait de partager avec les deux chercheurs américains le prix Nobel de chimie qu’on ne manquerait pas, cette année, de lui attribuer” (Ollivier 75). However, the text implies that the potion was not a discovery that Diogène Artheau himself made, but something “qu’il aurait recueillie grâce à la complicité d’un houngan de Tourbeck, bourgade perdue au fond de la presqu’île du Sud” (Ollivier 73). Artheau, in his position of exteriority to his community, has thus served as the liaison between the inquiring American researcher and the Haitian houngan, assisting in the exploitation of his own people.

¹¹ Wade Davis. *The Serpent and the Rainbow*.

¹² Voodoo priest

Interestingly, the word *zombi* is not used anywhere in this chain of events, which favors the use of indicators such as “vie après la mort” and “morts vivants” (Ollivier 73).

The brief description that is provided here as background:

Un phénomène inexplicable datant de l'époque des plantations bouleverse encore aujourd'hui la science médicale. Le décès subit ou survenu après une brève maladie d'un être humain est cliniquement et légalement attesté. Peu de temps après les funérailles, le mort, privé de certaines de ses facultés mentales, réapparaît dans son village ou ailleurs dans le pays. Le mystère le plus complet enveloppe ce phénomène (Ollivier 74).

This brief passage summarizes the zombi of traditional Haitian mythology while contrasting its existence with the laws of science and society. It is described here much as it in the context of the outside inquiries into the phenomenon made by Wade Davis, among others, with a sensationalized reinforcement of the “mystère le plus complet”. There has been, however, no break in the narrative to indicate a complete change of perspectives. This position is related to Artheau, who, in his complicity with the American researchers, occupies a place outside the “illogical” beliefs of Haitian mythology.

The zombi phenomenon is thus described as standing outside the bounds of scientific reason or explanation, defying the logic of clinical and legal death. However, the passage that immediately follows the glance at Haitian mythology begins to imagine the possibilities of such a “trouvaille pour l'avenir de l'humanité” (Ollivier 74). In setting up this contrast, Ollivier allows the significance of the zombi of Haitian mythology to stand in pale comparison to the scientific potential of the phenomenon when put into the hands of the American researchers. As the narrative voice proclaims, “A croire que dans le cul de l'île on venait de découvrir une nappe de pétrole !” (Ollivier 75).

The implications of this scenario thus include surprise at the fact that there was any sort of common value to an irrational Haitian myth. Of course, it takes American researchers to valorize such a phenomenon and bring glory to “le cul de l’île”. It is later revealed that, once the researchers remove the “phénomènes étranges de la Caraïbe” (Ollivier 81), they cease to function as such. To explain this malfunction, the people of Cailles explain that:

d’une part les loas n’ont pas la faculté d’enjamber les océans, que d’autre part les ouangas, les maléfices, les fétiches nègres, perdent leur pouvoir dans le pays de Blancs ... la transformation en mort vivant repose sur l’interception de l’âme de l’individu, âme que les houngans gardaient précieusement enfermée dans des bocaux déposés sur les autels de leurs dieux (Ollivier 82).

In this way, the zombi has been returned to the Haitian people. The potion with such enormous potential is not merely a fruitful element of a frivolous myth, it belongs to Haiti alone. The figure that belongs strictly to Haitian mythology disappears from its original definition when removed from its milieu.

Maximilien Laroche purports that “on ne peut pas parler du zombi hors son contexte haïtien” (*Mythologie Haïtienne* 7). He traces the increasingly secular progression of the zombi as such:

Hier, figures religieuses ou sociales des communautés africaines, aujourd’hui, personnifications des réalités historiques du peuple haïtien, ces figures évoluent, changent, se métamorphosent tout en traduisant les rêves des hommes d’hier et d’aujourd’hui, d’ici comme de là-bas (*Mythologie* 17).

Although Laroche is dealing here with the *ici* and *là-bàs* of Haiti and Africa, the same statement could be made concerning the *ici* and *là-bàs* of Haiti and the United States. Haitian identity has long been lived under the regime of the “other”, and literature

provides an opportunity to better understand the relationship between the interior and the exterior elements that define such an identity.

Dany Laferrière's 1997 novel, *Pays sans chapeau*, explores the complexities of cultural identity through the lens of Haiti's inconsistent past and present identities. The novel's narrator, Vieux Os, returns to his native Haiti, having left his country for Montreal twenty years before. Upon his return, he exists in and out of many worlds: Haiti of the past and Haiti of the present, Haiti and America, life and death. In an expression of an identity marked by the exterior, *Pays sans chapeau* seamlessly weaves back and forth between these worlds. The action of the novel is divided into sections entitled *Pays réel* and *Pays rêvé*, a division that begins more clearly than it ends. As the novel progresses and as the narrator re-submerges himself into his Haitian homeland, the line between *pays réel* and *pays rêvé* becomes increasingly indistinct. This blurring of perspectives is indicative of the acceptance of the multiple identities that establish Haitian identity, as well as a self-appropriation of a singular identity that is multiple in its nature.

Understandably, a sense of intermediacy pervades Laferrière's novel. In Haiti, Vieux Os reflects the external perspective of 20 years in America. He is neither entirely Haitian nor entirely American. His new perspective, the adoption of a stronger voice of exteriority, has changed the ways in which he interacts with Haiti as well as the ways in which Haiti interacts with him. Writing is the implement that allows the narrator, Vieux Os, to traverse and combine the many worlds that surround and define him, thus allowing a voice of exteriority to speak simultaneously with the voice of interiority. The seam between interior and exterior is stitched with a transtextuality that plays upon the reader's expectations and knowledge of the worlds that define him. The transtextuality in *Pays*

sans chapeau thus establishes it as a narrative between many voices, many of which are exterior to the narrative voice, rooting itself in the very structure of the novel. The chapters entitled *Pays réel* and *Pays revé* reference Edouard Glissant's 1985 poem entitled *Pays revé, pays réel*, a long eight-sectioned piece often narrated by a *nous* that contrasts itself sharply with a *vous*, exploring the metaphorical relationship between self and other through space and history.

The interweaving of Catholicism and voodoo in Haitian religious identity is widely apparent in *Pays sans chapeau*, in which characters call upon voodoo *loas* and Catholic saints with equal fervor. As Laferrière's representation of J-B Roumain expresses the phenomenon,

On a fait des églises chrétiennes des temples de vaudou... On a fait des saints chrétiens des dieux du vaudou... C'est ainsi que saint Jacques est devenu Ogou Feraille. Les prêtres catholiques nous voyant dans leurs églises croyaient que nous avions abdiqué notre foi, alors que nous étions justement en train de rendre gloire, à notre façon, à Erzulie Dantor, à Erzulie Fréda Dahomey, à Papa Zaka, à Papa Legba, à Damballah Ouèdo... Tous ces dieux avaient insidieusement pris la forme et le visage des saints catholiques. Nous étions chez nous chez eux (268).

According to Roumain, the Haitians have taken the input of the outside colonizer and made it their own. The contamination of "chez eux" into "chez nous" indicates that there was a line to be crossed between the two, and that modern Haitian identity is a result of this crossing.

Laferrière uses the zombi as a metaphor for this bi-dimensional Haitian identity, as well as a representation of the narrator's struggle to redefine himself in terms of his sojourn in Montreal and subsequent return to his native land. A zombi is described as "pas un fantôme ni un revenant" (Laferrière 66), exemplifying the identity struggle experienced

by the Vieux Os upon his return to Haiti. The use of the term “revenant” indicates a departure and a return while signaling the theme of zombification.

Laferrière repeatedly uses the theme of the zombi to play with the implications surrounding such a dialogue, touching on the disorder of Haitian identity. Laferrière’s zombis are *mélanges* of the folkloric, will-less, pitiable creatures of traditional Haitian mythology and the flesh-hungry, violent, sensationalized beasts of American Hollywood. Through the course of *Pays sans chapeau*, the reader is not once faced with the presence of an affirmed zombi. In this novel, the zombi exists only as a dweller of the periphery, an ever-present being that serves as a reminder of instability. The zombis are the ancestors, the restless peasants, the former slaves, the American occupants, and the Tonton Macoute that haunt the lives of the living. Through these spectral entities, Laferrière highlights the sensation of unprotected centrality that his narrative creates: nothing is stable or definable, and a wavering narrative voice serves as the sole guide. Through this voice, perspective leaps across all possible boundaries. The zombi, defined by its voided identity, hovers at the heart of this expedition.

The implications surrounding the zombi in *Pays sans chapeau* are often directly political. As the mother of Vieux Os declares:

On a l’impression d’être déjà mort, ici. Tout le monde, je veux dire les justes et les méchants. Tu vois, on trouve des charniers un peu partout. Les tueurs ne sont pas plus vivants que les tués. Nous sommes tous déjà morts. (Laferrière 102).

The proposition in such a statement is that there is barely any difference between life and death in the unstable environment of Haiti; Haitians themselves are the walking dead, controlled by whatever dictator is serving as the *bokor*¹³ to a national zombified body.

¹³ Bizango who controls the zombified corpse.

Thus, Haiti is a nation controlled entirely by external forces, zombified, perpetually serving the needs of other nations, under explicit or couched occupation. The global implication of such a proclamation is that Haiti as a country, and a people, has been left for dead.

When not supported, or forced, by an external *bokor*-ist presence, Haiti's own dictators drive the nation's actions. Along these lines, Laferrière uses the theme of zombification to describe the Duvalierist regime that presumably sent Vieux Os into exile. In his descriptions, this regime combines the steady, daytime presence of the American occupants with the horrifying nighttime presence of the *bizango*.

Ils circulent le jour comme la nuit ...La nuit, ce sont des bizangos. Et le jour, des zenglendos. Des fois, on ne sait plus si on est le jour ou la nuit... ils sont tellement malins qu'ils seront capable de te faire croire qu'ils sont des êtres vivants (Laferrière 48).

In making such a reference, Laferrière is launching a critique of the Duvalier regime's attempt to use vodoun as a manipulative tool to win over and control the people through fear, plastering his face alongside representations of Baron Samedi, the loa of the cemetery who is often linked to *zombis*.

Pays sans chapeau is a transcultural myth, neither entirely American, African, French, nor Haitian. Its narrative takes a deteriorative path, through the voice of an *écrivain primitif*, from the *pays réel* to the *pays revé*. Having left his native country, Vieux Os loses the part of his Haitian identity that allowed him not to question his own mythology. In hunting for his answers, he takes a path similar to that of most of the outsiders who have entered Haiti to explain and exploit its cultural identity. In the end, the *pays sans chapeau* is a muddled blend of real and imaginary, human and spiritual, American and Haitian. Vieux Os has let the external perspective enter his consciousness

to the point at which he himself needs to question his Haitian identity. He, like the American outsiders, must question its reality.

Vieux Os, as narrator and writer, guides the reader through the many worlds in which he exists: *pays réel* and *pays rêvé*, life and death. Through themes of voodoo conceptions of life and death, as well as the space in between the two, he expresses his experience of the struggle to determine his Haitian identity. From the beginning of *Pays sans chapeau*, our narrator introduces the themes of conflict and harmony within Haitian identity that are integral to the novel that follows. Our narrator states his intention directly: “Il y a longtemps que j’attends ce moment...pour parler d’Haïti tranquillement, longuement. Et ce qui est encore mieux : parler d’Haïti en Haïti” (Laferrière 11). His position as a migrant author lends him further perspective on the role of transculturality as it pertains to the Haitian experience:

L’écrivain est un renifleur d’existence. Plus que tout autre, il a pour vocation d’identifier ce qui, dans notre quotidien, détermine les comportements et structure imaginaire. Voir notre existence c’est nous voir en situation dans notre histoire, dans notre quotidien, dans notre réel. C’est aussi voir nos virtualités. En nous éjectant du confortable regard de l’Autre, la vision intérieure nous renvoie à la sollicitation de notre originel chaos (Bernabé 39).

The mythology surrounding the Haitian *zombi*, carried by oral tradition and mythology, has long been consumed and exploited by the American Other. Transtextual references to the mythology surrounding the *zombi*, who often serves as a political and identity metaphor, are a common theme throughout Dany Laferrière’s *Pays sans chapeau* and Emile Ollivier’s *La discorde aux cent voix*. These references to both Haitian and American mythologies about the *zombi* are ways in which the Haitian author can reclaim an exploited identity, as well as take control of his own exoticization. Through references to this definably Haitian entity that has been exoticized by the American

Other, an exoticization that has subsequently been internalized by the Haitian, these transtextualites are fascinating glimpses into the multifaceted perception of self that defines Haitian literature.

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