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WORKS OF MARYSE CONDÉ AND ZADIE SMITH**

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ENGAGED, MULTICULTURAL INDIVIDUALISM IN THE MILLENNIAL WORKS
OF MARYSE CONDÉ AND ZADIE SMITH

A Dissertation Presented

by

NICOLE M. CALANDRA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2019

Comparative Literature

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DEDICATION

For Stella

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Throughout my doctoral studies, I have had the extreme good fortune to receive support and guidance from some truly wonderful people.

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ABSTRACT

ENGAGED, MULTICULTURAL INDIVIDUALISM IN THE MILLENNIAL WORKS
OF MARYSE CONDÉ AND ZADIE SMITH

FEBRUARY 2019

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In “Engaged, Multicultural Individualism in the Millennial Works of Maryse Condé and Zadie Smith,” I explore the way these authors of the Caribbean diaspora represent the particular challenges characters face when they try to construct individual identities while also managing past traumas and future anxieties in multicultural contexts. I argue that the only path to success is through the development of a humor perspective similar to that of Condé’s and Smith’s third-person narrators, whose humorous, mocking tone, particularly at moments of crisis, creates the critical distance necessary for constructing an autonomous individual identity.

The first chapter argues that philosophical insights about unpredictability and interconnectedness in *White Teeth* and *La migration des cœurs* unite Smith and Condé with Caribbean theorists Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Edouard Glissant as well as the science of Chaos to form an important part of the millennial zeitgeist.

The second chapter explores curses, revenge, and satire as indirect ways of writing judgment of the past onto the present in three Condé novels: *Traversée de la mangrove*, *La migration des cœurs*, and *Célanire cou-coupé*. Each novel features an enigmatic central character interpellated by a painful past they cannot ignore. Taken together, these novels represent the characters' progression toward new forms of authorship and self-determination in the present.

The third chapter focuses on how to construct an identity in the present without relying on a sense of belonging: to a family, a nation, an ethnic group, or an ideology. I discuss how characters in Condé's *Desirada* and Smith's *White Teeth* and *On Beauty* are prompted by mockery from respected figures in their lives to abandon the original course of their clichéd identity quests and seek new levels of self-awareness instead.

This dissertation is therefore organized as a series of insights that build on one another. It moves from anxiety about the future and angst about the past to the ultimate liberation of the present, a necessary progression for individuals in multicultural contexts where multiple possibilities for identification coexist with inter-and intra-group tensions.

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INTRODUCTION

Pourquoi cette angoisse devant la réalité du chaos-monde dont il semble qu'il soit l'objet le plus haut de littérature aujourd'hui? Parce que nous voyons bien que la conscience *non* naïve de cette totalité ne peut *plus* ... passer par cette sécurisation que procurait, dans *L'Iliade* ou l'Ancien Testament, la certitude de la communauté élue s'établissant sur une terre élue qui ainsi deviant son territoire. Car à la conscience non naïve de cette communauté nouvelle et totale se pose la question: comment être soi sans se fermer à l'autre, et comment s'ouvrir à l'autre sans se perdre soi-même?

– Edouard Glissant, “Créolisations dans la Caraïbe et les Amériques”

But it makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, *peanuts*, compared to what the immigrant fears—dissolution, *disappearance*.

– Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

In a recent interview with UK tabloid newspaper *The Sun*.¹ President Trump strongly criticized Europe for accepting significant numbers of immigrants and refugees — especially from Syria — in the past few years:

Allowing the immigration to take place in Europe is a shame. I think it changed the fabric of Europe and, unless you act very quickly, it's never going to be what it was and I don't mean that in a positive way....So I think allowing millions and millions of people to come into Europe is very, very sad....I think you are losing your culture.

Although shocking when coming from the leader of a professed ‘nation of immigrants,’² Trump's comments are far from an anomaly. In fact, they resonate clearly with similar comments from leaders across Europe and the U.S. From Silvio Berlusconi's boast that “noi vogliamo un'Italia che non diventi un Paese pluri-etnico, pluriculturale; siamo fieri

¹ Dunn, Thomas Newton. “Migrants ‘Harm UK’: Donald Trump says Britain is ‘losing its culture’ because of immigration.” *The Sun*. 13 July 2013. www.thesun.co.uk/news/6766947/donald-trump-britain-losing-culture-immigration/

² John F. Kennedy famously coined this phrase in a 1959 pamphlet *A Nation of Immigrants*. Anti-defamation League and repeated it in his address to the “50th Annual Meeting of the Anti-defamation League” in January 1963. President Obama quoted Kennedy in a televised address (Nov. 20, 2014), as did Mitt Romney at the RNC convention (Aug. 30, 2012).

della nostra cultura e delle nostre tradizioni”³ to Angela Merkel’s assertion that multiculturalism had “failed utterly” because it’s not feasible to “be ‘multikulti’ and live next door to each other and enjoy being together.”⁴ From David Cameron’s lament that “the weakening of our collective identity...under the doctrine of state multiculturalism” allows young British Muslim men to become radicalized⁵ to Nicolas Sarkozy agreeing with Merkel that multiculturalism is an “échec” because “on s'est trop préoccupé de l'identité de celui qui arrivait et pas assez de l'identité du pays qui accueillait.”⁶ To look further back in time, Trump echoes Enoch Powell’s concerns that immigration in England has led to “the total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history” and that “only resolute and urgent action will avert [a cultural crisis] even now.”⁷ Even as recently as last month, Arizona state representative David Stringer complained about the number of minority children attending Arizona’s public schools. “That complicates racial integration,” he argues, “because there aren’t enough white kids to go around....If we don’t do something about immigration very, very soon,

³ *Radio Anch’io*, March 28, 2006. “We do not want Italy to become a multiethnic, multicultural country; we are proud of our culture and our traditions.” (My translation). On May 9, 2009, Berlusconi explained his policy of intercepting immigrants seeking passage to Italy via boat and returning them to Libya: “La sinistra con i suoi precedenti governi aveva aperto le porte ai clandestini provenienti da tutti i Paesi. Quindi l'idea della sinistra era ed è quella di un'Italia multiethnica. La nostra idea non è così.” [“The left, with its previous governments, had opened the doors to illegal immigrants from every country. Therefore, the left’s ideal was and is that of a multiethnic Italy. Our ideal is not that.” (www.corriere.it/politica/09_maggio_09/maroni_immigrati_respinti_da84e542-3ca2-11de-a760-00144f02aabc.shtml)]

⁴ Widely reported in the international news media, Merkel’s remarks were made on October 16, 2010 at a conference in Potsdam, Germany for youth members of her political party, the Christian Democratic Union.

⁵ Conference on Security, Munich, Germany, February 5, 2011

⁶ This episode of “Paroles de Français” aired on TF1 (Tele France 1) on February 11, 2011

⁷ “Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech.” Conservative Association Meeting, Birmingham, U.K., 20 April, 1968.

the demographics of our country will be irrevocably changed, and it will be a very different country, and it will not be the country you were born into.”⁸

Central to these assertions is the fact that concerns about maintaining a singular, definitive national identity, far from becoming increasingly obsolete in a globalizing world as postnationalists might suggest, have moved to the forefront of twenty-first century public discourse. As long as prominent leaders emphasize the importance of national identity, and particularly when they portray a solid national identity as a bastion against threats like terrorism, so, too, will writers, academics, and social activists continue to push back against any attempt to define national identity – either explicitly or implicitly – as commensurate with a single, historically rooted culture. Immigration advocates and human rights activists have rightly protested against the intolerance inherent in anxiety about the culture-changing impact of immigration by touting the contributions immigrants make to receiving cultures and highlighting the importance from a humanitarian perspective of accepting migrants and refugees who are fleeing life-threatening conditions. Alternatively, theorists in the twentieth century have deconstructed this anxiety by challenging the very concept of stable, historically-rooted identities. To provide only the briefest of reviews: Benedict Anderson argued that national identity is an ideation (“imagined community”) rather than a self-evident truth, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari shifted the imagery behind identity formation from trees growing vertically from their roots to rhizomes that grow by spreading out horizontally to seek new connections (nutrient sources), Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and other postmodernists deconstructed metanarratives such as ethnic or national

⁸ Yavapai County Republican Men’s Forum, June 11, 2018.

foundation myths, and Homi Bhabha argued, with his concept of third space, that culture does not pre-exist its enunciation.

The specific power literary authors wield, by contrast, is the ability to respond to a broad social issue like multicultural anxiety by bringing it into contact with everyday lived experience: global contexts viewed through intimate perspectives. In this dissertation, I address the way two authors of the Caribbean Diaspora, Guadeloupean-born Maryse Condé and British-born daughter of a Jamaican-born mother Zadie Smith, reframe the discussion of this anxiety. Instead of trying to repeat the argument that stems from fear and intolerance, they point instead to its fundamental futility to show that by the time the twentieth century was tipping over into the twenty-first, multiculturalism had evolved from something either to celebrate or lament into something that must simply be accepted as the inherent texture of our reality. Smith encapsulates this perspective in an emblematic moment from her debut novel *White Teeth*. Bangladeshi immigrant Alsana Iqbal leans heavily against her front door to keep an unquestionably obnoxious upper-middle-class white Londoner, Joyce Chalfen, who has recently – and rather forcefully — taken Alsana’s teenage son under her wing, from entering her home. As she listens to Joyce’s pleas, Alsana reflects on the larger implications of the fact that her blockade against Joyce is merely a pretense. In Joyce’s own words, they were already irrevocably “involved” in each other’s lives:

Sometimes, here in England, especially at bus stops and on the daytime soaps, you heard people say ‘We’re *involved* with each other,’ as if this were a most wonderful state to be in, as if one chose it and enjoyed it. Alsana never thought of it that way...*Involved is neither good nor bad. It is just a consequence of living, a consequence of occupation and immigration, of empires and expansion, of living in each other’s pockets...one becomes involved and it is a long trek back to being uninvolved....Involved. Just a tired, inevitable fact. Something in the way Joyce said it, involved—wearied, slightly acid—suggested to Alsana that the word*

meant the same thing to her. An enormous web you spin to catch yourself. (363, italics in the original)

In other words, regardless of the nature of the relationships that exist between cultures within a national border, or within a single region, whether they harmonize together, clash against each other, or try to ignore each other, they are always already (and irreversibly) entangled. There is nowhere to stand ‘apart from,’ or ‘outside of’ multiculturalism and no way to separate cultures once they have begun to interact— as another name for cultural interaction and entanglement is, quite simply, history.

As authors who live and write within the orbit of the Caribbean diaspora, moving back and forth between the ‘new’ world and the ‘old’ both in their narratives and in their travels, Condé and Smith are well positioned to write about our modern condition of entangled cultures and vexed histories. In many ways the Caribbean diaspora represents the epitome of what it means to be ‘always already’ entangled. To begin with, the Caribbean is widely considered the locus of initial entanglement of the modern era: by Edouard Glissant, who famously referred to his island of Martinique not as a root which its citizens must protect and nurture but a “point d’intrication” (36); by Latin American studies scholar John H. Coatsworth, who placed the Caribbean at the center of “the first major cycle of globalization” (40); by Dominican-American novelist Junot Díaz, who offers his readers a kind of “big bang” theory of modernity, referring to Santo Domingo, the site where Columbus first dropped anchor in the Caribbean, as “Ground Zero of the New World” (1). If the Caribbean is a departure point of modern entanglement, the Caribbean diaspora represents the evolution and amplification of that entanglement, as well as the absurdity of any attempt to untangle it.

The question that remains, then, is how to live with it and within it without being overwhelmed by its complexity. To answer this question, both Condé and Smith write novels that insist on that complexity. No matter the angle from which the characters view reality, the era or location of the society represented, or the nature of the relationship between protagonists and their community, every cross-section these authors make of the world reveals a thick web of people living together in one space while simultaneously connected to far-flung places and numerous consequential histories. Yet within the rich texture of this interconnectedness, Condé and Smith both focus almost counter-intuitively on individual identity construction. More precisely, they describe the pitfalls individuals encounter when they don't strive to create an identity with a built-in degree of independence from the pressures of familial, communal, and cultural histories— much in the same way they, as fiction writers, find a way to negotiate independence for themselves from, on the one hand, expectations that literature should function hand-in-hand with political and social activism and, on the other, beliefs that literature's true function is to pretend that “universal truths” can be fully decontextualized. In this way, Condé and Smith value characters who don't so much transcend or disregard their contexts as learn to manage their anxiety about the future and anger about or ignorance of the past. The characters most able to do this are those who find a way to develop a humor perspective that matches that of Condé's and Smith's third-person narrators, whose humorous, mocking tone, particularly at moments when the characters are deepest in crisis, creates a critical distance that provides the reader a constructive space for reflection and self-awareness. As Condé herself says: “Il faut savoir rire de soi, c'est le seul moyen de devenir, un jour, fort et vainqueur” (“Repenser l'identité”).

Smith and Condé's work speaks to each other not because their authorial trajectories run parallel, but because they intersect at a pivotal moment. Of course, Condé's career is longer and, to that extent, more complex than Smith's. Condé's ironically titled debut novel *Heremakhonon (En attendant le bonheur)*, in which she probes questions of identity that were heightened rather than resolved by her personal experience of leaving Guadeloupe to live first in France and then in Africa, was published in 1976, one year after Smith was born in Greater London to an English father and a Jamaican-born mother. By the dawn of the millennium, however, Smith and Condé were on the same wavelength. The publication of *White Teeth*, touted for its "ebullient" and "raucous energy,"⁹ coincides with Condé's entrée into a new phase in her writing, characterized by what Christiane Makward calls "a new, jubilant narrative mode" (407), but which I would describe as a shift away from forms of humor, laughter, and irony that serve purely as a form of resistance to those that also allow for a sense of personal progress. This energy also goes hand-in-hand with a kind of iconoclasm, in the form of a generalized "insolence" in Condé's case, to borrow Lydie Moudileno's term ("Positioning" 135) and an allergy to ideology in Smith's case ("I always find an absurdity in people's most strongly held cultural views"¹⁰), that structures their perspectives as they move through the Caribbean and its diaspora (with important stops in Europe and U.S. academia).

⁹ From Anthony Quinn, "The New England", *The New York Times* April 30, 2000. Web source: www.nytimes.com/books/00/04/30/reviews/000430.30quinnt.html

¹⁰ From "Conversations in the Library: Zadie Smith & Kurt Andersen," *PEN America* (Sunday, April 30, 2006). Web source: pen.org/event/conversations-in-the-library-zadie-smith-kurt-andersen/

In this dissertation, I focus on novels written by Condé and Smith at the millennial moment (*Célanire cou-coupé* and *White Teeth*, respectively) as well as in the years preceding it (*Traversée de la mangrove*, *La migration des cœurs*, and *Desirada* in Condé's case) or following it (*On Beauty* in Smith's case). For Condé, this period represents important steps she took toward the writing of *Célanire cou-coupé*. Though she passed through what she was quoted as calling a turning point in 1995 with the publication of *Desirada*, when "globalization became predominant and when literary frontiers collapsed"¹¹ (Thomas 83), the initial movement began with *Traversée de la mangrove*, which she has described as both a failed attempt at writing a "purely Guadeloupean" novel¹² and the beginning of her tendency to write "much less didactically, bringing in more and more derision, humor, and mockery" ("A Conversation..." 11). For Smith, *On Beauty* represents her broader engagement with the Caribbean Diaspora (namely, Haitian and Trinidadian communities in the U.S.) beyond the more autobiographical experiences of Jamaica's diaspora in London portrayed in *White Teeth*. I do not address her second novel, *Autograph Man*, also written during that time period, because the Caribbean diaspora doesn't play any particular role in it.

In the first chapter, I argue that essential philosophical insights present in *White Teeth* and *La migration des cœurs* unite Smith and Condé with Caribbean theorists such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Edouard Glissant and the science of Chaos, all as an important part of the pre-millennial zeitgeist. The science of Chaos is of particular

¹¹ In her article "Maryse Condé: Practitioner of *Littérature-monde*," Bonnie Thomas cites an unpublished talk she attended in 2005 (Maryse Condé, "Itinéraire d'une écrivaine des Caraïbes," Alliance française de Perth, 8 July 2005).

¹² Lecture given by Maryse Condé and Richard Philcox at Smith College, "Intimate Enemies: A conversation Between and Author and Her Translator." November 8, 2007

interest because of its contributions to our vocabulary (in the form of imagery and metaphors) for describing our relationship with the past and future in a new way (in fact, it shows that that the universe functions more like humans than like the machine it's been considered to be since the time of Newton). The science suggests that there is no contradiction between an impulse toward pattern and an inherent unpredictability. Similarly, Condé and Smith suggest that while it is important for us to pay attention to detail in the past and be aware of the shapes it has formed, it is foolish to try to exorcise anxiety about the future by trying either to control it or passively accept it. Instead, one must take action in the present while remaining flexible and open to the way interwoven pasts create unexpected connections between people in the present. Although these insights exist most clearly on the level of narration, where the narrators greet their characters' angst with humor—a perspective that also unites pattern with unpredictability—, they also provide a clear way of interpreting symbolic characters at the conclusion of each novel as filled with progressive potential.

Whereas my first chapter addresses anxiety about the future, the second one focuses more on the question of deriving power over the past. In this chapter focused exclusively on three Condé novels (*Traversée de la mangrove*, *La migration des cœurs*, and *Célanire cou-coupé*), I trace her evolution toward writerly freedom, on one level, and characters' capacity for self-determination (instead of allowing their past to become their destiny), on another, with satire being the connection between the two levels. I analyze Condé's use of satire in the light of Robert C. Elliot's vision of satire as the modern day curse (as both, after all, are forms of artful vitriol and, potentially, vengeance) and John Clement Ball's "multidirectional satire" that aims its vitriolic judgment in several

directions. Particularly pertinent in postcolonial contexts where power structures and norms overlap, this form of satire emphasizes how quickly the satirist can become the satirized (and vice versa). In this way, I explore how the most successful character is the one who enacts satirical and literal judgments, personally delivering poetic justice about events in the past, while still engaging fully with the present and looking to the future.

In the third and final chapter, I focus more specifically on the present, particularly in terms of the desire to construct an identity by developing a sense of belonging: to a family, a nation, an ethnic group, an ideology or several of the above combined. I analyze Condé's *Desirada* and Smith's *White Teeth* and *On Beauty* to discuss how key characters (Marie-Noëlle, Irie, and Levi, respectively) are thrown off the original course of their identity quests by being mocked by characters they respect, which mockery guides them away from an attempt to belong and toward new levels of self-awareness. The quests begin as the search for belonging, such that one develops a certain image of oneself and embarks upon a journey to find a community that affirms this vision in a kind of reciprocal reflection. When the characters encounter mockery instead of that affirmation, they are forced to look at themselves and relegate others to the background. In this way, they can begin to create a sense of themselves that is self-sufficient and relatively untroubled by unknowable histories and questions of authenticity. Although this analysis of constructive mockery speaks to the general freedom individuals who develop the ability to laugh at themselves and perform a self-critique should feel, it is particularly germane to multicultural contexts, where multiple identifying possibilities exist simultaneously.

CHAPTER 1

CHAOTIC REALISM AND INDIVIDUALISM IN ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE*

TEETH AND MARYSE CONDÉ'S *LA MIGRATION DES CŒURS*

“Sur le plan des technologies, des sciences, et des réseaux de communication, on prend de plus en plus en compte le rôle du chaos, au niveau de la littérature, on en reste toujours à l'intrigue à la narration, au portrait psychologique. Comment peut-on continuer à mettre en scène des personnages, des états d'âme, des vies anecdotiques, des coucherries mesquines... Ce n'est pas la vie: la vie est chaotique, labyrinthe.”

--Frankétiénne, “‘Écrire’ Haïti...”

Introduction

Throughout the 1990's, the terminal decade of a tumultuous century careening toward the uncertainty of a new millennium, a new kind of chaos was everywhere, offering a counterpoint to entropic literary images of wastelands and endgames. Although the collectivity of interrelated concepts popularly known as 'Chaos theory' emerged in piecemeal fashion over the course of the twentieth century from within a variety of mathematical and scientific fields and a number of different countries (namely, France, England, Russia, the U.S., and China), Chaos didn't truly earn the attention of the general public until 1987, through James Gleick's international best-seller *Chaos: the Making of a New Science*. In it, Gleick presents Chaos theory as an answer to questions that Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking's physics couldn't answer, such as: “[I]n a universe ruled by entropy, drawing inexorably toward greater and greater disorder, how does order arise?” (Gleick 7) Within a few years of the publication of Gleick's text, Chaos had evolved into a mobile cultural metaphor, often represented as 'the butterfly

effect,' and migrated into fields as varied as criminology, literature, economics, business management, and, significantly for this chapter, discourses on the Caribbean.¹³

Having little to do with the classical sense of 'chaos' as a synonym for disorder or formlessness, the science of Chaos derives its appeal, as Gleick's title suggests, from its emphasis on the possibility of a "new" way of examining a world in flux without trying to hold it still. In a technical sense, Chaos refers to the study of nonlinear dynamics: that is, systems whose behavior evades easy categorization as either random (unpredictable and irregular) or deterministic (predictable and regular). Chaotic systems, in other words, are "not random but look random" (Lorenz 4); sensitively dependent on initial conditions, they are dramatically unpredictable, yet each step in its process is determined by the one that came before, and the system's overall behavior generally conforms to highly complex, fractal-shaped patterns called strange attractors. In the scientific realm, Chaos both undermines the belief that ours is a clockwork universe that faithfully obeys Newtonian laws of predictable, reversible motion and also complicates the notion, as prescribed by the Second Law of Thermodynamics (which dictates that entropy in a closed system is always increasing), that order dissipates into disorder in a straightforward, unidirectional way. More broadly, Chaos provides a scientific basis for the Zen-like philosophical notion that order and disorder are interdependent, coexisting,

¹³ Even a cursory review of applications of 'Chaos' to fields outside of physics, mathematics, and biology (without delving into fictional representations of the new 'Chaos') reveals its widespread proliferation throughout the 1990s: for example, Margaret J. Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (1990), Edgar Peters' *Fractal Market Analysis: Applying Chaos Theory to Investment & Economics* (1994), Harriet Hawkins' *Strange Attractors: Literature, culture and chaos theory* (1995), Robin Robertson and Allan Combs' *Chaos Theory in Psychology and the Life Sciences* (1995), Dragan Milovanovic's *Chaos, Criminology, and Social Justice: The New Orderly (Dis)Order* (1997), T. Irene Sanders' *Strategic Thinking and the New Science: Planning in the Midst of Chaos, Complexity and Change* (1998), and John Briggs and F. David Peat's *The Seven Life Lessons of Chaos: Spiritual Wisdom from the Science of Change* (1999)

non-hierarchical concepts: that within the apparent tendency (in the universe as in society) toward increased disorder and difference, there is a concomitant, but not contradictory, impulse toward pattern and repetition – albeit with often enormous differences.

It is this capacity for containing contradictions and generating complex patterns within an ever-changing flux of uncertainty that provoked the upsurge of interest in Chaos in the 1990s. For writers of the Caribbean and its diaspora, Chaos was appealing as a new way of navigating questions of individual, national, and regional identity through the turbulence of neocolonialism, occupation, cultural Imperialism, and white supremacy. More precisely, Cuba's Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Martinique's Edouard Glissant turned to Chaos, with its sensitive dependence on initial conditions and paradoxically irregular patterns, to bolster their conceptions of identity as a mental structure that is both flexible enough to allow a given entity to participate in the constant evolution of the global present and resistant enough to external pressures to allow them to develop a distinct sense of self. For Benítez-Rojo, this translated into his concept of the "repeating islands" that connect the Caribbean islands to each other and to the world without suppressing differences within the region and for Glissant to his concept of all identities as relational in the context of the *Chaos-monde*. For both, chaos provides a way of arguing for the broad significance and individuality of the modern Caribbean, despite its being composed of physically small and politically marginalized places who have been alternatively overlooked (on "la face cachée de la terre" (*Discours*, 191)) and overwritten by outside influences, subjected to the Columbus-like "judgments and

intentions” of “the new (dis)coverers,” namely “scientists, investors, and technologists” (Benítez-Rojo 2) of the twentieth century.

Much more than a single point of interest, Chaos is a running theme in Glissant’s work in the 1990s¹⁴ as its precepts (namely the continual and unpredictable interaction of dynamic systems and the creativity that results from this interaction) resonate deeply with his ongoing theoretical concerns about history, culture, and identity. Most significant in his work is the Chaotic notion of total, non-hierarchical interconnectivity. By viewing our “realités” as “fractales” (*Traité* 215), Glissant argues that the complexity of experience exists across every scale, from the global to the regional to the individual. In this way, areas once dismissed as insignificant “poussières” (qtd in *Discours* 7)¹⁵ emerge instead as Chaotic butterflies: small in size but entirely capable of having a global impact.

As much concerned with determining a productive way to conceptualize a generally applicable yet non-essentialized Caribbean identity as with redefining the relationship between the Caribbean and the rest of the world, Benítez-Rojo made early interdisciplinary use of the science of chaos in *La isla que se repite/The Repeating Island* (1989/1992). Drawing upon the Chaotic propensity for paradoxes, he defines the “perspective” derived from an understanding of Chaos as follows: “within the (dis)order that swarms around what we already know of as Nature, it is possible to observe dynamic states or regularities that repeat themselves globally” (2). Benítez-Rojo then observes the

¹⁴ In terms of his theoretical work, Glissant presents his concepts of Chaos and the “chaos-monde” in *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), uses them as the obvious framework of “Le chaos-monde l’oral et l’écrit” (one of two contributions to *Ecrire la parole de nuit* (1994)), and returns to them throughout his *Traité du tout-monde* (1997).

¹⁵ Glissant prefaces an early section of *Le discours antillais* with the following quote about the Caribbean islands, attributed to Charles de Gaulle during a visit to Martinique: “Entre l’Europe et l’Amérique, je ne vois que des *poussières*.”

social world of the Caribbean through this perspective and concludes that “within the sociocultural fluidity that the Caribbean archipelago presents, within its historiographic turbulence and its ethnological and linguistic clamor,...one can sense the features of an island that ‘repeats’ itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth” (3). In Benítez-Rojo’s view, this indefinite yet palpable “sense” of a figurative island-like cultural structure repeating itself across the Caribbean (and then beyond) is what joins the actual Caribbean islands, holding them loosely together without binding them to an oversimplified and rigid (as well as geographically rooted) definition of pan-Caribbean identity.

Thus, through their explicit articulation, Glissant and Benítez-Rojo weave Chaos through the Caribbean narrative, and, reciprocally, the Caribbean narrative through Chaos, a significant pattern in the fabric of pre-millennial thought. Yet the strength of these connections, and their pervasiveness at a literally pivotal time in our cultural imaginary, cannot fully be understood merely by explicating the arguments already put forward by Glissant and Benítez-Rojo, or even by tracing those arguments through the works of writers directly influenced by them, such as Patrick Chamoiseau. Rather, one may best observe how these ideas resonate by exploring the implicit presence of chaotic concepts in fictional work of the Caribbean diaspora, where the relationship between the Caribbean and the world at large is inherently in question. In that spirit, I will read two ‘end of the millennium’ novels that address questions of identity, one by Maryse Condé and the other by Zadie Smith, as Benítez-Rojo ‘read’ the Caribbean- while “attuned to Chaos” (3).

To begin with an explanation of the pertinence of this kind of implicit presence to discussions of Chaos, I turn to N. Katherine Hayles' notion of the "archipelago of chaos," as presented in *Chaos Bound*, a seminal work exploring the natural overlap between chaos theory and literary studies. To illustrate how the development of Chaos in scientific discourses in the 1960s and 70s was an outgrowth of the same kind of "broader cultural conditions" that made possible the "new paradigms" in literature, poststructuralism in particular, Hayles uses the image of an archipelago. She explains that the simultaneous development of Chaos-like concepts in various disciplines is akin to a series of "islands...[each with their] own ecology, terrain and morphology" but nevertheless "part of an emerging mountain range," thus "connected both through substrata they share and through the larger forces that brought them into being" (3). This archipelagic model of idea development¹⁶ stands in direct contrast to the linear model of direct influence common to disciplinary traditions, emphasizing instead the significance of simultaneous developments that are related yet independently formed. In Hayles'

¹⁶ Begging for comment here is the apparently organic relationship between archipelagos and both the Caribbean and Chaos. Celia Britton observes that Glissant presents the notion of "la pensée archipelique" (181) in *Traité du tout-monde*; J. Michael Dash writes "Indeed, one could say that [Glissant] sees the entire world in terms of a Caribbean or New World condition. The world, for Glissant, is increasingly made up of archipelagos of culture. The Caribbean has become exemplary in this creative global 'chaos' which proliferates everywhere" (*Edouard Glissant* 23). Benítez-Rojo calls the Caribbean a "cultural meta-archipelago without limits" (9). Of course, the Caribbean is also literally an archipelago, a natural structure whose development falls under the purview of Chaos (Chaos being used to explain all naturally formed structures, from leaves and snowflakes to mountains, shorelines, and islands, which exhibit both irregularity and self-similarity). Additionally, archipelagos like the Caribbean exists in a fractal-like relationship (in terms of repetitive similarity across different scales) with star formations. As Benítez-Rojo writes: "If someone needed a visual explanation, a graphic picture of what the Caribbean is, I would refer him to the spiral chaos of the Milky Way, the unpredictable flux of transformative plasma that spins calmly in our globe's firmament" (4). Similarly, Nick Coates writes, regarding Benítez-Rojo's use of the Caribbean's archipelagic structure in a metaphorical sense: "How appropriate, then, that Michel Hénon should have found, in his study of stellar orbits, "complete disorder mixed with the clear remnants of order, forming shapes that suggested 'islands' and chains of islands'" [quoted in Gleick 147]" (Coates 257).

words, the archipelago suggests “a universe of discourse that is at once,” not unlike Caribbean identity, “fragmented and unified” (4).

Emerging as an archipelago in the second half of the twentieth century, by the 1990s Chaos had become a “cultural condition” in its own right. Researchers, writers, and thinkers in many different fields, including fiction writers such as Condé and Smith, were inspired to respond to the diffuse cultural presence of chaotic notions, rather than returning to the literary world’s promised revelations of the Yeats’ “rough” millennial “beast,” because they sensed in Chaos the possibility of a way out of the quagmires, endpoints, and binaries of the twentieth century. They sought instead a third state that exists between rooted, inflexible mindsets and visions of total, formless relativity.

It is my contention that Condé and Smith both responded and contributed to this atmosphere in two pre-millennial novels, *La migration des cœurs* and *White Teeth*, respectively, in which they explore the possibility of liberating oneself from the past without disregarding it. Both writers suggest that although the past may be deterministic, the future is not therefore fatalistic. Considered together, these novels provide what I call a Chaos perspective. On the one hand, Smith’s debut novel, which she began writing in 1997 as an undergraduate student trying “to...shake free of some of [her] influences and move on,”¹⁷ presents a type of ‘chaotic realism’ that overtly uses humor as a means of understanding the complex web of ever-changing connections between people in the world. On the other hand, Condé’s novel, her first after “Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer,” her gender-inflected declaration of independence from prescribed ways of writing about Caribbean history, culture, and nature, explores the

¹⁷ Interview with Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina in 2000 (271).

possibility of ‘chaotic individuality.’ Through the subtle humor of ironic repetition, Condé confronts her characters with their chaotic pasts (of both the genetic and the cultural kind) to raise the question of whether it is possible for them to develop a resilient and flexible individual identity that would allow them to navigate the chaos rather than succumb to it.

To draw specific links between Chaos and these two novels, I distinguish between three distinct and opposing metaphorical concepts—chaos, entropy (randomness and disorder), and perfection (predictability and determination) — to demonstrate that an affiliation with chaotic insights is the key to determining a character’s potential for developing a viable sense of self in the future. More precisely, these metaphors highlight each novel’s evolution from characters confidently seeking to dominate their realities (Hortense and Ryan, Marcus, Razyé), to characters passively tossed about on a sea of disorder (Archie and Cathy II), and culminating in characters with uncertain destinies (Futuremouse and Anthuria). Interpreted in the light of chaos, the uncertain destinies of Futuremouse and Anthuria suggest the possibility of a third state between rooted inflexibility and rootless passivity: a state in which one recognizes the impact of the past while reclaiming the right to self-determination and progresses toward the future without expecting to control it.

Chaotic Realism in *White Teeth*

“The Second Law [of Thermodynamics] has had a life of its own in intellectual realms far removed from science, taking the blame for disintegration of societies, economic decay, the breakdown of manners, and many other variations on the decadent theme. These secondary, metaphorical incarnations of the Second Law now seem especially misguided. In our world, complexity flourishes, and those looking to science for a general understanding of nature’s habits will be better served by the laws of chaos.”

--James Gleick, *Chaos: the Making of a New Science*

“What we need for understanding rational human behaviour - and indeed, animal behaviour - is something intermediate in character between perfect chance and perfect determinism - something intermediate between perfect clouds and perfect clocks”

--Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*¹⁸

The highly symbolic nature of *White Teeth*'s initial publication date – June 2000 – was not lost on reviewers and critics. Poised at the tipping point between millennia, the novel has been praised as an “end of millennium tour de force” (Head 108) and its author hailed as “the first publishing sensation of the millennium” (Merritt). Befitting its timely appearance on the literary scene, Smith’s debut novel is deeply concerned with the question of how to absorb the shocks of the past before moving into the future. As the novel’s epigraph – which Smith slyly attributes to an inscription in an unnamed museum in Washington D.C. rather than to Shakespeare— reminds us, “what’s past is prologue.” But what, then, does the prologue of modern history portend for post-millennial, postwar, post-Imperial Britain? More to the point, how does one resist the impulse to see the painful turmoil of the past as an indication of worse to come, a sure sign of our inevitable, entropic decline? How can we avoid this pitfall without, as Smith writes on the final page of the novel, escaping into “the myth, the wicked lie that the past is always tense and the future, perfect” (448)?

Smith explores these questions through characters for whom this “wicked lie” forms the crux of their life philosophies as they actively work to ward off randomness, disorder, and general messiness: in a word, entropy. In scientific terms entropy refers to

¹⁸ Popper, Karl R. *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 228.

the tendency of disorder to increase irreversibly in a system, whether in the form of energy that is converted into heat, therefore no longer available to do work, or through the random distribution of formerly distinct elements that mix together until they reach equilibrium, a state in which no further change is possible. Taken to its logical extreme, entropy has suggested to some physicists that the universe as a whole is destined for entropic equilibrium, a “heat death” in which all useful energy has been lost: in other words, a state where no further life can be supported. In all cases entropy indicates that loss inevitably increases over time. Figuratively, it represents the force that governs the unpredictable ways in which plans never go exactly as imagined and the predictable way all endeavors end in failure or stasis.

The disintegrative tendency of entropy is precisely what several of Smith’s characters wish to escape. They recoil so thoroughly from it, in fact, that they swerve to the opposite, yet equally inert, extreme of yearning and planning for perfection. As its etymology suggests, “perfection” denotes not just ‘flawlessness’ but also ‘finality.’ Like entropic equilibrium, then, perfection is a state that precludes all possibility of change and process, an intellectual dead end reached through total order rather than the total disorder of maximum entropy. It is therefore against such stasis in any form, despite the pervasive strength of characters’ desires to find it, that Smith pushes with the full force of *White Teeth*, guiding her characters toward Chaos instead, where mixing and messiness lead to anything but impasse. Writing in a form I call ‘chaotic realism,’ Smith relentlessly undermines her characters’ projections of future perfection, envisioned through means as varied as apocalypse and genetic engineering, by confronting them with the unavoidable force of the creative changeability of the present.

I offer the term ‘chaotic realism’ as a play on the famous, and famously controversial, critique levied against Smith by the subsequently high-profile British critic James Wood, who crystallized an entire genre—dubbed ‘hysterical realism’—around her debut novel in his review from July of 2000.¹⁹ Naming a genre for the express purpose of lambasting it, Wood cites Rushdie, Foster Wallace, and DeLillo, in addition to Smith, as pillars of hysterical realism, producers of “the big contemporary novel” that can be reduced to a single image: that of “a perpetual-motion machine that appears to have been embarrassed into velocity” such that lively language and fast-moving, multiplying plots take the place of depth of characterization.

Wood’s assessment represents a philosophical objection couched in aesthetic terms. After observing that there is something “inhuman” about the way characters in these novels perceive the world and relate to others, as they are “forever seeing connections and links and plots, and paranoid parallels,” Wood makes the following assertions about the truth of human experience (according to him):

Life is never experienced with such a fervid intensity of connectedness. After all, hell *is* other people, actually: real humans disaggregate more often than they congregate. So these novels find themselves in the paradoxical position of enforcing connections that are finally conceptual rather than human. The forms of these novels *tell* us that we are all connected — by the Bomb (DeLillo), or by myth (Rushdie), or by our natural multiracial multiplicity (Smith); but it is a formal lesson rather than an actual enactment.

Essentially, Wood’s critique stems from the simple fact that where these authors see connection, he sees disjuncture. With this emphatic disavowal of the pervasive reality of

¹⁹ Although Wood’s review was hardly the final word on the novel, it did strike a chord, especially when he reiterated his critique in a second, much more accusatory article, “Tell Me How Does it Feel?”, published just weeks after the 9/11 attacks of 2001, in which he said the “social and theoretical glitter” of novels like Smith’s should now absolutely be “abandon[ed]” (Wood, “Feel”). Smith herself was deeply affected both by 9/11 and by Wood’s article, to the point that she wrote a response to Wood, titled “This is How it Feels to Me,” in which she defends her fellow writers and their various ways of expressing themselves but admits to being shaken by world events and unsure of how to write, moving forward.

human connections, reinforced by his reference to Sartre's famous line from the arguably entropic *Huis clos* (for what could be more of a dead-end than an eternity in a room with people you can't stand and from whom you can't escape?),²⁰ Wood aligns himself with the notion that humanity obeys the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Our behavior, in his view, is essentially centrifugal, fundamentally geared toward disintegration and dissipation.

Although it echoes central aspects of the post-World War II, modern (and postmodern) mood of alienation, Wood's stance seems out of step with the realities of post World War II history, particularly in England where the destruction of war and disintegration of Empire amplified England's connections, such as they might be, with the citizens of its Empire through immigration from the Commonwealth to the 'mainland.'²¹ In the same sense, Wood's dismissal of Smith's presentation of the connections forged by "our natural multiracial multiplicity" as "conceptual" rather than "human" hits a false note. The multiracial reality Smith presents has nothing to do with abstract concepts of "natural" multiplicity and everything to do with the lived legacy of colonization. For instance, Smith's portrait of Irie, the biracial daughter of White British Archie and Jamaican-born Clara involves a "fervid intensity of connectedness" that

²⁰ Wood's allegiance to mid-century existentialism (in the sense that Nietzsche was an enormous influence on mid-century existentialism) is also reflected in the title of his review, "Human, All Too Inhuman: The smallness of the 'big' novel," with its allusion to Nietzsche's *Human, All too Human*.

²¹ A more extreme version of this sense of disconnect, in both senses of the word, is evident in Enoch Powell's divisive April 20, 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech, a flashpoint in U.K. immigration history, in which he urged Parliament to encourage Commonwealth immigrants to leave in order to spare England the racial strife of civil rights era America (note that the speech took place only weeks after MLK's assassination), saying: "That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming up on us here by our own volition and our own neglect." Absent from Powell's analysis is any understanding of the deep, yet obvious, connection between immigration patterns in the U.K. and Empire—such that the former caused average British Citizens to experience the latter, perhaps for the first time, in a way that was "up close and personal."

enhances, rather than obviates, her fully-fleshed out human dimension. At a time in her adolescence when Irie feels that she has no place in England or amongst her peers in school – in large part because of her Jamaican heritage— the reader learns in a flashback sequence that Irie’s Jamaican family has very specific connections to her present world, dating back almost a century. Her school, Glenard Oak Comprehensive, is named after its founder, Sir Edmund Flecker Glenard (1842-1907), a member of the British Aristocracy and owner of a tobacco plantation in Jamaica. Misremembered as a progressive social experiment in cross-cultural education, the school actually began as a workhouse designed to unite Jamaican workers (brought to England en masse by Glenard) with English workers in the packaging of cigarettes. Coincidentally, not only did several of Irie’s Jamaican ancestors participate in the (ultimately abandoned) workhouse experiment, but Irie’s great-grandmother was actually sexually assaulted by this very same Sir Glenard. Although by the end of the novel Irie has begun to do research into her family’s past and Jamaica’s history, it is unlikely she will ever uncover information about these subtle, unrecorded kinds of connections to her present life.

This knowledge on the reader’s part does not diminish the very real sense of the alienation Irie feels as “a stranger in a stranger land” (222), but it does suggest that alienation is more of a situational irony than a necessary insight into the essential nature of human existence. While this chain of Glenard-oriented connections may involve some artful exaggeration on Smith’s part, it also illustrates, albeit in compressed fashion, how tautly the citizens of England and the Commonwealth are tied together by the often unseen threads of history. ‘Chaotic realism,’ then, describes the reality of Chaos, with its openness to the creative uncertainty of new combinations, through a literary perspective

that plays at rendering the unseen visible and highlights the “fervid intensity of connectedness” that does in fact shape our reality. Furthermore, the fact that Smith expresses this perspective in a comic tone does not signify that narration in the “big” contemporary novel is, as Wood writes “almost incompatible with tragedy or anguish,” but rather that ‘chaotic realism’ is all-encompassing, attuned to the way that people are connected and beginnings and endings are simultaneous. Smith doesn’t ignore tragedy and anguish, but neither does she see them as endpoints or inevitable destinies. Instead, her plot sweeps tragic moments along in the current of life, revising the traditional alignment of comic modes with happy endings into a more general association with life’s implacable (and undeniable) movement forward. It is therefore incumbent on Smith’s characters to accept the thrust of this movement and detach themselves, accordingly, from fixed interpretations of the past and clear visions of future perfection.

It is in the spirit of mocking perfect futures that Smith first raises and then overturns the specter of apocalypse, inverting well-known 20th century visions of the horrifying and inevitable end of days; i.e. Yeats’ rough beast, Kubrick’s Domsday Machine, even Coppola’s Eliot-reading Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*. For Irie’s grandmother Hortense, apocalypse is the only happy ending possible. A Jehovah’s Witness born in Jamaica but living in England, Hortense has endured natural disasters, wars, colonialism, neocolonialism, and her daughter’s unfathomable (to her) decision to become an atheist, and her only hope is that the apocalypse will cleanse the modern world of its built-up, corrosive grime. In this expectation, Hortense lives with a literal version of a certain type of metaphorical yearning for cataclysmic judgments, for a complete righting of historical wrongs that J. Michael Dash discerns in Caribbean writing

in much of the second half of the twentieth century. Citing the “fiery” (“Eccentricities” 34) aspirations of Frantz Fanon, the apocalyptic imagery of Jacques Roumain, Etienne Léro, Aimé Césaire, and the writers of the *Eloge de la créolité* as examples, Dash distinguishes this desire for “redemptive or revolutionary apocalypse” (34) that would definitively undo the deeds of colonization from an ‘end of days’ vision that culminates in meaningless destruction or nothingness.

However, Dash critiques the fact that this apocalyptic desire persisted for some time despite the unavoidable reality that the past century has been one of repeated disappointments and “failed ‘revolutionary truths’” (36). One thinks, for example, of aborted independence movements, failed nationalist movements, liberation movements turned into dictatorial regimes, and Marxism’s markedly poor implementations. Accordingly, Hortense has experienced the twentieth century as a series of apocalyptic disappointments. Born in Kingston, Jamaica at a cataclysmic moment, during the earthquake of 1907, Hortense was raised with the hopeful expectation that apocalypse, the biggest cataclysm possible, was imminent. To her painful surprise, however, each time apocalypse was predicted during her lifetime, first in 1914 and then in 1975, “she awoke to find—instead of hail and brimstone and universal destruction—the continuance of daily life” (27). Toward the end of the novel, she pins all her hopes on one last possible apocalypse, predicted by church leaders after “thorough scriptural study” (339) for the turn of the millennium: January 1, 2000. The events of the novel conclude on December 31, 1992, which leaves Hortense seven years of eager anticipation in the reader’s imagination. Already, though, she is making plans to bring her life neatly full circle before its happy conclusion by returning to Jamaica for the millennial apocalypse:

“Lord Jesus, I have lived this century! Well and truly I have lived this terrible century with all its troubles and vexations. And thanks to you, Lord, I’m gonna feel a rumble at both ends” (339). Of course, Hortense’s excitement corresponds to the reader’s sense of irony, born of the certain knowledge, from a post-millennial vantage point, that Hortense is heading for one last disappointment.

This irony is only enhanced by the absurd intensity of Hortense’s efforts to prepare for apocalypse, a process which pervades every aspect of her daily life. Not content to wait passively for the End of the World, which she expects to bring about the rigid division of the world into three parts (the unfaithful heathens, dead and buried; the Great Crowd, living in paradise on earth; and the Anointed Ones, living in heaven (316)), Hortense expends a great deal of energy trying to eradicate disorder in the present by fighting the second law of entropy on its most fundamental level. Spurred on by the belief that the Lord only found extremes of temperature acceptable, Hortense "understood 'lukewarm' to be an evil property in and of itself" and strove to keep hot things piping hot and "kept whole buckets of ice to chill every glass of water 'colder than cold'" (328). As ice melting in a glass (devolving from a dynamic system marked by the sharp distinctions of temperature of its composite elements into a lukewarm bath) is the classic example used to illustrate a state of maximum entropy, Hortense seems to have an almost instinctual distaste for the confusion caused by the blending of extremes.

Of course, Hortense’s very extremism is ideal grist for Smith’s comic mill. When Hortense tries to apply her strict, extreme views to her emotional life, these two worlds come into conflict in a way that manages to give her at least momentary pause. She carefully explains to Irie, her mixed-race granddaughter, why, according to the Bible,

racial mixing is against God's law (and more importantly his plans) ever since "De Lord Jesus" (apparently making a cameo appearance in the Old Testament) "made a whole heap of fuss" about the building of the Tower of Babel and decided to scatter the human race across the globe in small groups because "'Im want everybody to keep tings separate." Mixing is therefore to be avoided because it can lead to unexpected results. But her reasoning gets tripped up as she takes her audience into account. She says to Irie, "when you mix it up, nuttin' good can come. It wasn't intended. Except you," the last part of which she "added as an afterthought" (318).

Overall, the reader experiences the thwarting of Hortense's beliefs and expectations as humorous, particularly in light of the contrast between the magnitude of her happiness and the horror of its source (i.e. the death and destruction of the majority of the human race, as depicted in the "Heathens" panel of the hand-sewn apocalypse tapestry hanging over her fireplace) as well as the structural emphasis on the repetition of her disappointments. Notably, the novel opens on January 1, 1975, the morning the world was supposed to end. Despite this humor at Hortense's expense, Smith ultimately weaves a sympathetic thread into her narrative. For instance, when Hortense manages to convert Ryan, the unpromising, pot-smoking teenager her daughter Clara started dating as a form of rebellion, to her faith, her absurd triumph turns strangely against her. Ryan is something of a parody of 'the rebel without a cause'; as Smith tells us, Ryan lives by "the aging fifties motto 'live fast, die young,'" worships his (slow-moving) motor-scooter, and "liked to warn Clara in grim tones" that he was "'going out' early and with a 'bang'" (30). Although Hortense's faith seems incongruous with Ryan's worldview at first glance, his conversation serves to affirm it, as he lets himself believe that the

apocalypse will provide just the ‘bang’ he is waiting for. He quickly transforms into a devout Jehovah’s Witness and easily supersedes Hortense in the church hierarchy. He even gets the chance to work with church leaders in calculating the ‘final’ apocalypse, an activity from which Hortense’s gender precludes her despite her lifelong involvement in the church, and ultimately lectures Hortense on appropriate biblical conduct from the height of his superior position. While Hortense allows this role reversal to take place, it soon becomes clear that her fundamentalism does not reflect a simple two-dimensional, mindless, or passive devotion. Rather, she sees her religion’s emphasis on apocalypse as a means of accomplishing autonomy and empowerment for herself through a total inversion of her social status. She even imagines herself critiquing the church. Not content to join the “Great Crowd” of the faithful living in paradise on earth, Hortense aims at joining the 144,000 Anointed ones. As she explains to her granddaughter: “I gat so tired wid de church always tellin’ me I’m a woman or I’m nat hedicated enough...if I were one of de hundred an’ forty-four, no one gwan try to heducate *me*. Dat would be *my* job! I’d make my own laws an’ I wouldn’t be wanting anybody else’s opinions” (338).

In her desire to improve the human condition from Heaven down, Hortense offers a significant point of contrast with Marcus, who wishes to improve it from the genes out. A genetic-engineer, Marcus is intent on honing his ability to create a perfect life in the here and now by controlling and reorganizing its very material. Predictability is the key to perfection, in his view, and Marcus firmly believes in “the perfectibility of all life” (260). Working with his protégé Magid, a future lawyer and master of public relations, Marcus is developing a method for rendering the genetic development of a mouse, dubbed FutureMouse©, entirely predictable by engineering its genome so that it would

grow a precisely timed series of tumors. Although the mouse's destiny of dying what will probably be a horrible death within a month of December 31, 1999 is perfectly planned, it certainly doesn't signify perfect happiness. Nevertheless, Marcus intends to use this experience to prove the power and significance of his engineering abilities as he strives to make the genome "more efficient, more logical...[and] more effective...in the way it proceed[s]" with the ultimate goal of ridding humanity of disease, or what Marcus calls "bad logic on the part of the genome" (260). As Magid explains in the project's Press release, "The FutureMouse© holds out the tantalizing promise of a new phase in human history, where we are not victims of the random but instead directors and arbitrators of our own fate" (357).

With his rock-solid belief in the power of order and control, in the notion that greater understanding leads directly to greater certainty because logic is the natural enemy of randomness, Marcus fully embraces the ideals of classical science. Crystallized in the work of Isaac Newton, the bedrock notion of the universe in classical science is that it functions like clockwork, following unwavering laws that produce predictable behavior. And in this clockwork universe, very little exists outside the realm of human understanding. As Ian Stewart, mathematician and proponent of Chaos, neatly outlines in *Does God Play Dice: The New Mathematics of Chaos*, all of the following is true in Newtonian and even quantum physics: a Theory of Everything is a worthwhile pursuit (3), it is logical for Einstein to assert that he does not believe in a God who plays dice with the universe but rather in complete law and order (xi), and, most notably for this chapter, 18th century mathematician Pierre-Simon de Laplace is justified in carrying his belief in a direct relationship between knowledge and certainty out to its logical endpoint.

As Stewart observes, Laplace famously posited the existence of an intellect for which no law of nature was unknown in order to conclude the following about the possibilities of predicting the future:

An intellect which at any given moment knew all the forces that animate Nature and the mutual positions of the beings that comprise it, if this intellect were vast enough to submit its data to analysis, [it] could condense into a single formula the movement of the greatest bodies of the universe and that of the lightest atom: for such an intellect nothing could be uncertain; and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes. (qtd in Stewart 6)²²

In Laplace's hypothetical vision, complete (therefore perfect) knowledge of a single part (a moment in time) leads directly to knowledge about the whole (the entire time-space continuum). To observe is to know, to know is to predict. Knowledge begets knowledge ad infinitum, and even time bends to the intellect. Indeed, by describing this vision in terms of an intellect ("une intelligence" in the original French) rather than using a word with stronger religious connotations, Laplace keeps this vision, speculative and theoretical though it is, within the realm of human capabilities and endeavors. Chaos, by contrast, would suggest that it is entirely possible for a situation such as the one Laplace describes, where all variables are known and entirely described by simple equations, to produce unpredictable results, to "generate motion so complex, so sensitive to measurement, that it appears random" (Stewart 12). Clearly, Marcus's FutureMouse project places him squarely in the camp of Laplace (and Newton and Einstein).

Equally clearly, Smith is intent on critiquing that camp. Indeed, as Marcus attempts to explain the FutureMouse© project to Irie, Smith playfully highlights his

²² The passage in the original French reads as follows: "Une intelligence qui, pour un instant donné, connaîtrait toutes les forces dont la nature est animée et la situation respective des êtres qui la composent, si d'ailleurs elle était assez vaste pour soumettre ces données à l'analyse, embrasserait dans la même formule les mouvements des plus grands corps de l'univers et ceux du plus léger atome : rien ne serait incertain pour elle, et l'avenir, comme le passé, serait présent à ses yeux" (Laplace 2).

affiliation with law and order while simultaneously lampooning it. First, Smith's narrative lens draws the reader's attention to the space on the wall of Marcus's study where a poster of Einstein hangs, proudly bearing the quote "God does not play dice with the universe" (279). Shortly thereafter, while Marcus is still bragging about the glorious order he is creating in FutureMouse© (broadly claiming that if "you eliminate the random, you rule the world" (283)), Smith highlights the distinct lack of order and outright randomness in Marcus's filing system as he struggles and ultimately fails to shove the drawer containing pictures of FutureMouse© closed. As Irie wryly remarks: "My school shit is better organized, and I'm not in the business of World Domination" (283).

More subtly, Smith undermines Marcus and Magid's shared vision of FutureMouse© in her description of the triumph Magid feels when he attends the mouse's birth. Magid's interest in FutureMouse© likely stems from the precariousness of his upbringing. Born in England to Bangladeshi immigrants, Magid was sent away from home—without warning or explanation—by his father when he was nine to live in Bangladesh, a country particularly prone to unrest and natural disasters. Rather than turning to religion to escape the vicissitudes of the world, as his father had planned, Magid becomes an atheist and aspiring lawyer, eager to participate in projects such as FutureMouse© that suggest the power of man to forge an earthly realm "where order prevailed, disaster was prepared for" (240). Speaking enviously of FutureMouse©'s future, Magid reflects on how significant the mouse's life will be:

No random factors. No *you have your father's snout and your mother's love of cheese*. No mysteries lying in wait. No doubt as to when death would arrive. No hiding from illness, no running from pain. No question about who was pulling the strings. No doubtful omnipotence. No shaky fate. No question of a journey, no

question of greener grass, for wherever this mouse went, its life would be precisely the same. It would not travel through time (and Time's a bitch, Magid knew *that* much now. Time is *the* bitch), because its future was equal to its present, which was equal to its past.... No other roads, no missed opportunities, no parallel possibilities. No second-guessing, no what-ifs, no might-have-beens. Just certainty. Just certainty in its purest form. And what's more, thought Magid—once the witnessing was over, once the mask and gloves were removed, once the white coat was returned to its hook—what more is God than *that*? (405)

From Magid's perspective, this passage represents an ode to certainty, an individual enactment in miniature of Laplace's hypothetical vision. For the reader, however, its overall tone is oppressive. With an overly long series of noun phrases all headed by the word "no," this passage amounts to a repetitive and monotonous accumulation of negations, paradoxically filling the concept of certainty, and therefore a certain notion of God, with absence.

But with such a solid foundation of certainty, backed by several centuries of scientific practice, to undermine, Smith needs to poke more than small holes in Marcus's plan to engineer a specific future. Indeed, Smith harnesses all the ideological energy of her 450-page novel to upend Marcus's FutureMouse© project entirely. By the end of the novel, Marcus's project has become a lightning rod for other characters' worldviews and visions of the future, particularly when he holds a press conference to present his creation to the world. In fact, the action of the novel's final chapters is propelled forward solely by the growing sense of ideological outrage against FutureMouse© emerging from increasingly wide-ranging segments of London society. These anti- FutureMouse© forces finally rise and converge, each with their own plan of attack, on the novel's final space. Fully confident in the righteousness of his project, Marcus betrays his allegiance to linear, straightforward thinking even in the method of his presentation at the conference. As he sits on the dais in in the exhibition room of the Perret Institute, where

FutureMouse© will live out his seven-year existence, he is flanked on one side by his mentor Dr. Perret and on the other by his protégée Magid. Together, they represent Marcus's intellectual lineage as it advances implacably from the past to the future.

As this final scene in the novel makes clear, the essential irony of Marcus's research is that although it is based entirely on his ability to plan, control, and accurately predict the effects of his genetic engineering, he is entirely unable to anticipate the almost universally negative response his FutureMouse© elicits from the general public. This includes people like Hortense, with whom he has only a distant social connection via his secretary and who will be protesting FutureMouse© by standing outside the institute singing about the apocalypse, and, to his utter surprise, people as dear to him as his eldest son Joshua, with whom he had a very close relationship until he began directing all his attention to FutureMouse© and Magid. Whereas Marcus sees only one possible future for his research, that is, the ability to fight random gene mutation and therefore cut disease off at its source, his opponents see many possibilities. In fact, they project a broad range of social anxieties onto FutureMouse and foresee terrible, alternative futures for both mice and men evolving from this experiment. Animal rights activists, like Joshua, envision horribly mutated animals, each body part patented to a different scientist and auctioned off to the highest bidder, suffering in laboratories across England. Members of various religious groups, otherwise at odds, come together to proclaim that Marcus will incur the wrath of God by attempting to ape his work. Political Science students conclude that Marcus's research will only end in prenatal ethnic cleansing.

All of this mystifies Marcus, largely because he simply cannot see the connections they are making between what he understands as isolated systems:

FutureMouse© on the one hand, and the complications of the social world on the other. Indeed, as a good scientist adhering to the dictates of the scientific method, Marcus makes every effort to control the experimental space of his research, reducing variables to a minimum and factoring any that still remain into his results, even as he opens it to the public. As the press conference begins, a bar-coded FutureMouse© is safely ensconced in a glass display case, ready to be looked at, but not interacted with, as he fulfills his singular, pre-planned destiny of an unnaturally extended, cancer-filled life. But glass cannot protect either him or Marcus from social critique powered by the historical context of the 20th century, a context already 92 years in the making at the time of the FutureMouse© press conference.

Marcus's failure to understand this context might best be described as a failure to be open to the dynamics of Chaos. Focusing on the irregularities and inexplicable variations that other scientists tend to dismiss as meaningless 'noise' or 'random' behavior (Gleick uses Thomas Kuhn's famous assertion to suggest that Chaos means "the profession can no longer evade anomalies" (315)), researchers of chaotic systems emphasize the new, fascinating middle term between behavior that is regular (that is, governed by law and therefore acting in a predictable way) and behavior that is random (that is, ungoverned, unpredictable). This middle, chaotic term describes behavior that appears random but is actually governed by law – that is, determined by the history of the system, though its results are not predictable. In this sense, chaotic systems are both unpredictable and "sensitively dependent on initial conditions," such that slightly different starting positions can lead to vastly different, unforeseeable outcomes.

By dismissing the objections of his community members as random noise external to the FutureMouse© project, Marcus simply mistakes chaotic behavior for random behavior. As James Gleick explains, a Chaos perspective is holistic in its scope, attentive to the whole fabric of the world rather than a particular thread: “Only a new kind of science could begin to cross the great gulf between knowledge of what one thing does...and what millions of them do” (8). Marcus, however, is unable to recognize the web of connections that linked some of these objections to his work in a very real, very direct way. In short, Marcus discovers at the press conference that his mentor, Dr. Perret, the man whom Marcus credited with being “the guiding spirit” and “personal inspiration” (440) for his own forays into genetic engineering, is a war criminal who got his start doing genetic research for the Nazis. No longer can Marcus argue that FutureMouse has only one possible future, or that it is illogical to imagine sinister outcomes to Marcus’s genetic work, since FutureMouse was now in some ways the fruit of a poisoned tree of knowledge with deeper, more complicated roots than he knew. In this instance, for Marcus, it was the past—the original source of his knowledge—that introduced unpredictability into FutureMouse’s destiny, and his present connections that brought that past to light.

Though unpredictable, FutureMouse’s destiny is also determined. If Dr. Perret’s identity is made apparent at the press conference, it is because Archie Jones, father of Irie and family friend of Marcus’s protégé Magid, is in attendance; for not only is Archie connected to the Dr. Perret narrative through his experience in World War II, but he has also evolved, by the end of the novel, into an agent of Chaos. Indeed, from the very beginning he stands in stark contrast to ‘agents of perfection’ such as Marcus and

Hortense. As to the latter, the novel's opening date of January 1, 1975, marks Archie's attempted suicide as well Hortense's apocalyptic disappointment. But whereas Hortense is aggrieved by "the continuance of daily life" (27), Archie greets the same with great joy, celebrating it, in fact, by impulsively deciding to attend an ironically named "End of the World Party" (thrown by newly atheist Clara). The fact that his suicide was foiled not by a change of heart or the kind intervention of a friend or stranger but by a mundane encounter (the car in which he was trying to poison himself with carbon monoxide was shooed away by a butcher reserving that space for a meat delivery truck) does not stop Archie from interpreting the butcher's intervention as a sign that he was meant to live—and change his life. The narrator supports Archie's interpretation, asserting that the apparent randomness of the butcher's intervention, and therefore Archie's salvation, does indeed have a larger meaning derived from the butcher's connection with, among other forces in the world, Chaos theory's butterfly effect: "the position of the planets, the music of the spheres, *the flap of a tiger mother's diaphanous wings in Central Africa*, and a whole bunch of other stuff that Makes Shit Happen had decided it was second-chance time for Archie" (4, emphasis mine).

By beginning her novel with Archie's second chance at life, Smith highlights the importance of such a possibility, which speaks even to her novel's title; as a character much later in the novel reminds us, "mammals only get two chances" (144) at having nice 'white teeth.' Archie has squandered his first chance on a life that was spectacularly average, which is precisely why he considered ending it. From his intelligence to his talents, his accomplishments, and even his name, Archie is an average man.²³ As he

²³ It is possible to read Archie's first name as an allusion to Archie Bunker from *All in the Family*, himself an American working-class everyman of sorts in need of learning how to deal with a changing social

explains to his best friend in a statement that winks at the author: “I’m a Jones, you see. ‘Slike a ‘Smith.’ We’re nobody...My father used to say: ‘We’re the chaff, boy, we’re the chaff.’....Good honest English stock” (84). But rather than nobody, I would argue that Archie’s averageness, combined with his ability to embrace his second chance, renders him something of an English Everyman, designed by Smith to represent the need of all citizens of Britain to break free from stagnant notions of British identity and adapt to a new way of living in a new England following the destruction of World War II, the breakdown of the British Empire, and the influx of Commonwealth immigrants into its former seat. Appropriately, in that sense, Archie’s second chance manifests itself immediately in his hasty marriage with Hortense’s daughter Clara and, subsequently, the birth of their daughter Irie.

Although Archie does not cease to be average, his second chance initiates a gradual shift in his life philosophy: one which leads him over the course of the novel to become what Elaine Childs calls the novel’s “moral barometer” (11) and puts him increasingly at odds with Marcus and his project. Far from seeking to eliminate randomness from his life, Archie, in fact, positively embraces it. Virtually incapable of rhetorical elegance or heady theoretical argumentation, Archie’s most notable characteristic is his tendency to make decisions, as small as whether or not to keep a coat rack or as large as whether or not to kill himself, by flipping a coin. In this sense, Archie lives in the present and relinquishes control over the future, essentially removing himself, and any hopes or anxieties he might harbor, from the equation. As E.M. Forster says in

culture (Archie Jones being, of course, more successful in this effort). In her essay “Dead Man Laughing,” Smith describes in detail sharing her father’s love of “great situation comedy” (239) of the “laugh-or-you’ll-cry genre” (252), a category into which *All in the Family* fits neatly.

the epigraph to the first section of the novel, labeled “Archie: 1974, 1975,” such hopes and anxieties are heavy burdens to bear in everyday life: “every little trifle, for some reason, does seem incalculably important today, and when you say of a thing that ‘nothing hangs on it,’ it sounds like blasphemy. There’s never any knowing...which of our actions, which of our idlenessness won’t have things hanging on it forever.”

Yet, Smith routinely undermines Archie’s coin-flipping strategy, as the results of the flips rarely determine the actual outcome of events. The 1974 coin flip deciding that Archie should commit suicide is overruled by the butcher’s self-interested intervention. Earlier in Archie’s life, but much later in the book, we find out that in the days immediately following the end of World War II, Dr. Perret (known at the time as Nazi scientist ‘Dr. Sick’) profited from the time it took Archie to flip a coin (Archie was being pressured to kill the doctor by a fellow soldier Samad as a way of doing something ‘heroic’ in the war, but he hesitated to commit what felt like murder) to steal Archie’s gun, shoot him in the leg, and escape. Finally, the following happens in 1992 when Archie attempts to flip a coin to resolve a conflict between now best friend Samad’s sons:

At some point in [the coin’s] triumphant ascension, it began to arc, and the arc went wrong, and Archibald realized that it was not coming back to him at all but going behind him, a fair way behind him, and he turned with the others to watch it complete an elegant swoop toward the pinball machine and somersault straight into the slot. Immediately the huge old beast lit up; the ball shot off and began its chaotic, noisy course around a labyrinth of swinging doors, automatic bats, tubes, and ringing bells....” (377)

While it may at first seem a superfluous, improbable detail, the fact that this coin flip terminates in the activation of a pinball machine is highly evocative when read in the light of Chaos.

Indeed, the fact that Smith describes the coin's path as 'chaotic' is serendipitous for, deliberately or not, in this passage, Smith has brought together two key images in the important work of Edward Lorenz, the unintentional founder of Chaos and discoverer of both the butterfly effect and the strange attractor. In a series of lectures delivered at the University of Washington,²⁴ Lorenz distinguishes Chaos from pure randomness through the repeated use of two representational theoretical models. He establishes the coin toss as the "paradigm for randomness" (6) and "the pinball machine" as the paradigm for chaos. The latter, he explains, is "one of those rare dynamical systems whose chaotic nature we can deduce by pure qualitative reasoning" (25) since the motion of the ball from one pin to the next is an exercise in sensitive dependence on initial conditions: its future trajectory is unpredictable yet determined by the precise angle at which it hits each pin. Whereas the coin flip simply divides the world into two equally probable possibilities, the pinball machine opens up a complex network of possibilities (i.e. the pins) which, at any given moment, give rise to probabilities that are both drastically different and ever-changing (with each hit of a pin).

Read in the light of Lorenz's understanding of the two systems, the moment the coin lands in the pinball machine heralds Archie's transition from a contented submission to randomness into a humble openness to the more complex web of cause and effect of chaos. Accordingly, this scene marks the last in the novel's chronological series of events where Archie attempts to make a decision by means of a coin flip. The next time we witness Archie in the midst of a decision-making process is when, at the FutureMouse

²⁴ Lorenz was invited to be a Jessie and John Danz lecturer in 1990 in order to explicate the exact nature of Chaos to a general audience. These lectures were published in book form under the title *The Essence of Chaos*.

conference, he simultaneously recognizes Dr. Perret as Dr. Sick and sees Millat, Magid's twin brother and a fundamentalist Muslim who objects to genetic engineering, aiming a gun at the doctor. At this moment, Smith notes that although "there is no coin to help" (442) Archie, he nevertheless takes the very decisive action of jumping in front of the bullet, saving the doctor's life, getting shot in the thigh, and crash landing on FutureMouse's glass case, which then breaks and allows FutureMouse to escape. Archie has therefore moved beyond the complacency of accepting his ultimate lack of control in a random universe to an understanding of his place—and his need to participate in—the complex web of human relations. The reader is left to speculate as to which was the stronger motivating factor: an impulse toward the sanctity of all life (even a Nazi's) or a reflexive desire to save Millat, his best friend's son, from all the consequences that would inevitably stem from murdering a man in cold blood.

In this way, FutureMouse's unpredictable destiny is determined in 1992 by its location in a chaotic chain of events emerging from the complex web of connections around Dr. Perret and Archie, dating back to 1945 at least. And thus FutureMouse, bearing the symbolic weight of the millennial anxieties of a whole cross-section of London society at the end of the 20th century, escapes into freedom and uncertainty at the novel's end. In this sense, the great mouse escape at the novel's end reads like a reworking of both the fixed happiness of conventional comic conclusions and the mournful philosophical conclusions reached by the speaker in Robert Burns' poem "To a Mouse." Regarding the latter, in which the speaker laments the accidental destruction of a mouse's nest but ultimately concludes that Mouse is more fortunate than Man in living unburdened by an awareness of the vagaries of fate (through memories of the past and

fears for the future), Smith directly alludes to the poem's most famous line in her final chapter's title: "Of Mice and Memory." However, when Archie smashes FutureMouse's glass case, the artificial 'nest' in which the mouse was to live for the duration of his life, and sends its occupant scattering, he indulges in celebration, not lamentation. Like the speaker of the poem, Archie feels a sense of kinship with the mouse, but it derives from the spirit of shared excitement. The last line of the novel reflects this: watching the mouse escape from the conference hall, Archie thinks to himself, "*Go on my son!*" (449).

This final thought is doubly emphasized: by its position and by the fact that it belongs to Archie, the novel's "moral barometer." The additional fact that this man-mouse interaction takes place at a community gathering in the "Exhibition Room" of the Perret Institute brings the conclusion into the realm of comic convention. Designed as a "clean slate... a new British room, a space for Britain, Britishness" (429), this space represents the "logical endpoint of a thousand years of spaces too crowded and bloody" (428), in that it gestures toward the desire for the untroubled blankness of a fresh start. In Northrop Frye's detailed description of this convention, the typical happy ending of a comedy involves not just the satisfaction of individual characters' desires but, more importantly, a shift "from one social center to another... one finally being judged as real and the other as illusory" (166): in other words, the conclusion is the jumping off point for an entire community's happy, perfect future. Several factors serve to ensure the solid basis of these happy futures. The new "social center" is generally oriented around a solid, central figure who rises to a position of authority and receives approbation for his new position from "as many people as possible" (165), including not just all right-thinking characters, who are usually gathered together in a communal celebration by the end of the

narrative, but even the audience. Additionally, the new society is purified by the performance of a “scapegoat ritual,” through which an overly troublesome and “irreconcilable” character who represents what was wrong with the previous social structure is expelled (165). In terms of Smith’s conclusion, Archie would serve as that solid central figure and FutureMouse as an inversion of the scapegoat ritual, as the mouse escapes regardless of the wishes of the majority, slipping “through the hands of those who wished to pin it down” (448) — i.e. derive meaning from it. It is thus FutureMouse, not society as a whole, who moves definitively from the “illusory” realities of the characters’ imaginings and into the “real” world of uncertainty and unknown possibility, with the community gathered there simply bearing witness to this shift. In terms of this community gathering, it is important to note that Smith unites her characters not in approbation but in discord, with some of them going to the conference reluctantly, others going in order to protest it, and most experiencing the thwarting of their most cherished plans while there. Smith then engages with the reading audience by evoking their likely expectation that her novel should end happily for all her main characters as a result of the events in ‘the final space.’ Although she provides sketches of what such happy endings might look like, she does so to acknowledge her readers’ expectations, but she stops short of fulfilling them. These sketches are merely “the *endgames*” that “must be played” (447) to satisfy various audience demographics in a probable “focus group” (448), gestures designed to make the reader aware that such endings are never anything more than a reflection of their own desires.

In this way, she portrays traditional comic structure as a “wicked lie, that the past is always tense and the future, perfect” and reaffirms instead the onward march of life

towards an imperfect future: after all, "like the independence of India, like the signing of peace treaties or the docking of passenger boats, the end is simply the beginning of an even longer story" (448). Comedy, for Smith, should be defined not by the happy conclusiveness of its ending but rather by its refusal to end--more 'life goes on' than 'all's well that ends well.' In her own conclusion, Smith thus opens her vision of pre-millennial London society to the world at large rather than allowing it to fold into itself in the manufactured neatness of the final space. In this, Smith joins her vision with Dash's understanding of the "*fin de siècle*" moment as post-apocalyptic: 'post' not because an apocalypse took place but rather because the expectation of its definitive conclusiveness has passed. In fact, this new kind of post-apocalyptic vision is incongruous with all "triumphalist" (Dash, "Eccentricities," 41) conclusions and looks instead to the subtler realities of ostensibly insignificant individuals whose actions are capable of causing far-reaching consequences. Indeed, Smith concludes her novel not by fixing her fictional world into regular, predictable shapes, but rather by opening it up to unpredictable, chaotic shapes created by the "constant, patient, inexorable unfolding" (35) of life in multicultural London at the dawn of the new millennium.

Chaotic Individualism in *La migration des cœurs*

If Marcus and Hortense act as agents of order in their separate but equally doomed pursuits of perfection in *White Teeth*, then Razyé, Condé's reboot of Brontë's Heathcliff in *La migration des cœurs*, would best be classified as an agent of entropy, a one-man dissolution crew intent on increasing disorder in the world around him. As he travels to Caribbean islands, from Guadeloupe to Cuba, Dominica, Marie-Galante, and

back, Razyé represents an amoral (and at times immoral) force of destruction. Neither colonial nor revolutionary, he burns poor villages in Cuba for the Spanish army during the War for Cuban Independence as readily as he joins the socialists in burning sugarcane fields in post-abolition Guadeloupe. In his personal life, he beats and ignores his children, abuses his wife, and gains his fortune by ruining others—rich plantation owners and struggling up-and-coming leftist politicians alike—at the card table; in short, he dedicates his life to toppling what others have built, without seeming to care about building anything of his own to replace it. Nor is he personally exempt from the decline of entropy, as he finishes his life at a relatively young age, thoroughly depleted. After years of failed attempts to contact his dear departed Cathy, he finds himself “fatigué de trainer [s]on corps partout où [il va]” (241).

Razyé’s disorderly narrative arc is worthy of such emphasis because the notion of disorder provides the necessary link between *Wuthering Heights* and *La migration des cœurs* and a likely reason why Condé turned to Brontë’s novel in the first place: that is, to rehabilitate and amplify what Francoise Lionnet calls the “revolutionary texture” (59) of *Wuthering Heights*. Whereas Virginia Woolf praises Brontë for the way she “looked out upon a world cleft into gigantic disorder and felt within her the power to unite it in a book,” implying that Brontë’s ultimate goal was not to celebrate but rather to restrain the disorder she saw, critics of *La migration des cœurs* tend to note the way disorder proliferates throughout Condé’s text—and even beyond it. In the disintegration of an orderly Epiphany procession “into a free-for-all” in the opening scene of the novel, Dawn Fulton discerns a “thematics of disorder that will characterize the novel as a whole” in addition to reflecting the New World condition (68). Carine Mardorossian interprets

Condé's wide-ranging characterizations of "the black Creole underclass" (56) in *La migration des cœurs*, which portray individuals whose loves and hatreds often thwart readers' expectations of how such characters should view the world, as an attempt to create a "kind of 'representational' disorder." Mardorossian suggests that Condé seeks to question "postcolonial reading strategies" that too easily equate granting subaltern characters a voice (i.e. access to narration) with granting them "agency" (57) to act as the representative of an oppressed minority.

In order to locate the overall importance of notions of disorder in Condé's vision, it is necessary to consider why Condé portrays Razyé as a character enmeshed in disorder of a specifically entropic kind, particularly in light of the argument she makes about the importance of disorder in her article "Order, Disorder, and Freedom, and the West Indian Writer." Originally published in 1993, this article presents Condé's firmly held belief that a writer must cultivate his or her individual vision first and foremost, with no regard for any sense of a collective writerly obligation to address agreed-upon social concerns or profess allegiance to social movements—whether they are as broadly international as postcolonial feminism or as regionally focused as Créolité. Considering its timing, her framing of this question of artistic freedom in terms of order and disorder is of particular interest. Her article appeared just as the tide of Chaos was rising in the Americas, propelled, as perhaps Condé herself was propelled, by the transformative potential of the millennial benchmark. As Françoise Lionnet writes, from the other side of this benchmark, in her 2002 analysis of *La migration des cœurs*: "with the dawning of a new millennium, we are at a liminal moment. It encourages the emergence of new paradigms and demands a pluritropic rather than monologic argument about the role of history and

memory, both during the early colonial forms of globalization and within contemporary cultural or discursive formations and economic conjunctures” (49). To this effect, a major component of the ‘new paradigm’ of Chaos was precisely the revaluation of a certain kind of disorder, determined to be neither incommensurate with order nor synonymous with confusion or randomness, but rather “a positive force in its own right” (Hayles 3). This revaluation is perhaps most prominently heralded through the adoption of the term ‘Chaos’ to designate this theory, the term’s new, specialized sense largely overturning ancient notions of chaos as void, absence, or formlessness.

In fact, this revaluation of disorder, which attracts authors such as Glissant to Chaos, resonates deeply with Condé’s 1993 article. While accounting for the appeal Chaos held for Edouard Glissant in the 1990s, J. Michael Dash notes that “[m]odern physics is used by Glissant to elaborate a theory of creative disorder that transcends earlier notions of abject dependency and the deadly equilibrium that is the inevitable result of static ideas of centre and periphery” (*Glissant* 176, my emphasis). Similarly, Condé sketches her own ‘theory of creative disorder’ in her article as a way to cure the “malaise” caused by the creativity-stifling “order” (151) of mainstream, male-centered Caribbean literature. She opens the “Disorder” section of the piece with the following observation: “in a Bambara myth of origin, after the creation of the earth, and the organization of everything on its surface, disorder was introduced by a woman. Disorder meant the power to create new objects and to modify the existing ones. In a word, disorder meant creativity” (160). Although she attributes her vision of ‘creative disorder’ to Bambara myth, a very different source of inspiration than Glissant’s, the fact that both authors suggest a similar reevaluation of disorder suggests an implicit connection, in

keeping with Hayles's notion of archipelagos of thought. Likewise, it is conceivably a similar impulse that led Carine Mardorossian to conclude that *La migration des cœurs* contributes to the “salutary and fertile ‘disorder’ that Condé brings to creolization and Créolité” (58), discourses which fail, in Mardorossian’s view, to transcend old forms of categorization regarding race, gender, and ethnicity.

Considering the significance of disorder in Condé's pre-millennial thought, the question then remains of how, precisely, *La migration des cœurs*, a novel that both directly follows her “Order, Disorder...” article and reworks the Romantic ideals of *Wuthering Heights*, contributes to the discussion. Reading Condé’s work through the lens of Chaos shows how Condé turns the latent disorder in Brontë’s novel into the potential for this new kind of creative disorder, a potential that suggests new ways of inheriting the past while cultivating freedom in the present.

To distinguish the potential for creative disorder in Condé’s novel from the unproductive disorder which is explicitly present, one must look beyond Razyé and his entropic quagmires. In fact, one could frame Razyé’s tendency to land in these quagmires as the inevitable result of his inability to exist in the realm of creative disorder. He aims too high and then falls too low to land in this middle term because his attempts to destroy the lives of everyone around him are nothing more than consolation for his inability to achieve his true goal: perfect, eternal union with Cathy. In every way, Razyé seeks endpoints and finality, whether in the form of his nemesis Aymeric de Linsseuil’s ruin or in the romantic gesture of asking to be buried alongside Cathy. In a maudlin moment characteristic of Razyé’s post-Cathy life, Razyé expresses his yearning for the sense of closure and completion that death provides. Even as he races to set fire to

Aymeric's sugarcane fields, the culmination of his mission of vengeance, Razyé is more focused on a passing funeral procession because it reminds him of how much "il enviait toujours ceux qui avait fini leur temps" (153). However, if it is closure he seeks through death, he is destined for disappointment. As we are told both by a living Irmine (Razyé's wife) and an already deceased Cathy, fantasies of afterlife reunions, symbolized by gestures like side-by-side burials, are mere tricks to obscure the reality of our inevitable solitude: in Cathy's words, a side-by-side burial is a "réunion tardive" that "ne servira de rien" (98). Razyé's subsequent experience of the afterlife confirms the extent to which his inability to shake free of his imagined union with Cathy holds him back from following his individual destiny. In a posthumous visit to his son Genghis, Razyé's spirit complains that the afterlife is worse than his life was. Still alone and "fatigué," he additionally feels overwhelmed by a sense of purposelessness; "ne sa[chant] plus s'[il] atten[d]" a posthumous reunion with Cathy, he is stuck following an endless, circular path that always leads him back "au même point" (279).²⁵ Furthermore, much as his hopes are undermined in death, so is his legacy diminished among the living. Once he is dead, his former community, full of people who used to fear him as an almost supernatural figure capable of destroying them, works to "rabort[er]" his reputation until "[lui] qui de son vivant avait touché au moins les deux mètres de hauteur ne mesurait plus que quelques centimètres" (268).

In this, Condé clearly distinguishes Razyé from Heathcliff. Whereas Razyé is slowly drained of life as his interest in vengeance, certainty of a reunion with Cathy in

²⁵ Characterized by the fatigue of ambivalent waiting and eternal returns to the same point, Razyé's afterlife takes on a distinctly Beckettian quality that furthers his association with mid-century modernist concerns (more entropic than chaotic) that the novel struggles to move beyond.

the afterlife, and even desire to eat diminished, Heathcliff gains in energy and excitement as he approaches the end of his life. His refusal to eat results not from a dwindling appetite—quite the contrary—but from a strong desire to hasten the culmination of his most cherished desire. Heathcliff realizes that he has been thwarted in the social realm by the budding romance between Hareton and Catherine, which he terms, observing the couple with the detachment and insight of a Greek chorus, an “absurd termination to [his] violent exertions” (295). Such detachment, however, is possible only because his appetite for revenge has been almost totally supplanted by the sudden, dramatic increase in his faith in a supernatural reunion with Cathy. Although the instances of haunting remain, from the reader’s perspective, in the ambiguous realm of the Todorovian *fantastique*, as they invariably blend with characters’ dreams or occur in secondhand accounts, Heathcliff fully believes that Cathy’s ghost has finally returned to visit him. At one point, Nelly is startled to observe his eyes moving about the room and “gaz[ing] at something within two yards’ distance [that] communicated, apparently, both pleasure and pain in exquisite extremes” (302). This new development arising after twenty years of waiting gets Heathcliff quite literally wound up with a potential energy just waiting to be released: “his frame shivering, not as one shivers with chill or weakness, but as a tight-stretched cord vibrates—a strong thrilling, rather than trembling” (299). In this way, Brontë presents Heathcliff’s death as a positive transformation brought about by a great expenditure of energy—a type of passionate apotheosis, perhaps—rather than a wasting away of body and soul.

Accordingly, Heathcliff’s death, and more particularly Nelly’s narration of Heathcliff’s death, is tightly wound together with the generally satisfying conclusion of

the novel. Although the novel is hardly a comedy in the traditional sense, *Wuthering Heights*' conclusion nevertheless conforms to several of Frye's comic conventions.²⁶ After all, it promises a happy, harmonious ending for Hareton and Catherine that signals, in turn, the onset of a happy, harmonious era for the residents of the Heights and the Grange, with Nelly offering her uncategorical approbation of their union as she contentedly forecasts their wedding ("I shall envy no one on their wedding day: there won't be a happier woman than myself in England!" (289)). Moreover, this promise of a new society is made more plausible through a type of scapegoat ritual wherein Heathcliff, the "irreconcilable" character who created obstacles along the way that kept the now happy couple apart, is expelled from the new society as it begins to take shape.²⁷ Or, rather, in an inversion of the scapegoat ritual, one might say he makes society his scapegoat and expulses it by detaching himself entirely from the earthly plane, consciously allowing his "soul's bliss to kill [his] body" (304) in pursuit of his own happy ending. Thus, Brontë concludes her novel by providing a way for readers to experience (or at least envision) closure through perfection on two levels, if one chooses to believe the little boy who claims he saw a ghostly "Heathcliff, and, a woman [i.e. Cathy, by implication], yonder, under t'Nab" (307), presumably enjoying their private

²⁶ I would also argue that the Cathy-Hareton conclusion begins to move toward an authentically comic tone, as one sign of Heathcliff's waning power over the world of the Grange and the Heights (as he turns his attention more fully toward the supernatural) is the re-emergence of laughter in his household. More specifically, Cathy's initial mockery of Hareton evolves into affectionate teasing until she is comfortable enough to tease him at the dinner table—in front of Heathcliff. When Hareton fails to smother a laugh, Heathcliff (unable even to imagine that Hareton could have been the one laughing) snaps at Cathy, saying "I thought I had cured you of laughing!" (290)

²⁷ In an intriguing analysis that focuses almost entirely on the socio-political realms in both Brontë's novel and Condé's, to the exclusion of the spiritual realm, Vinay Swamy reads the ultimate exclusion of Heathcliff and his genetic legacy from the world of the novel in racial terms, seeing the Grange/Heights society as a microcosm of the British Empire striving to protect itself from "the threat of miscegenation—the ultimate enemy for those in search of purity as evidence of, and imperative for, superiority" (64).

paradise of eternal togetherness, far from the heaven “of others that is altogether unvalued and uncoveted” by them (305).

Whereas Heathcliff’s potentially perfect death signals the literal closure of *Wuthering Heights*, *La migration des cœurs* goes on well after Razyé’s entropic death, which occurs in the middle of the novel’s Part III. This sense of continuation is ironically underscored in the title of the chapter that concludes that part, “En guise de premier épilogue,” in which Irmine realizes that Razyé’s recent death was not a cataclysmic end but merely the end of an interruption: “une parenthèse” in her life that “s’était refermée” (289). A single epilogue already suggests that the apparent conclusion is not really the end, but a ‘first’ epilogue, implying there will be more than one, renders the entire notion of endings absurd, especially when this first epilogue is located forty-six pages before the actual end of the novel. By representing Razyé’s death as a significant point of departure from Brontë’s source text, Condé simultaneously undermines, in an extra-textual sense, the notion of closure for the reader and, in an intra-textual sense, Razyé’s vision of the world, in terms of both his aspirations and his disappointments.

It is because of the particular way the novel unfolds around and past Razyé, that Chaos becomes a useful way to elucidate the emergence of creative disorder, or at least the potential for its emergence, in Condé’s vision. In mathematical models, a system is determined to be chaotic if it exhibits certain behaviors when it is iterated, where we understand iteration to occur when “the output of one calculation [serves] as input for the next” (Hayles 153) to create a feedback loop. A non-chaotic system will exhibit regular behavior when iterated, conforming to such predictable behavior as converging on a single point, for instance, or regularly oscillating between two points, patterns which,

once the systems settle into them, fully determine the systems' future. These patterns are called 'attractors.' A chaotic system, however, will neither exhibit such regular behavior nor repeat itself exactly, with its outputs varying widely when even slight changes are made to its initial input. In this way its behavior remains largely unpredictable. At the same time, however, chaotic systems can also, when iterated, produce output that forms a certain kind of highly complex pattern called a strange attractor. As Hayles explains: "chaos theory would not have attracted the attention it has if it simply confirmed the obvious, that chaos is disordered. No: what makes it noteworthy is the discovery of order in the midst of disorder...If a system is not a strange attractor—if it is simply disordered and nothing more—[chaos theorists] consider it a 'featureless blob' of no interest [qtd in Feigenbaum, 56]" (216). As Lorenz explains, "a strange attractor, when it exists, is truly the heart of a chaotic system" (50). Indeed, the strange attractor is also 'at the heart' of Chaos' characteristic paradox—that it describes behavior that is at once "patterned" and "unpredictable" (Hayles 216) — because its shape is a fractal, a figure with non-integer (i.e. fractional) dimensions that doesn't conform to the smooth shapes of Euclidean geometry. It is important to note that while strange attractors are generally characterized by self-similarity, such that small sections of the figure may resemble its overall shape,²⁸ they never fold back on themselves to retrace their earlier steps.

To illuminate the relationship between *La migration des cœurs* and the concept of the strange attractor, one must begin by considering the interpretive interaction between Condé and *Wuthering Heights* as iterations of a literary system, with each successive reading of the novel informed by the preceding one to create a kind of feedback loop.

²⁸ A naturally occurring, and often cited, example of this is branches of a tree, which often mimic the shape of the tree as a whole.

Hayles imagines a similar kind of feedback loop in her analysis of Chaotic narrative structures in Stanislaw Lem's *The Cyberiad*: "literature—indeed, language itself—is engaged in a feedback loop in which articulating an idea changes the context, and changing the context affects the way the idea is understood, which in its turn leads to another idea, so that text and context evolve together in a constantly modulating interaction" (Hayles 128). Although Hayles refers broadly to a "context" evolving and interacting with a text, her insight seems most relevant to chaotic systems if one imagines instead a singular reader funneling these evolving ideas into an interpretation of that text. In "A Conversation at Princeton," Condé describes Emily Brontë as a strong early influence, a point she illustrates by highlighting the repetitive nature of her reading of Brontë's novel: "Someone gave me *Wuthering Heights* as a gift, or maybe it was a prize at school. I spent an entire rainy season reading and rereading it until I knew it by heart" (4). When, in the 1990's, Condé decided not only to re-read the novel but also to rewrite it (one might recall here the etymologic relationship between iteration and reiteration, i.e. a renewing through repeated expression), her reading of the novel resulted in *La migration des cœurs*, a manifestation of her interpretation of *Wuthering Heights*.

In the same way a textual interpretation may be said to act as an overall picture of a text (its nature and meaning) that emerges over the course of many readings, an attractor, "be it strange or not," serves as a mechanism for representing a "global picture of the long-term behavior of a dynamical system" (Eckmann and Ruelle 373). In that sense, one can read *La migration des cœurs* as a strange attractor that formed over time through the process of Condé's interpretations of Brontë's novel. In this way, I

emphasize Condé's originality against assertions that her novel is overly derivative.²⁹ In addition, this reading addresses a critique of literary cannibalism, a practice that greatly intrigued Condé at the time she was writing *La migration des cœurs* and which she has described as a "magical appropriation of the literature of the other" (*Césaire* 62). Nicole Simek argues that Condé "put[s] into question the value of literary cannibalism" in her novel *Histoire de la femme cannibal* (2003): "the subversive dimension of cannibalism is itself easily subverted. The agency claimed by the cannibal artist quickly slips away as her works are devoured by the public" (114). A chaotic rewrite, however, sidesteps any question of hierarchy in favor of a focus on self-similarity: where the relationship between two texts (whether one is discussing interpretations of Brontë or of Condé) is created by the reoccurrence of shapes, islands of meaning, that suggest a kind of integrity even as their context evolves.

In terms of the specific structure of *La migration des cœurs*, Condé has opened the enclosed and relatively inert shape of Brontë's novel³⁰ into a something more like a fractal. She has created a complex narrative that loosely gathers together individual paths which, although occasionally 'attracted' into similar regions as each other, bending and flowing together for a time or in a particular space, follow their own distinct trajectory.

²⁹ For instance, to demonstrate the extent to which Condé likes to defy expectations (here, of what defines innovative writing), Bishopal Limbu notes that *La migration des cœurs* has likely had a "lukewarm" reception from critics because it "not only 'cop[ies]' an already existing text, it also seems to reproduce, somewhat belatedly, an already existing textual strategy," (Limbu, 151) i.e. the postcolonial rewriting of canonical texts.

³⁰ Dorothy van Ghent argues that the principle of order in *Wuthering Heights* derives not so much from the harmonious conclusion as from the "Chinese Box" structure created by two layers of narrative perspectives, Nelly Dean's and Lockwood's, that "limit" the disorder at the heart of the story with "the restrictive reality of civilized habits, manners, and codes" (Van Ghent, *English Novel*, 157). I would simply suggest that without the peaceful conclusion (which is, of course, mediated through these two narrative perspectives-- at least one of which is rather strained, as John E. Jordan illustrates through an analysis of Lockwood's patent unreliability in "The Ironic Vision of Emily Brontë"), the natural energy of Heathcliff and Cathy seems capable of overwhelming these restrictions.

In part through this affiliation with the shape of a strange attractor, Condé's novel offers a definitive rebuttal both to (Brontë's) Cathy's famous declaration of total identification with Heathcliff ("Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff"; 74) and to what Swamy, relying on Leo Bersani's reading of the genetic conservatism represented by the novel's path toward the coupling of cousins Catherine and Hareton, describes as an iterative process that has settled down into its final, non strange, state: the "closing [of a] loop in a perfect repetition" (64) geared toward "the consolidation of the Earnshaw family unit ([Bersani] 199)" (63). By contrast, Condé critiques the notion that two individual trajectories can ever resolve themselves finally into a single space (or a simple attractor), whether in the physical, social, or spiritual realm. Moreover, Condé amplifies Brontë's romantic individualism—in which individual desires supersede social customs³¹ and passionate yearning transcends the corporeal realm, such that the couple's spiritual connection trumps the attempts of reason, culture, and material existence to contain it³²-- to highlight the risks of subsuming the self not only to society but also to the idea of passionate union with another person. Reformulating signature moments from Brontë's work, Condé overtly underscores the erroneous nature of notions of transcendent union, both in life and in death, from positions of relatively strong textual authority: namely, the ruminations of a dead woman (Cathy) at her own funeral and the assessment of the third-

³¹ Robert Kiely, who calls *Wuthering Heights* a "masterpiece of English romantic fiction" (233), praises Brontë for "achiev[ing] with unmatched success the aim of every romantic novelist" by creating a novel whose "extraordinary originality and power... come from its presentation of the private life which communal rules cannot touch" (250). One might also recall here the individualistic nature of Heathcliff and Cathy's vision of Heaven, which included no one but themselves.

³² As Dorothy van Ghent notes in "The Window Figure and the Two-Children Figure in *Wuthering Heights*," the "unnaturalness and impossibility of [Heathcliff and Cathy's] mating... can be construed in physical and human terms only by destruction of personality bounds, by rending of flesh, and at last by death" (196).

person narrator. Whereas Brontë's Cathy asserts emphatically that she is Heathcliff, Condé's Cathy apostrophises Razyé, ruefully musing that although she used to believe she was 'one' with him ("j'avais l'impression que j'étais toi"), she now knows she has lost him forever ("je t'ai perdu. À jamais"; 96) and must therefore go her own way. Similarly, whereas Heathcliff dies smiling ("girning at death," according to Joseph), with his eyes open in what Nelly Dean characterizes as a "frightful, life-like gaze of exultation" (306) that suggests once again that death was Heathcliff's means to a desired end, Razyé's expression in death reinforces both the helpless persistence of his attempts to find Cathy in death (il a "vainement tenté") and the inevitable futility of these attempts ("discerner l'indiscernable"): "ses yeux appaurent grands ouverts, écarquillés comme s'il avait vainement tenté de discerner l'indiscernable" (267).

By contrast, and in a dramatic departure from Brontë, the deceased Cathy accepts relatively early in the novel that she must follow her own path in death as she did in life. In a post-mortem apostrophe to Razyé, Cathy shares an insight that lends a strong sense of irony to all of Razyé's subsequent attempts to contact her via spiritual guides: death, she tells him, is a "migration sans retour" (95), a one-way trip naturally antithetical to the concept of reunions. This assertion gathers strength through its connection with the novel's title, the notion of 'migration' (particularly when 'hearts,' the seat of romantic love and the concomitant attachment, are doing the migrating) suggesting in both cases Condé's emphasis on potentially ongoing movement and separation, and her de-emphasis on visions of settled or fixed relationships. In this way, Condé writes *La migration des cœurs* as an ode to a dynamic brand of individualism powered by constant implacable

movement forward in unique and separate directions and away from any notion of an imagined, pre-ordained soul mate or recapturing of a perfect past.

Thus, like the various trajectories that form a strange attractor, the paths Condé's characters follow are individual and forward-moving. Also like the strange attractor, however, these individual trajectories, while never permanently joining with each other, are not entirely isolated from each other either. The development of the self, therefore, should not necessarily be exercised in what Dawn Fulton, through an enlightening analysis of Cathy II and Razyé II's unwillingness to open questions about various aspects of their family past that are begging to be asked, calls "self-imposed ignorance" (72) of possible connections with their past. Condé drives this point home quite memorably through her reworking of Brontë's incest motif, which, as Fulton illustrates by sketching a trail through scholarship on *Wuthering Heights* (67, 75-6), is considered a contributor to the "dynamics of enclosure" (67) at work in the novel. In Condé's vision, however, the presence, or threat, of incest need not operate precisely as a restrictive similarity that contracts, or otherwise function in a way that is entirely incompatible with expansiveness, newness, and individuality. Rather, it simply stands as an ultimately irrepressible sign of our complex connections with the past that must be grappled with in order to make movement forward possible.

Cathy II (daughter of Cathy and, ostensibly, Aymeric) and Razyé II (son of Aymeric's sister Irmine and Razyé) are two characters who literally attempt to migrate away from their families and backgrounds by moving from Guadeloupe to Marie-Galante, where they meet and fall in love. Seizing upon the freedom granted by a new context, both Cathy II and Razyé II distance themselves from unpleasant and complicated

aspects of their past, namely, their connections, both acknowledged and unacknowledged, with Razyé, in favor of simplified or invented versions of their heritage. Razyé II lives under an assumed name, lying about his family and hiding from his father, while Cathy II selectively chooses details from her family's past to recognize, focusing on her grief for her beloved father Aymeric and hatred for Razyé (whom she blamed for Aymeric's death) while entirely ignoring rumors that her biological father was actually Razyé.³³

Fulton describes this kind of refusal of acknowledgement on the part of the novel's second generation as a manifestation of their "incest anxiety" (76), which, in addition to referring to the general sense of incest as a taboo, more precisely connotes the characters' fear of both the overly stultifying and reductive nature of "excessive...resemblance" (78) and the vulnerability created by acknowledgement of it. But in Condé's world, unpleasant complications from the past can't be ignored, and breached taboos always rise to the surface. Not only do these complications literally follow them to Marie Galante when Rayzé travels there to confront Razyé II (although he comes face-to-face with Cathy II for the first time instead), but they also implicitly follow them through the prospect of Cathy's pregnancy. As far as an "incest anxiety" that leads the characters to shy away from confronting the taboo-breaching truth, Condé leaves her readers with no such option. In fact, from Part III to the final page of the novel, starting around the time of Razyé's decline and death, Condé prods the reader with a constant stream of allusions to Cathy's uncertain paternity and the consequent transgression of the taboo against brother-sister incest her relationship with Razyé II represents.

³³ Note that in addition to raising the possibility of Cathy and Razyé having a child (Cathy II), Condé also alters the incest narrative in Brontë's text by essentially switching the roles of Hareton and Linton, such that it is Razyé's son who is hale, hearty, and likely to survive long term.

For the most part unspoken in the world of the text, occurring in narrative representations of characters' inner thoughts or subtle textual jokes, these increasingly heavy-handed allusions create an irony for the reader alone to appreciate. Once it has been clearly established in the novel that Razyé is likely Cathy II's father, Condé makes playful use of verbal juxtapositions and double meaning to create the written equivalent of a wink. When Cathy II's servant Romaine recalls the few topics Cathy would repeatedly discuss with her, Condé presents Romaine's mental list as a sentence fragment separating the topics by commas, the first of which creates a momentary hitch in the reading process: "elle n'avait dans sa tête que peu de sujets de réflexion. Toujours les mêmes. Le souvenir de *son papa, Razyé* qui, d'après ce qu'elle soutenait, avait raccourci sa vie..." (243, my emphasis). This was followed a few lines later by the following sentence with a clear double meaning: "parler de son papa l'amenait [Cathy II] à parler de Razyé" (243). In a second textual juxtaposition, Condé makes playful use of the local term for a nun—"ma-soeur"—even as Cathy II is lying on her deathbed. While speaking to a virtually unconscious and uncomprehending Cathy II, Razyé II takes it upon himself to interpret the smile that chanced to pass across her face as a sign that she had figured out, without him telling her, that Razyé was his father, and she had forgiven him for lying about it. Swelling with positive feeling, Razyé II decides to tell her how important she is to him, despite his recent lack of passion for her. When he explains to her that he now realizes that they are "liés l'un à l'autre au-delà de la passion," meaning, ostensibly, that their love is deeper than lust, the reader hears an ironic reminder of their complicated genetic ties. Condé then immediately reinforces that reminder by introducing the following character into the scene: "À ce moment, une *ma-soeur* s'approcha" (307, italics)

in the original). In an earlier passage that reads as both an utterly groan-worthy nod to their shared genetic heritage and something of a parody of the excessive nature of young love (including a bit of a jab at the original Cathy and Razyé's sense of 'oneness,' here rendered as "fusion"), Condé describes the early days of Cathy II's and Razyé's mutual but as yet unspoken attraction:

Parfois, les mots tremblaient sur leurs lèvres, mais ils les retenaient, car ils avaient la conviction partagée...qu'ils étaient faits l'un pour l'autre, comme si le même sang coulait dans leurs veines, qu'ils étaient proches comme un frère et soeur séparés à la naissance et qu'il leur suffisait d'attendre sans se presser le moment inévitable de leur complète fusion. (259-60)

The effects of these repeated references are two-fold: initially they may be experienced by the reader as a constant renewal of his or her own 'anxiety' about the taboo of incest but eventually, by dint of the frequency of these reminders, the reader's response becomes one of amusement³⁴—and perhaps frustration at the discrepancy between Condé's willingness to prod unspoken truths and the characters' inability to recognize or give voice to these same issues. This is especially true in light of the oft-remarked fact that both Cathy II and Razyé II look a great deal like Razyé, and thus like each other as well. When the people of Roseau first see the couple, who have just migrated to Dominica, they take them "pour un frère et sa soeur à cause de la grande

³⁴ Here, Condé's use of humor differs greatly from Brontë's. As John Jordan asserts, *Wuthering Heights* begins with a fairly classic comic scenario, i.e. the 'fish out of water' representing a clashing of two worlds (here "the city slicker [Lockwood] in the haunted house" (5). Humor results from the kinds of misunderstandings caused by a confident person lacking self-awareness (again, Lockwood) being humbled by his inability to understand that the social rules he is used to don't necessarily apply in his new environment. For example, in a gentlemanly attempt to charm the attractive young woman he meets in Heathcliff's household, Lockwood "innocently asks young Cathy if 'her favorites' are among a furry heap which he takes to be kittens but which turns out to be a pile of dead rabbits" (6-7). This humor serves as a way of shaking up reader expectations for normal behavior and highlighting the contrast between Lockwood (a more familiar character type) and Heathcliff (an anti-social, unfamiliar type) before leading into some of the more troubling aspects of the novel. By contrast, Condé's humor evolves slowly over the course of the novel, increasing in tandem with the unfolding of certain unpleasant realities.

resemblance qu'il y avait entre eux" and it is only her pregnancy that makes them 'realize' "qu'ils étaient dans l'erreur" (296). Similarly, when Romaine sees Razyé on Marie-Galante, she suddenly realizes that "la ressemblance qui la tracassait tellement depuis qu'elle se louait chez Cathy c'était avec lui! Avec lui!" but then quickly tells herself that it is "folie pure et simple" (250) to think that Aymeric's daughter looks like Razyé. Finally, a few pages from the end of the novel, Razyé II is surprised when his mother notes that his daughter Anthuria is the "portrait" of Razyé because "il avait toujours pensé qu'Anthuria était le portrait de Cathy" (331).

Their collective inability to recognize all three angles of this triangular reflection simultaneously – especially when the evidence is literally right before their eyes— becomes all the more absurd in light of the transgressive guilt Razyé II seems to feel instinctively. By way of explaining to himself why his passion for Cathy II has faded, Razyé II cites not only the stress he feels about hiding his true identity but also "la sensation sacrilège" he experiences during love-making "d'êtreindre un autre lui-même, curieusement changé en femme. Il en était venu à la considérer comme une soeur" (297). This unnamed sense of guilt weighs on Razyé II even to the extent that he starts to think that Cathy II's death might be the result of some kind of cosmic justice: either Aymeric taking revenge on his 'daughter' for marrying his enemy's son or for something more nebulous: "d'autres fois il se disait qu'elle expiait une faute plus grave qu'elle aurait commise sans le savoir," which supposition he follows by asking himself the now richly ironic question, "Laquelle?" (308) Razyé II's sense of guilt extends even to his unborn daughter, whose birth he initially hoped against, "tant il était persuadé qu'en perpétuant la vie ils avaient enfreint un ordre redoutable et très ancien" (299). By showing the

extent to which Cathy II and, especially, Razyé II are burdened by their parental pasts, Condé highlights the power the past holds over them despite their attempts to either conceal or refuse to acknowledge its more unpalatable aspects. As such, their refusal to address the past in its full complexity is nearly as detrimental as Razyé's obsessive need to recapture his past with Cathy.

Into this atmosphere thick with hushed speculation and guilt (for the characters) and irony (for the reader), Condé casually introduces a new, matter-of-fact perspective that provides a striking counterpoint to the main characters' angst. While watching Cathy II exit his church, a bishop in Roseau reflects on the rumors surrounding her. But, in the narrator's words, "le révérend Bishop était de ceux que sa ressemblance [i.e. celle de Cathy II] avec Premier-Né [Razyé II's alter ego] ne dérangeait pas trop" (303). Such a simple assertion, especially when voiced by a religious figure from whom one might expect a vigorous condemnation of those suspected of breaking an "ordre redoutable et très ancien" (299), draws a straight line through the unspoken assumptions and fears of the other characters. Moreover, the bishop's subsequent thoughts about history and identity in a new world context provide an interpretative direction for readers trying to make sense of Condé's use of increasingly ironic repetition to emphasize the absurdity of characters' attempts to avoid confronting the inescapable question of incest directly:

si ses vingt années de Roseau lui avaient appris une chose, c'était que de l'humus tropical sortaient des sociétés aux racines et aux branches tellement entrelacées, torsadées, amarrées les unes aux autres qu'on pouvait très bien se surprendre à aimer d'amour et partager la couche d'un demi-frère ou d'un cousin germain inconnu. En outre, dans chacun des habitants des sangs semblables d'Africain, d'Européen et de Zindien s'étaient mélangés en proportions à peu près égales. Aussi, rien ne pouvait surprendre. (303)

In the bishop's interpretation (one that, like the other allusions to incest, is not shared out loud with anyone in the world of the text), the potentially incestuous nature of Cathy II and Razyé II's relationship is not a cause for particular angst or self-recrimination. Rather, the unexpectedly incestuous aspect of their relationship is a logical possibility given the complex circumstances of colonization. Moreover, this possibility can be accepted once it is acknowledged as a historical fact, just as the sense of the unexpected is normalized within this passage. Awareness of complexity (quite distinct from comprehensive knowledge of it) guards against the shock of unpleasant surprises: i.e. "rien ne pouvait surprendre." In this view, therefore, similarity (in the form of incest and racial mixing) becomes a manifestation of the unpredictability naturally unfolding from the complexity of roots (and not, as in *Wuthering Heights*, a restrictive mechanism designed to hold complexity at bay).

In some ways, the bishop's vision of the culture of Dominica speaks almost anachronistically to late twenty-first century attempts to describe the tangled roots of Caribbean culture and identity (imagery of the mangrove, in particular) and to discourses on Chaos: the latter in terms of the emphasis on unpredictability, in the tension he outlines between disorder ("racines...torsadées") and pattern ("sangs semblables...en proportions à peu près égales"). That which Benítez-Rojo's 'repeating island' represents on first a national, then a regional, and finally a global scale, the bishop brings down to an individual level, that is, the proliferation of a kind of similarity amidst change and complexity.

Also significant about the bishop's analysis is the way it shifts from "sociétés" to "habitants," with incestuous relationships representing the expression, on an individual

scale, of society-scale complexity. This semi-metonymic relationship, where similarity exists across different scales, speaks to the aesthetic order of the strange attractor.

Whereas the aesthetic principle of bilateral symmetry, such as that demonstrated by the Earnshaw-Linton family tree,³⁵ emphasizes a kind of similarity that creates a sense of balance, regularity, and, often, closure, the fractal self-similarity instead suggests expansiveness. With self-similarity, similarity is not reflected back in a mirror image, but rather it propagates across different scales. As Edward Lorenz explains, fractals tend to be self-similar, such that, as in the particularly interesting cases of naturally occurring statistical self-similarity, “small pieces, when magnified...will have the same general type of appearance” as the system as a whole” (171), and, by extension, as the adjacent scales. It is in part this notion of dynamic similarity that attracted Benítez-Rojo to Chaos when he was developing his ‘repeating island’ concept and inspired Glissant to develop the concept of “les réalités fractales...des cultures en interaction” (*Traité* 215) on scales ranging from the individual to the global.

In light of the particularly complex, and even overdetermined, nature of the historical ties in *La migration des cœurs* that link individual characters to larger narrative scales, self-similarity presents a useful means of envisioning how the individual can connect with the larger scales of history and culture without sacrificing his or her right to self-determination. When looking across the narrative scales of the text, from authorial context, to narration, to non-narrating characters, one particular figure reoccurs: that of the “aïeule bambara.” Appearing several times in the novel to refer generally to various

³⁵ Vanay Swamy presents a diagram that clearly displays the visual harmony of these relationships, observing that “the symmetry of the family tree [in *Wuthering Heights*] is achieved only by rejecting the intrusion of the (racial) other—Heathcliff” (Swamy 64).

characters' African descent, "aïeule bambara" is a strikingly specific and significant descriptor, especially in light of the emphasis Condé places on the "Bambara myth of origin" in which the first woman on earth, the ultimate "aïeule," derives the power to create from the dissemination of disorder ("Order, Disorder, and Freedom...").

On the level of narration, Lucinda Lucius, one of several character-narrators in the novel but one of only two narrators granted two consecutive narrative segments, occupies a position of relative significance. As Cathy's servant following her marriage with Aymeric, Lucinda offers a perspective akin to Nelly Dean's³⁶ on such pivotal moments as Cathy and Razyé's emotional final meeting and Cathy's death. Significantly, quite unlike Nelly Dean, Lucinda frames the narration of her time with Cathy in terms of the dramatic intersection of their two lives, which represented, for Lucinda, the potential interruption of the unending repetition of the same. The heritage of degradation that ties her family to Aymeric's estate, Belles-Feuilles, has ensured "depuis des temps et des temps" that the women in her family all meet the same destiny. While most generations in her family therefore merge indistinguishably into each other—Lucinda asserts that she doesn't know "grand-chose de [s]es ancêtres, si ce n'est qu'elles peinèrent, souffrirent et moururent sur ce domaine où moi-même je peine et je souffre et où je vais mourir," (73) — one generation stands out. She traces this lineage of repetitive female suffering back to the original, tragic rupture of one ancestor wrenched away from a prosperous future (part of

³⁶ Together with other domestic worker-narrators, notably Nelly Raboteur, the first character-narrator, Lucinda Lucius represents part of a fragmented version of Nelly Dean, whose knowledge of the story's events is also, therefore, partial and incomplete when compared with Brontë's narrator. In fact, Lucinda was brought in to replace Nelly Raboteur by Aymeric precisely because, according to Cathy's brother Justin, she knew too much (55) about Cathy's past, a suggestion that lends support to Mardorossian's analysis about the contrast between the potential empowerment suggested by so many narrators and the actuality of their lack of real-world agency (49-52). Taking this analysis one step further, in fact, one might say that, in this case, additional narrators are in fact the direct result of Nelly Raboteur's lack of agency.

which involved her anticipated marriage to “un noble de la maison Diarra”) in Africa and condemned instead to the regulating system of Belles-Feuilles where life converges on the single point of suffering as it repeats itself. Lucinda reflects feelingly on the story of “Fankora, [s]on aïeule Bambara,” who was captured and forced onto a slave ship where she was raped and impregnated en route to Guadeloupe. Although the circumstances under which Cathy leaves her home are dramatically different, her removal from the relative freedom of l’Engoulvent where she indulged her unconventional passion with Razyé to the monotony of Belles-Feuilles and her unsatisfying marriage with Aymeric seems to resonate with the story of Fankora. Indeed, the reader is prompted to make such a comparison by the similarity between Lucinda’s account of female suffering at Belles-Feuilles since Fankora’s time and Cathy’s brother’s strangely penetrating description of Cathy’s mindset at her wedding only pages earlier (which description shortly follows our first introduction to Lucinda). Sounding much more like an omniscient third-person narrator than a drunken brother talking to his arch nemesis, Justin offers Razyé the following ruminations on the unending plight of women from a shockingly universalizing, proto-feminist perspective: “Sous les chandeliers de cristal, elle valsait avec Aymeric sur un plancher que des générations d’esclaves, ses ancêtres, avaient poli....Car le domaine des Belles-Feuilles était rempli de soupirs et de peines de femmes noires, mulâtres, blanches, unies dans la même sujétion....Et, discernant ces plaintes et ces soupirs sous les échos de la fête nuptiale, Cathy comprenait qu’elle prenait place de son plein gré dans une longue procession de victims.” (56-7). For all its lack of verisimilitude and reckless equation of suffering that cuts blithely across class and race, regardless even of the singularity of slavery, Justin’s assessment of Cathy’s mindset is

perhaps most notable for its emphasis on the fact that, quite unlike Fankora, Cathy conforms to this destiny of feminine suffering entirely by choice, “de son plein gré.” More precisely, she is actively choosing to smother her widely-recognized potential for wild and unpredictable behavior in convention. It is this consciously thwarted potential that draws Lucinda to form an attachment to her new mistress: one that is composed of equal parts admiration (in Lucinda’s words Cathy is “celle que j’aurais voulu être” (76)), resentment (as Lucinda wishes to remind her that she “une femme comme les autres” (76), whose “aïeules étaient descendues du même bateau que les nôtres” (75)) and pity as Cathy languishes at Belles-Feuilles and finally wastes away.

Moving from the scale of character-narrator to the scale of character narrated, Cathy II is also closely connected to the figure of the “aïeule bambara.” In Cathy II’s case, as in Lucinda’s, this figure is used to evoke her African ancestry. Unlike Lucinda, however, Cathy’s “aïeule bambara” is evoked during a reflection on her appearance. Remarking on the fact that Cathy II’s complexion is darker even than her mother’s (which is surprising to those who consider her Aymeric’s daughter, less so to those who believe her Razyé’s), Aymeric asks himself “de quelle aïeule bambara s’était-elle souvenue?” (143). Similarly, *mabo* Sandrine reasons that Cathy’s African ancestry alone might account for Cathy II’s complexion since “le sang africain est traître. Il est tenace. Il circule en cachette, puis il reparaît au grand jour au moment où personne ne l’attend plus. Un beau jour, l’aïeule bambara avait décidé de se venger” (199-200). By contrast, Cassandre, Razyé’s lightest-skinned daughter, represents the inversion of Cathy II. Whereas many struggle to believe Cathy II is Aymeric’s daughter because of her skin color, Cassandre doesn’t quite look like Razyé: “avec son teint clair, . . . ses cheveux

soigneusement lissés à la brillantine, tout le monde pouvait oublier qu'elle n'était pas ce qu'elle paraissait." In other words: "pas trace de l'aïeule bambara en celle-là" (291).

Although on the surface these references to an "aïeule bambara" pertain to literal racial identity, I would argue that they are not simply synonymous with 'African ancestry.' Particularly since each of the above references either explicitly or implicitly refers to a character's resemblance to the highly disorderly and disruptive Razyé, "aïeule bambara" can most fruitfully be read as an allusion to the Bambara myth that has marked Condé's writing since at least the mid-eighties.³⁷ Almost a decade before she cited that myth as inspiration for her vision of creative disorder, Condé dedicated *Ségou*, her controversial (as she herself mentions in "Order, Disorder..." (164)) novel in two volumes exploring the late 18th century encounter of the Bambara people in Mali with both Islam and European Imperialism, to her own "aïeule bambara." Despite the historical nature of the novel's subject matter, however, Condé makes it very clear that her dedication should not be read as an authentic genealogical claim unearthed during her research. She explains in an interview that: "Je ne me suis pas du tout intéressée du point de vue généalogique à chercher une aïeule bambara. Il se peut que mes ancêtres soient venus du Mali, mais ça n'a pas d'importance" (Jacquey 57). Denying both the factuality and the importance of a genealogical connection, Condé thus introduces the imagined or intellectual connection that she feels with a certain Bambara ancestress and which her subsequent article solidifies. What likely makes this myth attractive to Condé is its inherently iconoclastic nature. Although it reaches back to a timeless past and a deep

³⁷ Interestingly, Condé's connection with the Bambara is marked enough that a recent statue erected in her honor (at the Collège de la Désirade, at the initiative of the mayor of la Désirade, René Noël) is called "La liseuse au masque Bambara." A video showing this is available on You Tube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_ePr4JJHw4).

African tradition, the myth valorizes the creative provocation of “creat[ing] new objects” and “modify[ing] the existing ones” (160): a myth, moreover, which, through its emphasis on the mechanism of disorder into previously established “organization” (160), is virtually incapable of becoming the kind of “new orthodoxy” (Mardorossian 35) or a prescriptive “authoritative gesture” (Simek 69) of which Condé is generally wary.

In that spirit, Condé both creates a new object and modifies an existing one (namely, *Wuthering Heights*) when writing *La Migration de cœurs*, placing references to the myth in her narrative without offering a fully-fleshed out reenactment of it. Most significantly, Cathy II is the only character who is twice singled out for having an ‘aïeule bambara.’ This special relationship with the mythic figure suggests a way of interpreting the disorderly aspects of her family background. A generally well-behaved young woman driven by a religion-based moral sense and her great respect for her ‘father’ Aymeric to do ‘good works’ (by teaching children in economically depressed Marie-Galante, for example), Cathy II functions as a creature of convention formed by Belles-Feuilles in a way her mother never quite manages. Despite this, however, her symbolic post-abolition impact is more akin to that of the woman in the Bambara myth, the disordering of the organization (or at least racial hierarchies) of the post-abolition plantation system. First of all, because she is Cathy’s daughter, she is a person of color and the legally legitimate daughter of a powerful white plantation owner, a fact that the rest of the *béké* community finds jarring but must accept. Secondly, because she is almost certainly Razyé’s biological daughter raised as a de Linsseuil, she represents a kind of inversion of the historical phenomenon wherein masters would sire children—whom they then refused to recognize—with enslaved women.

On an individual level, Cathy II's conservative behavior is also at odds with her disorderly impulses. She describes herself as unable to reconcile her general image of herself with the presence "cachée en elle" of "une violence qui, parfois, faisait surface" (297): when she lashes out against Romaine after her encounter with Razyé, for instance. Asking herself a rather ironic question in her attempt to understand herself ("de qui tenait-elle ce caractère emporté qui la conduisait à des actions qu'elle regrettait?" (259)), she envisions her rage as a kind of maternal inheritance; it's what she got from her mother in lieu of physical resemblance ("On disait qu'elle ne lui ressemblait pas en apparence. Mais elle la portait en elle, invisible et toute-puissante sous sa peau" (259)). By considering this inheritance of Cathy II's not merely in terms of maternal (or even—considering Razyé likely status as her biological father—paternal) heritage but also in relation to the influence of an "aieule Bambara," it is possible to read its apparent violence as a forceful potential to "displease, shock, or disturb" (Condé "Order, Disorder, Freedom" 161) in the name of introducing creative disorder into the world (or at least her own world). However, instead of developing these forceful aspects, Cathy II becomes the second generation of women in her family to try to squelch this potential in favor of courting convention. Unlike Brontë's second Catherine, whose personality is clearly presented as a smooth blending of her mother's rambunctiousness and her father's bland goodness, and whose pleasing, good-natured feistiness makes her a natural partner for Hareton, Cathy II remains as divided as her mother ("un jour toute douce, un autre jour en furie" (260)) even after she turns away from the plantation lifestyle and moves to Marie-Galante to teach the less fortunate.

The closest she comes to fulfilling her potential for creative disorder, therefore, is by amplifying the part of herself “en furie” in the form of her daughter with Razyé II: Anthuria. The thrust of the novel then shifts to the daughter of Cathy II and Razyé II: the next generation with potential to embody the disruptive spirit of the “aïeule Bambara,” applied here not precisely to the question of literary freedom but to the knotty questions of genealogical lineage and individual freedom. In light of the fact that when Cathy II and Razyé II’s daughter Anthuria is born she joins a lineage that is highly complex, simultaneously uncertain and overdetermined in relation to Razyé’s position as her grandfather, it is important to consider the extent to which Condé suggests Anthuria will have any possibility of faring better than her parents and grandparents. That Anthuria has as much potential for power as some of her predecessors is suggested while she is still in utero, when Cathy II asks herself “quel enfant est-ce qu’elle portait là? Sauvage et violent comme un cheval arabe, défonçant les parois de son ventre à coups de sabot, caracolant jusqu’à son estomac” (300).

To what use she might put it, then, is the question. The question of Anthuria’s fate is, in fact, a frequent preoccupation of scholarship on *La migration des cœurs*, as it is raised by the concluding note of the novel, where Razyé tries to reassure himself that “une si belle enfant ne pouvait pas être maudite” (337).³⁸ Whereas several scholars discern a “hint of optimism” (Swamy 71) or possible “new direction” (Lionnet 62) in this final line, others focus more on its ambiguity, with Fulton emphasizing the fact that this line, expressed by the relatively unreliable Razyé II, is merely “a hope that Premier-né

³⁸ The forward-looking nature of this concluding statement is notable in comparison with the similarly hopeful yet ambiguous statement concluding *Wuthering Heights*. In *WH*, however, the statement looks back to the deceased, as Lockwood “wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth” (308).

has no possibility of fulfilling or confirming” (76). Nicole Simek additionally notes that Anthuria’s name either announces a “break in [the] repetitive saga” represented by two generations of ‘Razyé’ and ‘Cathy’ or heralds a return to the story’s “point of departure” (91) as her name, like the original Razyé’s, is derived from the natural landscape of the Caribbean (i.e. the ‘anthurium’ flower). Moreover, earlier references in the text to anthuriums reinforce this sense of ambiguity. Although twice used as a way of moving beyond a tragedy, anthuriums are at once a means of acknowledgement (as white anthuriums are brought to Cathy II’s cousin Justin-Marie’s funeral: 206) and a means of concealment (as servants at Belles-Feuilles are reported to have placed anthuriums in the entryway to hide the bloodstains created when a miserable young bride had jumped to her death (56-7)).

While acknowledging the importance of the note of ambiguity that Condé maintains in the conclusion, which is in keeping with her aversion to the restrictions of closure, I suggest that reading the novel through the lenses of Chaos and the Bambara myth allows one to imagine just how Anthuria might break away from tradition—although this is very specifically a possibility raised rather than enacted. If her mother and grandmother found their potential curtailed by their inability to escape the stasis of feminine suffering in Belles-Feuilles (Razyé II was convinced that even though Cathy II “croyait avoir rompu avec son milieu...elle le portait au plus profond d’elle” (328)), Anthuria is born into a world where Belles-Feuilles has been burned to the ground and its inhabitants scattered. Furthermore, her father expresses his firm intention to remove himself and his daughter from his own mother’s attempt to integrate them both into Guadeloupe’s high society from a different direction. Born Irmine de Linsseuil, she is

eager to reclaim the social status that her marriage with Razyé, who shunned the trappings of high society as much as he coveted power, had denied her. However, Razyé II recognizes the trap that this society represents through its restrictive order, as he imagines his now deceased father warning him to leave his mother's house:

d'ici, je la vois venir, ta vie, mesurée, quadrillée comme papier à musique, et je te vois venir, bourgeois à qui ne manqueront bientôt que les guêtres et la bedaine. D'ici peu, on te trouvera une fille à marier, assez blanche pour éclairer la race, et tes péchés de jeunesse seront pardonnés. (333)

By thereafter leaving his mother's house to take up residence in L'Engoulvent, Razyé chooses to turn away from this regulated destiny (part of which consists of increasing racial singularity) to pursue instead an open, unregulated future.

Even if this future doesn't augur particularly well as his appearance and reputation seem to deteriorate the more he focuses on his fear that Cathy II was his sister, more important is the question of how open Anthuria's future remains. Whereas Razyé only timidly hopes that his daughter's life won't be determined by the past—that she is too beautiful to be cursed—, another character, Ada, more definitively asserts Anthuria's independence, even from Razyé's attempt to seek absolution through his daughter:

"contrairement à ce qu'il espère, Anthuria ne sera pas une consolation. Au contraire. Cette enfant-là sera un vrai bal masqué. D'ailleurs, les enfants ne sont jamais une consolation. Ils viennent pour vivre leur vie, pas pour embellir celle de leurs parents"

(318). Speaking from a position of disinterested affection after having helped Cathy II throughout her pregnancy, Ada's easy confidence in the forward-moving nature of parent-child relationships recalls the bishop's earlier reflections on the nature of accidental incest: more specifically, his belief that one must accept rather than atone for surprising genetic connections in the present that derive from complexity in the past. In

both cases, these secondary characters undercut Cathy II and Razyé II's angst with their calm philosophies.

Furthermore, Ada's broad predictions about Anthuria's future suggest that her beauty must be read in a new way: not as an inert embellishment that neatly encloses the troubled past and complex histories woven into her DNA in a pleasing surface but rather as a forceful energy moving forward into its own complications through the shifting, swirling surfaces and unpredictability of a dance at a 'bal masqué.' Indeed, as her physical beauty recalls her resemblance to her mother and to her grandfather twice over,³⁹ this reading of her beauty allows the reader to consider this resemblance not as a simple mirroring but instead as a fractal similarity, a kind of repeating island of facial features that suggest the continuing presence of the "aïeule bambara" in the next generation. The "aïeule bambara" stands therefore as the marker of a paradoxical heritage geared toward not repetition of the same but potential for disruption: like the appearance of similar curves in unpredictable locations in a strange attractor, it is a pattern that simultaneously marks irregularity.

Although Anthuria is not born into a new world, like the woman in the Bambara myth of origin, Condé imbues her with the same capacity she sees in the writers she supports in her article: that of transcending the deterministic influence of the suffering and confusion of the past by bringing newness into the world—for better or worse—through their individual perspectives. Anthuria thus stands poised at the end of the novel to bear both the combined history of all the major families in the novel and the potential

³⁹ Humorously, when Irmine first sees Anthuria, she exclaims "C'est son portrait" (speaking of Razyé), Razyé II is surprised because "il avait toujours pensé qu'Anthuria était le portrait de Cathy [II]" (331).

for creative disruption in the early years of (what the reader knows will be) the tumultuous twentieth century.

Conclusion

The past, whether known or unknown, whether it stays tucked away or emerges into the present, inevitably poses the question of how to maintain one's integrity in the midst of its overwhelming complexity. In this way, Anthuria's position recalls that of Future Mouse, who likewise balances between carrying the genetic and historical burdens of his world at the end of the narrative and moving freely toward an open future—which ironically constitutes, from the reader's perspective, a past that is already known to be complex and turbulent, whether the entire course of the twentieth century in the case of *La migration des cœurs* or only its final decade in the case of *White Teeth*. In *White Teeth*, it is Archie's actions as an agent of chaos, his unplanned reaction to the surprising resurgence of the past in the present, that create the opportunity for Future Mouse's literal escape: not from the past that he carries with him but from the external forces that would seek to control the expression of that past. In *La migration des cœurs*, Anthuria's potential liberation would have to come from within. For although Razyé II seeks to protect his daughter from his mother's normalizing influence and Condé bolsters the reader's belief in Anthuria's potential with the matter-of-fact approbation of such silent witnesses to the Cathy-Razyé drama as Ada and the bishop, it will ultimately be up to Anthuria to draw upon the influence of her "aïeule bambara" and enter her world as a force for creative disorder.

Thus, even when they don't explicitly name Chaos, Smith and Condé are sharers of its insights as they valorize the impulse toward individualistic self-determination in the midst of chaotic histories and uncertain futures. Though their presentations of chaotic identities are more on the level of gesture and potential than fully realized visions, they flow around key concepts: redefining similarity, such that repeating structures suggest a kind of integrity and connection across time and space rather than a kind of inescapable fatalism, and understanding the importance of chaotic unpredictability. Unpredictability, in this sense, is non-hierarchical across scales: small things, whether people or nations, are capable of creating change on a larger scale, whether social or global. Conversely, of course, small things can be rocked by change on a larger scale, which suggests the importance of adapting an attitude of slight detachment, where one neither seeks perfection nor takes refuge in nostalgia. Only in this way, a chaos perspective suggests, can we find a way to live happily within the "fervid intensity of connectedness" that ties us all together.

CHAPTER 2

CONDÉ'S SUPERNATURAL SATIRE IN *TRAVERSÉE DE LA MANGROVE*, *LA*

MIGRATION DES CŒURS, AND *CÉLANIRE COU-COUPÉ*

“In general, that’s what writing is—a kind of revenge against those around you.”
– Zadie Smith, “A Conversation at Princeton”

Introduction

In her oft-cited conversations with Françoise Pfaff, Condé made a striking assertion about the singularity of authorial visions; that, in fact, no matter how many times they write, “authors always write the same book” (75). Framed as a refusal of Pfaff’s attempt to identify a significant shift in her authorial focus, Condé elaborates on this assertion: “I don’t see periods in my work. I think that all my books simply say the same thing in different settings” (qtd in Pfaff 75-6). A decade and a half later, in “A Conversation at Princeton,” Condé both clarified and obfuscated this statement, stating that a writer’s work was always the “same” in that it continually revolves around a central question, which, in her case, is “how does one manage to live? By what means?” When further prompted, however, she nevertheless acknowledged an “evolution” (11) in her approach to this (admittedly very general) question, particularly in terms of her understanding of the relationship between her texts and her readers. She even went so far as to identify a time period during which this shift took place:

In the beginning, I wanted to write militant books, books whose meaning would be clear to readers....And then, as time went on, I freed myself from this idea. I think you have to give people a story that they can read as they wish, and not impose too much direction. Ever since *Crossing the Mangrove* (1989), I have been writing much less didactically, bringing in more and more derision, humor, and mockery, so that the message, if indeed there ever was a message, has become so muddled that it is now difficult to perceive. For example, a book like

Célanire is really a book that has nothing to teach people, that one can understand as one chooses. It has whatever meaning one wants it to have. (11-12)⁴⁰

Although Condé attributes this rather sweeping claim regarding the supposed interpretive relativity of her work to a liberating and anti-authoritarian impulse, it is equally likely to result from Condé's well-documented desire⁴¹ to stymie critical readers and interviewers alike. Condé does this here by implicitly undermining all interpretations of her texts through her near total disavowal of any meaning that might inhere in them. Elsewhere, Condé more directly refutes specific readings of her work, perhaps most notably when she disavows a number of critical responses to her novel *Moi, Tituba, sorcière noire de Salem*: "What some critics did not understand is that the book is ironic....I don't see how people could read *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* with any seriousness in the first place and make Tituba into something she's not" (Pfaff 60).

In this sense, Condé's interview persona functions as an extension of Condé's narrative voice, which, likewise, is often characterized by its interpretation-thwarting tendencies. Whereas Celia Britton notes a distinct lack of "authorial overview" (44) in Condé's work, such that readers are left, unguided, in texts such as *Traversée de la mangrove*, to puzzle over conflicting information and attempt to resolve enigmas, Leah

⁴⁰ One might contrast this description of *Célanire* with what Condé said about the novel as she was writing it. In an interview with *BOMB* magazine, she says: "my next novel is going to be a kind of fantasy, about a person who is not a human being, who is supposed to be a kind of she-devil.... I could not write anything—although I write an entertaining fantasy novel—unless it has a certain political significance. I have nothing else to offer that remains important. I could not write something with no meaning. I could not."

⁴¹ This occurs perhaps most notably in Lydie Moudileno's article "Positioning the 'French' 'Caribbean' 'Woman' Writer," where Moudileno addresses Condé's strategic approach to interview questions in terms of occasional attempts to create an interpretive "dead-end" (145) while avoiding being boxed in by identity politics.

D. Hewitt outlines precisely how Condé continually destabilizes knowledge in *Les rois mages* in a way that aptly describes her general approach to narrative, particularly during the time period Condé indicates above: “by using maxims, indirect discourse, and asking open questions (with no definitive speaker or listener), the narrative sets the reader adrift in a sea of rivaling values and interpretations. We are often aware of irony, but its limits are not always clearly set” (644). More explicitly, Nicole Simek, who was present when Condé made the above comments, describes Condé’s conscious attempts to manage interpretations of her work, both within her texts and outside of them, through consciously conceived gameplay maneuvers. Regarding the author’s “sometimes surprisingly contradictory pronouncements” about her work, she writes that “Condé’s interviews, like her novels, are best understood as tactics, as defensive moves expressing her desire to avoid interpretive reification by her voracious readers/interviewers” (116).

Tactics and defensive moves are by definition, however, rather short-term and reactionary gestures. It stands to reason, therefore, that once these tactics are repeatedly employed in an ever-growing number of texts, they would eventually differ very little from a full-blown ‘offensive’ strategy: one, moreover, which would suggest that Condé’s existential *question de base* (‘how does one live?’) is necessarily entangled with the more epistemological ‘how does one read?’ As regards the latter question, Condé’s strategy has a largely satirical purpose, particularly during the trajectory she follows from *Traversée* to *Célanire*. More particularly, Condé thematizes the interpretation process in her novels, seeking not simply to destabilize her readers but, indeed, to satirize their interpretive gestures, regardless of their epistemological orientation. Whether her characters simply mirror the reader’s sense of frustration about the difficulty of resolving

a central enigma (“que faire de toutes ces anecdotes sans queue ni tête? se demandait Lucien. Qu’en faire?” (*Traversée* 224)) or offer their own perfectly feasible interpretations that anticipate those the reader might be developing, only to have these interpretations second-guessed by the narrator (“peut-on réellement avoir foi en pareilles bêtises et malparlances?” (*Célanire* 115)), Condé’s readers witness their interpretive efforts being mockingly reflected back to them, even as invitations to interpret continue to proliferate throughout the narrative.

In this way, Condé overturns Jonathan Swift’s famous assertion that “Satyr is a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body’s Face but their Own” (155) by creating instead satirical texts that repeatedly force her readers to confront their readerly image. In Hewitt’s words, Condé uses her “playfully satirical pen” to set her reader loose amidst the dizzying array of reflections created by “her novels’ hall of mirrors” (641). Condé’s satirical approach is thus both universalizing, in that it aims at all her readers equally, and “multidirectional,” to borrow John Clement Ball’s term, in that it puts a wide range of possible readers’ values and worldviews into question. “Satiric multidirectionality” is how Ball classifies postcolonial modes of satire whose “context of imperial domination” (7) ensures that its critical thrust aims at a “multiplicity of targets” (12) and whose audience of international readers, with more gaps than overlaps in their respective fields of reference, is particularly prone to producing “misreadings” (27).⁴² But whereas Ball hypothesizes that multidirectional satire can

⁴² Drawing upon a debate on the nature of morality and norms in satire initiated by Northrop Frye in the 1960s, Ball distinguishes ‘multidirectional’ satire (in the work of Naipaul, Achebe, and Rushdie) from more traditional modes of satire that presuppose a “binary model of norm and deviation” (27), wherein the latter is critiqued and the former upheld. Or, if the notion of upholding an implicit norm should be disputed (as it was in the 60s), the satire may nevertheless be said to aim in a singular direction or at a singular object (18-19). By contrast, “since morality as an absolute and hierarchical criteria is tainted after the history of colonialism...the relationship between satiric judgment and a potentially prescriptive *moral*

permit a text to “accommodate ‘misreadings’ as simply variant readings allowed and even encouraged by satire’s variable critique” (27), Condé highlights the possibility of misreading while eschewing all notion of accommodation, simply incorporating the reader into the text as one more satiric target among many.

However, despite the fact that Condé’s work from *Traversée* to *Célanire* fully displays her predilection for all-encompassing multidirectional satire and despite her proclamations regarding the indeterminacy of the texts from this period, several of these texts clearly provide strong evidence of the singularity of Condé’s vision, in accordance with her declaration that “authors always write the same book.” More precisely, three novels, *Traversée de la mangrove*, *La migration des cœurs*, and *Célanire cou-coupé*, share a striking structural similarity: plots centered on a single charismatic, enigmatic, racially unclassifiable character (Francis Sancher, Razyé, and Célanire Pinceau, respectively) who has an enormous impact on the racially, culturally, and economically heterogeneous communities in which he or she chooses to live. Moreover, although aspects of their pasts are shrouded in mystery, these characters’ deep connections with both Guadeloupe and the supernatural realm are ultimately indisputable, as is the fact that they believe that their pasts, whether individual or familial, have the power to determine the outcome of events or the nature of relationships in the present. By writing and rewriting this type of central figure three times, Condé suggests that its dynamics are a significant part of her ongoing thought process. In the body of critical work on these novels as individual texts, much attention has been paid to the transformative impact

position based on binaries must be monitored [when reading multidirectional satire]. The critic must be alert to the fact that some satiric representations will look like reinscriptions of condescending colonialist discourse, as well as to the possibility that ambivalence and satiric multidirectionality may qualify a text’s apparent loyalties” (23, emphasis in the original).

these characters have on their communities and their general ability to thwart community members' desire to understand them. However, when these three characters are taken together and viewed as a continuum, the fascination they arouse in others (i.e. their incidental impact) seems secondary to the question of their ability to impact the world in the way they choose.

In fact, despite Condé's decision to describe this period of her work in terms of a progressive relativizing of meaning, ostensibly undermining her own authorial authority, these characters represent a clear progression in the opposite direction: toward greater potency, as defined by the ability to manipulate cosmic forces and act upon the world rather than be subject to these forces and acted upon. Although Condé's narrators tend to lack authority and refuse definite resolution, supernatural forces sweep through the texts with great authority, determining the extent to which revenge, a desire for action based on the notion that the past has a special claim on the future, will operate in the lives of the characters. Whereas Francis Sancher is fully subject to a decades-(or even centuries)-old ancestral curse, unable to diffuse it through his own good acts (i.e. activism in Angola and/or Cuba) and thwarted even in his attempt to end the curse by refusing to have any children, Célanire is fully able, with imprecisely defined supernatural support, to enact brutal revenge against all those who attempted to kill her when she was a baby, leaving her enough energy to make happy plans to have a baby of her own. Razyé, meanwhile, serves as an intermediate point between these two extremes, in that he achieves a kind of vengeance against the man who 'stole' his love (and is feared by others who liken him to forces both supernatural and natural) but is entirely thwarted in his ambition of rejoining his now deceased love through supernatural means.

Thus do supernatural forces in Condé's novel perform the satirical function of censure, allowing and even enacting curses and plans for vengeance conceived in the spirit of righting past wrongs. In this way, Condé is tapping into the deepest roots of satirical thinking, as explored by Robert C. Elliott in *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art*. Whereas Ball's notion of multidirectional satire emphasizes the range and simultaneity of possible satirical targets in Condé's work, Elliott's historical view of satire helps to highlight the way Condé evokes its deeply authoritative roots. Drawing upon literary and anthropological research from across the globe, Elliott sidesteps the formal generic tradition of Roman satire to reach back (through Aristophanes, for example) to what he deems the true origins of the satiric impulse: i.e. the ancient magic of the 'Railer' or Curser who calls upon the supernatural realm to imbue his words of judgment with literal power to judge and, ultimately, kill. By refocusing the satirical tradition, Elliott's aim is "to show how that original connection [between satire and magical power] survives, in underground and distorted ways, in satire written today" (vii), with the ultimate goal of uniting curses, invective, revenge fantasies, and satire, all of which respond to the same "primordial demand—a demand that out of the fears and confusions engendered by a hostile world man shall be able to impose some kind of order" (58).

This question of how to impose order on the world particularly concerns the characters in the three novels in this study who, despite their relative geographic mobility, must grapple with Guadeloupe as being in some way the "point d'intrication" (Glissant 36) of their own tangled personal histories. Whether in the hopes of unraveling the tangle or entirely transcending it, these characters engage with the extra-social powers

of the supernatural to seek authority over their individual pasts (through vengeance) and consider what it means to contribute to a collective future (through activism and the possibility of social reform).

Moreover, although only Célianire truly acquires that sense of authority, these three characters' attempts to find ways not only to impose themselves but truly to imprint themselves on the world by harnessing supernatural authority necessarily resonate with Condé's own attempts to do the same while navigating between two contradictory impulses in her work: the "muddled" and the "militant."

The Cursed One: Francis Sancher in *Traversée de la mangrove*

Confusion about Francis Sancher's origins and personal history proliferates throughout *Traversée de la Mangrove*. Composed of twenty personal reflections narrated from the perspective of various community members as they attend Sancher's wake, the novel follows these community members' attempts to make sense of his sudden arrival and mysterious death in the Guadeloupean *bourg* of Rivière au Sel. Amidst their confusion, however, they constantly reaffirm the fact that Sancher came to Rivière au Sel expecting to die. Indeed, Sancher's certainty in the imminence of his death shapes not only his life but also the narrative as a whole, from the moment on the second page of the novel when Léocadie Timothée literally stumbles upon his corpse to the final page where a communal voice articulates a question that underlies many of the personal narratives: "Qui était-il en réalité cet homme qui avait choisi de mourir parmi eux?" (251)

While this question can ultimately only refer the reader back to the uncertainty created by the community members' recollections of Sancher at the wake, these

recollections admit of no uncertainty as to the reason why Sancher expected to die. As he repeatedly announced to those in whom he chose to confide, Sancher fully believed that he would die because of his family curse, a curse that feeds the true hermeneutic, investigatory impulse in the novel.⁴³ Despite *Traversée*'s initial engagement with the detective or mystery novel tradition (opening with the discovery of a dead body, followed by the posing of the question "Qui l'a tué?" (18) and the ominous assertion on the part of the city doctor summoned to perform the autopsy that "même s'il n'y avait ni sang ni blessure sur le corps, cette mort ne pouvait être naturelle" (23)), the murder-mystery thread of the novel soon unravels. As Pascale de Souza observes: "le début du roman laiss[e] espérer un bon policier mais malgré les titres aguicheurs de quelques revues de presse: 'Le Mystérieux Aventurier de Rivière-au-Sel' (*Jeune Afrique* 1522 [5 mars 1990]: 65), 'Le Mystère de l'île à ragots'" (*Libération* 18 janvier 1990: 24), l'enquête sur la mort de Sancher tourne court" (831). In fact, before the search for a possible murderer can even get underway, an official cause of death (accidental "rupture d'anévrisme") is abruptly appointed (although the cause is unconvincing, as the doctor comes to a

⁴³ In its emphasis on the impact of Sancher's family curse on his destiny, over and above the murder-mystery element, my reading of Condé's novel differs from Typhaine Leservot's reading in "Murder or Accident? Condé's Postcolonial Detective Novels." In this article, Leservot offers admirable insight into Condé's interest in the popular fiction form of the detective novel (a form with which Patrick Chamoiseau was playing at about the same time in his novel *Solibo Magnifique*), but she does not at all account for the supernatural element in *Traversée*. Namely, she argues that the attendees of the wake remain "obsessed with the idea of murder" (92) until the end of the narrative when they reluctantly accept that Sancher's was, indeed, an accidental death (91). In addition to not pointing out exactly where she sees either this obsession or this acceptance taking place in the novel, Leservot also presumes that since "the only rational (and therefore judicially valid) explanation for Sancher's death becomes that of the accident" (91), the 'accident' explanation is therefore the one in which Condé herself places the most stock, and this despite the fact that it was explicitly presented as an explanation of last resort, arrived at after three days of examining the body to no avail (*Travesée* 23). It is, moreover, only by disregarding the significance of the curse (which is rooted in the power of colonial history to determine the present) and unquestioningly accepting the 'accident' explanation that Leservot is able to argue that "by underlining the theory of the accident as the only rational and valid one, Condé's text subverts postcolonial theory by removing the determining role of colonialism. She thus gives, in a way, more subjectivity to her postcolonial characters than the practice of postcolonial theory often does" (Leservot 92).

conclusion “en désespoir de cause” (23)) and the reader’s attention is repeatedly drawn away from the possibility that Sancher was a murder victim and toward the question of Sancher’s personal and family history. Thus, through the slow and deliberate revelation of the curse, it becomes readily apparent that Sancher is less the victim of a crime in the present than the inheritor of a crime in the past. In this way, Condé offers possible resolution to a mystery in the present (i.e. Sancher’s death-by-curse) only by inscribing it in a deeper, more remote mystery in the past, with the curse serving as the bridge across which the past travels into the present.

Accordingly, it is the narrative of the curse and the crime at its root that more closely resembles a structure akin to that of a detective novel, with a maximum of hermeneutic tension created by the arrangement of the vignettes in the main section of the novel, titled “La nuit.” In that section, mysteries alluded to and questions enticingly raised in the first vignette, told from the perspective of Moïse, local mailman and town laughing-stock, are briefly evoked in the following vignettes and then answered with accelerated attention in the final few. Sancher initially piques Moïse’s curiosity, as well as the reader’s, with his odd behavior that speaks plainly of dark, hidden secrets. He mentions, for instance, enigmatic, nightmare-driven speeches about people from the past who have left “leurs crimes intacts en nous” (42), a nightly habit of “mystérieuses désambulations à travers les bois” (44), and his jealous guarding of a mysterious trunk. When Moïse is inevitably tempted to open this trunk, and equally inevitably discovered while doing so, this leads to the dissolution of his relationship with Sancher rather than to any clarifying revelation. It is not until the next-to-last vignette that the trunk reappears, when Sancher extracts from it long-awaited historical documents relating to his family

history (236). Similarly, although Cyrille, the town storyteller, enticingly reports Sancher as having provided a kind of preface to the ‘origin story’ of the curse by invoking his “aïeul- aïeul, un certain François-Désiré...un Français, un fils de haute famille, qui ayant commis un premier crime a enjambé la mer et transplanté sa pourriture dans ces îles [i.e. Guadeloupe]” (155-6), it is not until one of the final vignettes that the word “malédiction” (222) appears in conjunction with a potential explanation of it.

As these gestures toward revelation accumulate toward the novel’s end, the natural emphasis placed on the last several vignettes is strengthened by the fact that most of these vignettes represent the perspectives of people who are, on the surface at least, likely to be deeply invested in the Sancher family narrative. In other words, they are three figures deeply engaged, though in three very different ways, in the project of understanding and preserving family and cultural memory in Guadeloupe. These figures are: Lucien Évariste, a politically engaged Guadeloupean ‘novelist’ who, not yet having managed to write a novel, is eager to find the ‘right’ kind of story to tell; Emile Étienne, unofficial town historian (whose single publication was poorly received); and Xantippe, town outcast and self-proclaimed personal witness of natural and cultural history as it unfolded over the course of untold years.⁴⁴

However, despite their collective promise of narrative authority, the narrative about the origins of the curse remains obscure, allowing the novel’s conclusion to fall short of the full satisfaction promised by the detective/mystery novel genre. Despite what Cyrille reports about “un premier crime” committed in France, Lucien’s vignette

⁴⁴ In fact, Condé has described Xantippe as the “embodiment of Guadeloupe,” although later in that same talk she describes this as something she attempted to portray but did not necessarily accomplish: “I was trying to do something I could not do.” (Lecture given by Maryse Condé and Richard Philcox at Smith College, “Intimate Enemies: A conversation between an Author and Her Translator.” November 8, 2007).

confirms that the real crime in question was the one perpetrated in Guadeloupe, perhaps by his “arrière-arrière-arrière grand-père” who “a pris refuge [in Louisiana] en fuyant la Guadeloupe.” As Sancher affirms, “des papiers prouvent que tout part d’ici” and, more precisely, from a sugar plantation named Saint-Calvaire (223). Alternatively, the only straightforward narrative about the crime, also reported in Lucien’s vignette, is also the one whose reliability is most explicitly questioned. Bandied about as town gossip, this story was traced back to Emile Étienne’s wife Sylvanie, who “répétait ou déformait” (224) what her husband heard from Sancher. In her version, “Francis Sancher se prendrait pour le descendant d’un béké maudit par ses esclaves et revenant errer sur les lieux de ses crimes passés” (224). Finally, in the last vignette, which therefore represents the reader’s last hope for total illumination, Xantippe offers his vision of the crime, which provides the most suggestive and direct information, stemming as it does from his personal knowledge of the crime’s deep Guadeloupean roots and Sancher’s hereditary guilt rather than from a discussion with Sancher. However, the real closure Xantippe’s knowledge offers is the absolute certainty that the nature of the crime will never be fully revealed. While others are contemplating Sancher’s life at the wake, Xantippe speaks in first-person narration (and the present tense) of Sancher’s guilt and his own attempts to memorialize the victims of the Sancher family crime:

un crime s’est commis ici, ici meme, dans les temps très anciens. Crime horrible dont l’odeur a empuanti les narine du Bon Dieu. Je sais où sont enterrés les corps des suppliciés. J’ai découvert leurs tombes sous la mousse et le lichen. J’ai gratté la terre, blanchi des conques de lambi et chaque soir dans le serein je viens là m’agenouiller à deux genoux. Personne n’a percé ce secret, enseveli dans l’oubli. Même pas lui qui court comme un cheval fou, flairant le vent, humant l’air. A chaque fois que je le rencontre, le regard de mes yeux brûle les siens et il baisse la tête, car ce crime est le sien. Le sien. (245)

Thus do Xantippe's comments reveal how the novel's various references to the crime, without necessarily contradicting each other,⁴⁵ cannot entirely fill in each other's gaps as they converge around indelible traces of the always inaccessible past.

Although the burial site is the strongest trace of this past for Xantippe, it is clearly the curse that leaves its mark on Sancher. As he is otherwise so knowledgeable about Sancher, it is notable that Xantippe makes no mention of the curse in his vignette, especially since he asserts that, as far as he is concerned, Sancher, though guilty, is safe from any reprisals: "il peut dormir tranquille cependant, engrosser ses femmes, planter des fils, je ne lui ferai rien, le temps de la vengeance est passé" (245). As otherworldly as Xantippe is, the potency of the curse must therefore derive from another source, since the evidence Sancher offers for the curse's impact is compelling. He refers more than once to the pattern of "morts subites, brutales, inexplicées, toujours au même âge, la cinquantaine" (223) throughout several generations of his family, a pattern into which his own especially unexplainable death around age fifty fits neatly.

Yet despite the neatness of the pattern, the notion of a curse, with all the implications it carries of characters' destinies being completely determined by their roots, sits uncomfortably within the context of twentieth century Caribbean discourses that seek to overturn the authority of roots. From Edouard Glissant's Deleuze-and-Guattari-inspired notion of the creativity and openness of rhizomatic cultures that transcend the need for rootedness in a singular founding myth to Harris's notion of syncretism as a way of transforming the violence of the past into the potential for flexibility and creativity,

⁴⁵ In this sense, the curse/crime narrative, with its details being incomplete rather than mutually exclusive, differs from that of Sancher's own personal past. As Heather Smyth writes: "There can be no certainty about his past or his time in the village...for his story is told piecemeal in layered, repetitive, and contradictory ways by each of the nineteen narrators whose lives he has affected" (16).

many theories sought to define ways for individuals, communities, and even regions to shake free of limitations imposed by the past. To understand Sancher as having been successfully cursed, by contrast, means accepting that for this man with a prototypical Caribbean background (like Guadeloupe itself, “il avait tous les sangs dans son corps”(229)), a single French colonial root can entirely direct his future and spell his doom.

Perhaps for this reason, many critics pay scant attention to Sancher’s curse. Indeed, Françoise Lionnet places Francis Sancher at the center of her optimistic vision of a “nouvel humanisme” in part because of his background (she considers him “le prototype de l’habitant de l’archipel avec ses origines incertaines, ses multiples attaches géographiques, sentimentales et sexuelles...” (481)) without once referring to the curse. Of those critics who do engage with the curse, most tend to believe in its psychological power over Sancher rather than its supernatural reality within the world of the text. Pascale de Souza argues that it is Sancher’s obsession with finding Saint-Calvaire that “imprisons him in the family curse”: an ironic consequence to this obsession, as she argues that the search for the ancestral home is primarily motivated by his desire to put an end to the curse by “aton[ing] for the crimes his ancestor perpetrated in the past” (368). Lucienne Serrano also believes that Sancher is “prisonnier de lui-même” (90) because of the curse, which she reformulates as an inescapable “réalité traumatique” that dates back to his difficult birth. Brushing aside the question of the curse’s reality, Serrano argues that its real effect on Sancher is the only pertinent issue: “Que cette réalité soit réelle ou imaginaire n’est pas la question: elle reste réelle dans le sens lacanien où elle occupe en lui une place hors des mots et donc hors de toute possibilité de symbolization” (89).

Finally, although Heather Smyth highlights the social significance of Sancher's cursed heritage by arguing that it challenges binary thinking and "indicates the danger of drawing lines of victims and victimizers when defining cultural identity," the curse's potency ultimately stems from the fact that Sancher is unable, psychologically, to "find a way to creatively transform his legacy of violence" (17) into a viable future for himself.

Interestingly, it is just this type of academic interpretation, wherein Sancher's curse becomes a product of his psychological circumstances, that Emile Étienne provides in his vignette. Taking it as a given that the curse is not real in any objective sense, Emile begins his reflections at the wake by analyzing Sancher's belief in the curse. His conclusions are quintessentially psychological in nature, ranging from a specific insight (in that, despite having "rien à craindre de rien," Sancher "est mort, par peur de sa mort") to a universal one (Sancher's case proves, therefore, that "les hommes gardent au creux de leur tête un fond de déraison" regardless of how well-educated or informed they might be (233)). As both his thoughts at the wake and his comments while Sancher's life was awake illustrate, Emile is convinced that it is pure intellectual folly to believe in the curse. When Sancher solemnly shared his family story with Emile, even offering historical documents as evidence in the hopes that the latter would assist him in locating Saint-Calvaire, Emile offered not assistance but theoretical critique. Objecting this time from a sociological perspective, Emile subjects Sancher to the traditional, rationalist opposition to folk beliefs. He scoffs at the notion that Sancher would take these "bêtises" seriously and explains, with all the overtones of condescension that generally accompany an academic attempt to 'make sense' of such things, that "c'est le génie populaire qui s'exprime ainsi et c'est bien ce qui fait son caractère unique et précieux!" (237). In this,

Emile echoes Lucien's earlier, distinctly less scholarly dismissal of Sancher's belief in the curse: "Une malédiction! Tu parles comme un Nègre des champs!" (223) Both, in turn, echo the narrator's own occasionally expressed skepticism of popular beliefs or gossip, particularly as they relate to the supernatural. Where, for instance, one paragraph begins with an elaborate image of the natural elements acting in ominous harmony with Sancher's doomed destiny ("les gens prétendent que la première nuit que Francis Sancher passa à Rivière au Sel, le vent enragé descendit de la montagne, hurlant, piétinant les bananeraies et jetant par terre les tuteurs des jeunes ignames") the next paragraph consists of a single declarative sentence that undermines what preceded it: "Mais les gens racontent n'importe quoi" (34).

In this way, Emile may be said to highlight the line the narrator draws between rational 'raison' and superstitious "déraison" (233), a line he reinforces through his satirical treatment of Sancher's story. Almost as soon as he is entrusted with the story, Emile dismisses it, referring to it only in order to submit his friend's deepest fears to ridicule. He derides both the curse ("de temps en temps, Emile Étienne raillait Francis Sancher, le surnommant moqueusement 'le Maudit'") and the unspoken sense, as several characters note, that Xantippe is deeply (perhaps supernaturally) connected to Sancher ("s'étant aperçu de l'effet que le pauvre Xantippe produisait sur Francis Sancher, Emile Étienne ne l'appelait pas autrement que 'le Messenger' et se moquait, soutenant que Xantippe avait bien une tête à sortir de l'autre monde" (237)). In this sense Emile functions within the text as what John Clement Ball might call a traditional satirist: that is, one who seeks to correct, or at least critique, the 'wrong' side of a "binary model of

norm and deviation” (Ball 21), in this case rationality and superstition, such that the critique of the “deviation” serves to reinforce the “norm.”⁴⁶

Yet the simple binary system suggested by Emile’s satire is hardly representative of the true satiric scope of the novel. Indeed, *Traversée de la mangrove* may easily be said to be a model of Ball’s concept of “multidirectional” satire, where, particularly in the “postcolonial” era, norms are relative rather than universal, and no sooner upheld through satirical opposition then overturned by a shift in the frame of reference. As Condé’s novel amply illustrates, when multiple frames of reference coexist (interlocking and overlapping in a single space or single moment in time), shifts amongst them can occur almost imperceptibly, such that the satirized can easily become the satirist, and vice versa. To this effect, if Emile is seconded by the narrator in his distrust of gossip, he nevertheless serves as grist for the narrator’s own satiric mill because of his unshakeable confidence in the rightness of his understanding of the world. In other words, Emile’s strident mockery of Sancher is framed by the narrator’s subtle mockery of Emile. The narrator seizes upon the fact that despite the neatness with which Sancher’s death fits into the curse narrative and the fact that Emile’s own interpretation is more metaphorical than empirically provable, lacking both physiological grounding and a demonstrable relationship between cause and effect, Emile never condescends to entertain the possibility of the curse’s validity. In this sense, Emile demonstrates the disciplinary failing of the overly rational (and rationalizing) Historian (with a capital ‘H’). As Noëlle Carruggi notes in the introduction to *Maryse Condé, Rébellion et transgressions*, whereas

⁴⁶ Ball cites, for instance, theorists who consider the essence of satire to involve the opposition between, in Frank Palmeri’s view, the corrupt present and the “pristine” past (qtd in Ball 9) or, in Northrop Frye’s view, “two societies, one normal and the other absurd” (qtd in Ball 10).

“bien souvent” the historian “en voulant éclairer...efface la présence de l’invisible et obscurcit l’essentiel,” in her novels Condé “lève la voile sur ce que Glissant nomme ‘le refoulé historique,’ les zones d’ombre de l’histoire et les spectres du passé qui continuent de hanter le présent, aussi bien au niveau des ideologies collectives que des destinées individuelles” (11).

Rather than inviting the reader to reflect on the possible significance of Emile’s confident interpretation of Sancher’s fate which admits of no such possibility that the past could literally haunt the present, the narrator quickly places a distancing boundary around it, setting the interpretation apart from the rest of the vignette as an introductory quote. When the narrator’s voice then takes over, it portrays Emile’s reasoning as perfunctory, a contrast to the meaningful meditation on his friend’s fate that the reflective atmosphere of a wake should produce. In fact, Emile himself seems but little moved by his own conclusion as prosaic concerns rise directly to the forefront of his mind to cloud it out: “Emile Étienne ayant philosophé ainsi songea qu’il avait un bon bout de route à faire jusqu’à Petit Bourg et s’approcha du cerceuil” (233). More generally, Emile is subjected to a subtle form of satire that accumulates rapidly throughout the compressed space of the vignette, where, unlike other characters, he is always referred to by his full name. Like his interpretation, his full name represents an equally inert, self-contained unit. At first, this use of his name might seem to testify, through the respect such formality implies, to Emile’s status in the community as a semi-official authority figure. As established in our first introduction to Emile in the novel, the community takes his role as historian seriously, despite the narrator’s desire to undermine it. Planting one of the first satirical seeds in the novel’s introductory section “Le serein,” the narrator announces the arrival to

the wake of “Emile Etienne, dit l’Historien, bien qu’il n’eut publié qu’une brochure que personne n’avait lu” and remarks upon the communal response to his friendship with Sancher, which “choquait fort dans le cas d’Emile que son métier aurait dû inciter à plus de sérieux” (25). However, in light of the intimate nature of the vignettes, the incessant repetition of his full name (at least eighteen times in six pages) renders the formality absurd, thus neutralizing his authoritative qualities. Overall, this satirical treatment of Emile has the effect of presenting his interpretation as a pat refusal to reflect critically on his beliefs.

In this way, Emile represents just one example of the overlapping forms of multidirectional satire in Condé’s novel. If, in Ball’s estimation, the purpose of the multidirectional “thrust” of satire is to allow it to “spread[s] its accusations and humiliations, its blame and its shame, throughout an international community encompassing as many subgroups as the text’s satiric trajectory can legitimately support” (Ball 38), then Condé is remarkable for the way she strikes out at an international community of readers and writers while remaining minutely focused on a single, relatively isolated *bourg* in Guadeloupe. In this, Condé engages with a highly charged dynamic in Caribbean literature. More specifically, through multidirectional satire, she highlights the difficulty Caribbean writers encounter when simultaneously confronting the inevitable internationalism of a literature that is better received abroad than ‘at home’ while laboring under (what she sees as) the restrictive dictates some of her fellow writers impose on their colleagues in an effort to resist the potentially estranging effect of that internationalism.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Condé outlines how Glissant and the Creolists discuss this problem at the beginning of “Order, Disorder...” though in 2007 she noted that she felt it had changed. During a talk at Smith College

While J. Michael Dash generally observes that it is “difficult not to see in *Traversée de la mangrove* a mocking satire of a number of iconic Caribbean writers who have preceded Condé” (“Vital Signs” 314), several other critics have noted the way Condé satirizes the particular plight of the Caribbean writer through the figures of Lucien and Sancher. Indeed, as Condé describes community members’ initial reactions to Sancher’s profession (as he, like Lucien, is working on a novel) in Moïse’s vignette, she highlights the chasm that fundamentally divides the global literary world from the local everyday one. Upon hearing that Sancher is a writer, the nonplussed residents of Rivière au sel collectively ask a rather destabilizing question (“qu’est-ce qu’un écrivain?”) to which they then offer an equally destabilizing answer, based on the sole reference point of Lucien, the only ‘writer’ they know, who also happens to be a writer who has written nothing: “un écrivain est-ce donc un fainéant, assis à l’ombre de sa galerie, fixant la crête des montagnes des heures durant pendant que les autres suent leur sueur sous le chaud soleil du Bon Dieu?” (38). Condé thus simultaneously chides Rivière au sel’s communal lack of interest in literature and mocks, through the estranging lens of that community’s point of view, writers’ inflated sense of their own inherent importance.

In a further twisting of this fraught literary dynamic, Condé also mocks those who attempt to bridge the chasm between the literary global and the everyday local realms by shaping the content of literature to match a culture’s predetermined needs. Namely, she presents Lucien’s somewhat unrealistic attempts to follow his friends’ novel-writing advice as the pretext for what Celia Britton calls “Condé’s straightforward, vigorous

(11/08/07), she commented that she saw a difference in Guadeloupe, in that young people were reading more Caribbean literature. In that spirit, she noted that she wrote *Le coeur à rire et à pleurer* with her granddaughters’ generation in mind.

satire of...the writers of the *créolité* group (‘As-tu comme le talentueux Martiniquais, Patrick Chamoiseau, déconstruit le français-français?’, p. 228)” (“Breaking the Rules” 41-2). Britton could have extended her discussion of Condé’s “vigorous satire” of the Créolistes to include her portrayal of Lucien’s “amis patriotes...abondamment consultés” (218) to whom he turns for advice about writing literature. As the descriptor “patriotes” suggests, Lucien’s friends impress upon him the need to strengthen the domestic audience for Caribbean writing and try to designate, by group consensus, an appropriate subject for Lucien’s novel: one who is noble, heroic, and imbued with political and cultural significance on a national or regional level. When these ‘amis’ prove unable to agree on a subject but insistent that he absolutely must write in Creole (a language that he doesn’t speak fluently), they effectively guarantee Lucien’s literary impotence. In this way, Condé mocks attempts to stop the international drift of Caribbean literature through strict management of its content. But at the same time, she also mocks Caribbean writers’ frequent physical estrangement from their ‘home’ countries. As Jeannie Suk notes, Condé “ironizes...the marked absence of Antillean writers in their own cultures, and pointedly, Condé’s own tendency to spend long periods of time abroad at foreign universities” (158). Suk traces this mockery through Lucien’s vignette, highlighting his frustration that conversations with fellow writers were usually impossible because “les quelques écrivains guadeloupéens pass[ent] le plus clair de leur temps à pérorer sur la culture antillaise à Los Angeles or Berkeley” (219). Thus does the multidirectional span of Condé’s satire implicate and undermine a wide range of figures responsible for shaping Caribbean literature, from her international audience and her fellow countrymen to her fellow writers.

In Ball's view, the purpose of this multidirectionality, even when some of its vectors are aimed at opposing sides of the same issues, is to serve a "constructive" function rather than a "divisive" one. In keeping with the corrective thrust of traditional satire, "the multidirectional orientation of postcolonial satire," he writes, "looks for mutual, cooperative admissions that things could be better than they are and mutual commitments to work towards change" (38-9); in other words, it provides a pathway to change through universal critique. Although it might be difficult to argue that Condé seeks to trace a clear path through *Traversée* toward some cooperative understanding (about Caribbean literature, for example), her satirical gestures do ultimately orient around around a single point: that is, Sancher, a figure who indirectly inspires many characters in the novel to question their priorities and make changes in their lives, as many critics have noted. For instance, although Emile and Lucien's previous pretensions and misconceptions are subtly satirized in their respective vignettes, their confrontation with Sancher's corpse at his wake also triggers their desire to re-evaluate their beliefs. Lucien suddenly realizes that what he really wants to write about is not heroism but rather disillusionment and other "dangereuses vérités," with an aim not to please but rather "Déplaire. Choquer." More specifically, he wishes to write the story of Sancher, an "idéaliste sans plus d'idéal" (227) who has evolved from believing in the straightforward heroism of causes such as the Cuban revolution to disbelieving in his ability to overcome his family curse by virtue of his own good acts. Similarly, after taking a second look at Sancher in his coffin, Émile suddenly decides to promise his deceased friend that he will write a history of Guadeloupe in a new way (by traveling

across the country and collecting oral narratives), in defiance of what his critics might think (237).

From this stems the central irony regarding Sancher: that he is able to do for others precisely what he is unable to do for himself. Through his untimely death he inspires community members to transcend the external, communal pressures they are grappling with and imagine living their lives on their own terms, yet this death is precisely what marks his own failure to overcome the pressures oppressing him. Offering, in this sense, a persistent counterpoint to other characters' hopeful *élans* toward individual determinism, Sancher's experience of his familial curse evokes what Robert Elliott deems the true origins of satire, making him, through his death, the text's most fundamentally satirized character. According to Elliott, satire can trace its essential impulse toward censure back to 'the curse' as an elemental form of judgment enacting "the will to attack, to do harm, to kill—in some negative way to control one's world" (Elliott 292). Although Elliott suggests that this violence is attenuated in modern satire, where it operates on a figurative, linguistic level, Condé breathes new life into "satire's ancient associations" (281) by granting Sancher's curse a lethal power in the world of the text. The curse therefore represents a literal enactment of the satirical 'will to control' through violence. However, since its origins are imperfectly known but its impact on Sancher's family is suggested in some detail, Condé clearly seeks to emphasize not the control gained by the curser but the control lost by the one cursed: here, in the form of Sancher's total subjection to supernatural forces that are vaguely connected to the colonial past.

He spends much of his life seeking a measure of control over those forces, however. Before he ever dreamed of ‘returning’ to Guadeloupe to accept his fate, Sancher sought to liberate himself from the curse by redeeming himself through good or noble acts. At one point, he refers to Cuba as “le pays que j’avais choisi pour ma renaissance” (155). At another point, Sancher explains how, following the advice of le Père Luandino Vieira, he decides that going out into the world to make it better would be “pour [lui] le moyen de tout réparer” (97). He participates in Operation Carlota, Cuba’s intervention in Angola in 1975, in what was likely a medical capacity (as he is known as ‘Curandero’). However, the Operation serves only to disillusion him as he is unable to reconcile the noble aspirations of revolutionary ideas (Marxism being the cure-all for the wrongs of colonization) to the human cost of implementing them, particularly after seeing a horribly injured young girl still chanting her support for the revolutionary cause (194) and emotionally connecting with a Portuguese woman hospitalized for cancer (224)). As a result, he becomes a deserter who refuses to “s’accommoder de slogans” and realizes that absolution is elusive. Hence his lament to Xantippe, who he believes to be something of a ‘keeper of the curse’ who haunts him: “Est-ce que tu ne connais pas le pardon? La faute est très ancienne. Et puis, je n’en suis pas l’auteur direct. Pourquoi faut-il que les dents des enfants toujours soient agacées?” (117)

By the time Sancher returns to Guadeloupe, he has decided to take control of his destiny by preparing to sacrifice himself to the curse with eyes wide open. He accepts the inevitability of his own death to a certain extent, but only so that he may be the curse’s final victim, the last of “cette sinistre lignée qu[‘il] voulai[t] éteindre avec [lui]” (155). It is for this reason that he returned to Guadeloupe in the first place: “je suis venu

[to Guadeloupe not for a fresh start but] mettre un point final, terminer, oui, terminer une race maudite” (87). In the process of accepting his fate, he allows his death to leach into his life, marshalling all his energy toward the expectation of the end and considering himself a virtual member of the living dead: “comment est-ce que j’aurais pu me marier, sachant ce que je sais? Moi, mort-vivant, j’ai toujours fui les femmes” (88). Even his writing of a novel is framed in terms of a wrestling with death: “moi presque zombie, j’essaie de fixer la vie que je vais perdre avec des mots. Pour moi écrire, c’est le contraire de vivre” (221). He additionally schedules his life around his death, particularly through his quasi-nightly vigil in which he sits on a tree stump near a ravine and actively awaits (to use a paradoxical phrase) his death.

However, Sancher’s careful preparations will mostly prove to be for naught. In fact, the defining aspect of Sancher’s life as well as his death is the consistency with which his every attempt to determine its course is thwarted. If the curse represents the impersonal judgment he has merely inherited, the thwarting of his careful preparations represents the personal, satirical price he pays for trying to accept the judgment on his own terms. Most particularly, it is precisely his attempts to anticipate his death that lead to his being subject to its caprices. As Sancher suggests to Cyrille le conteur: “La scélérate [i.e. la mort] ne m’a pas laissé en repos une seule minute. Elle m’a tourné, viré, fait valser sans musique et pourtant, je m’aperçois à cette heure que je continuerais bien à marcher à sa baguette” (156). This sense that Death is not just controlling but actually toying with Sancher emerges most clearly through the portrayal of Sancher’s vigil. Even though the discovery of his body facedown in the mud on a forest path near the ravine indicates that the vigil does, in fact, lead to the expected result, the text dwells not on the

bleakness of Sancher's eventual death but rather on the playful way in which Death drew out its occurrence. While Sancher sits on the stump waiting for death, life, ironically, continues to find him. He is frequently and unceremoniously stumbled upon ("*buté*" or "*heurté*") in the woods in a series of awkward encounters with, namely, Léocadie Timothée, a single, retired schoolteacher, and two disenchanted young women from prominent (but ethnically disparate) local families: Mira and Vilma. These encounters, collectively forming what Lucienne Serrano calls a "jeu de répétition" (93), serve to lend Sancher a ridiculous air through repeated cases of mistaken identity and ironic predicaments.

More specifically, whereas all three women know exactly who he is when they find him, Sancher is every time confused, every time terrified in his belief he is finally meeting 'la Mort' herself, come to take his life. This misunderstanding impacts Léocadie and Mira most forcefully. The approach of the former so petrifies Sancher that he runs off into the night to get away from her, his face contorted into an exaggerated expression of fear. Because Léocadie, of course, doesn't understand why Sancher is afraid, his flight deeply mortifies her feminine pride, reminding her that, through this final confirmation that she is more able to scare men away than draw them near, she will never find love (150-1). Mira, who thinks Sancher is waiting for her in the hopes of beginning a sexual liaison, has the most humorous encounter with Sancher. With this assertion, I contest Serrano's claim that, in light of Sancher's obvious, mounting distress, this scene is overwhelmingly somber in tone: "rien ne semble plus douloureux et tragique que ces deux phrases échangées lors de [l]a première rencontre [de Sancher] avec Mira, que je reprends ici: 'Tu m'attendais? [...] Pas si tôt! [...] Mais de quoi as-tu peur? Mais de toi.

Comment feras-tu?’ (p. 55)” (94). Although Sancher’s fear of how exactly Death will come to the point is indeed revealed in these lines quoted by Serrano, it is hardly the overriding element of the dialogue. Sancher may be experiencing a tragedy (complete with his inevitable death), but Mira is not; in this moment, his fear contrasts sharply with her sexual confidence. In fact, when her perspective is taken into consideration, their conversation sounds like a classic comedic dialogue of misunderstanding where the humor derives from the fact that the speakers don’t realize they’re talking about different things. Sancher’s fearful “Comment feras-tu?” is especially humorous when one considers that Mira thinks he’s asking about her lovemaking technique— which she then amply demonstrates by first kissing him and then, when he equally fearfully says, “C’est tout?”, unbuttoning his shirt and unbuckling his belt (55). The reader thus faces several variously amusing concepts: first, that Sancher thinks he is dying when he is actually being seduced (and he therefore thinks that Death operates through seduction); second, that, from an outside perspective, Sancher is a grown-man who trembles in passive terror because, of all things, a beautiful young woman is attempting to have her way with him; third, that Mira is so excessively confident that Sancher’s obvious trepidation doesn’t trouble her at all as she initiates their lovemaking.

Far from gratuitous, the confusion between sex and death, the impulse toward continuation versus the impulse toward conclusion, in these encounters speaks to the ironic predicament in which they place Sancher, a predicament which, furthermore, is instrumental in the thwarting of his attempt to control the curse by ending it. Namely, he will, eventually and inevitably, impregnate two of the women he mistakes for Death (Vilma and Mira), thus ensuring that his family line will continue on, as will, presumably,

the curse. Even worse for Sancher, if one considers that part of the curse's torturous efficacy necessitates foreknowledge of it, Mira's second vignette (she is the only character granted more than one vignette) is almost entirely devoted to her decision to make it a personal quest that Quentin, her son with Sancher, will find out about the Sancher family history, despite the difficulty in ascertaining information about him (229).

Thus is Sancher powerless to avoid either meeting his destiny or propelling its consequences forward in time as his family curse reverberates through the text, linking present, past, and future. The question that remains is how to make sense of this character: one charged with a curse that bears a heavy, seemingly cosmic, judgment and imbued with an aura that leads the community to conclude, in the final pages, that, whatever else he was, he is also most certainly "un envoyé, le messenger de quelque force surnaturelle" (251). Bearing in mind Condé's general equivocations about "muddled messages" in her text, one must read such a line with a degree of circumspection. Nevertheless, it is possible to imagine Sancher as a rather indifferent messenger whose message is likewise equivocal. The "force surnaturelle" working through Sancher being undeniably connected to the power of past, Sancher's experience highlights the way the past acts on us against our will while escaping our full comprehension. Though we may pay tribute to it, we will never master it. Furthermore, through the thwarting of Sancher's attempt to exert some sort of control over his supernatural past by devoting himself to it, Condé suggests that turning your back to the future in order to face the past is just as foolhardy as ignoring the past altogether. Our relationship with the past will always be uneasy; one must walk forward while cultivating a humble awareness of the past at one's back.

The Satirist Satirized: Razyé from *La migration des cœurs*

Where Francis Sancher impacts those around him unconsciously and seeks only the passive control of submission to his cursed fate, Razyé from *La migration des cœurs* is all action. More precisely, he actively tries to harness natural and supernatural powers and bend the world to his will in pursuit of his two-fold goal of enacting his own violent judgments and bridging the gap between life and the afterlife. Indeed, supernatural powers are the only external powers to which he can at least somewhat creditably lay claim as, unlike Sancher who is overburdened by his family's history, Razyé has no history at all. As he lacks an unambiguous ethnicity, family name, and status in the social structure (except to the extent that his foster brother Justin places him squarely at the bottom of the social order of L'Engoulvent once he inherits it), the only true sense of place he feels derives from the ultimately insecure position he occupies by Cathy's side.

However, despite his weak social bonds, Razyé seems to benefit from strong supernatural connections, as is made apparent both when he is first introduced to the reader and when he is first introduced to the Gagneur family that will eventually adopt him. Hubert Gagneur, the man who named Razyé after the *razyé* bushes in which he found him during a hurricane, suggests that Razyé's very essence is supernatural. Seeing in him not a son of Guadeloupe or its people but rather the product of a passing storm, he observes that "c'est sûrement les mauvais esprits, cachés dans les vents du cyclone, qui l'ont amené de notre côté" (28). In her article exploring the "transcolonial" anxieties Razyé's presence exposes in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Guadeloupe, Françoise Lionnet highlights how Melchior, a *babalawo* whom Razyé consults while he is in Cuba, provides readers their first look at Razyé and compares the latter's appearance and likely

actions with those of the *egun*, “trickster figures of the *gede* family, known for their contrary behavior” (78). Melchior adds, furthermore, that Razyé reminds him specifically of an exiled *egun* who has been abandoned by the “invisibles” and forced to “errer” amongst the humans (*Migration* 15). Accordingly, once he returns to Guadeloupe, his fellow citizens respond to their fear of him by comparing him with Satan (134, 137) and a “diable sorti de son enfer” (49). When he travels to nearby Marie-Galante, he makes a similar impression: “ceux qui virent Razyé galoper ce jour-là dans la pluie, les éclairs et les coups de tonnerre crurent vraiment que l’occupant du Trou-à-Diable était sorti de son gîte” (248). Even as he reminds others of an “*egun*” or “diable,” it should be noted, Razyé is still perceived as a being at once powerful, as the ease with which he intimidates those around him amply illustrates, and displaced in some way.

This sense of displacement serves to spur rather than hinder Razyé in his attempts to gain and keep control. In particular, a kind of supernatural, destructive force animates him once Cathy’s betrayal (when she chooses a wealthy, plantation-owning *béké* over him) compels him first to leave Guadeloupe and then to return with, literally, a vengeance. While primarily focused on his personal desire for vengeance against Aymeric and Justin (Cathy’s new lover and brother, respectively, who directly or indirectly allowed issues of social status to disrupt Razyé and Cathy’s private world), Razyé would clearly like to make a public spectacle of his private pain and implicate the general in the particular. In one of his several grand statements of vengeful intent, Razyé informs his wife Irmine (also Aymeric’s sister) of her role in his scheme: “Toi et ton enfant, vous êtes les instruments que je vais utiliser pour me venger. Car je vais me venger, et d’une façon éclatante, de ce que le ciel, de connivence comme toujours avec

vous, les békés, m'a fait. Et mon histoire passera dans celle de ce pays" (109). Although Razyé's desire for vengeance is straightforward and self-centered, the significance he attributes to his experience is quite wide-ranging as it sweeps out to include not only a social critique of Guadeloupe but also an indictment of the cosmic sanction of the social structure that earned the critique.

By asserting that "le ciel" consciously favors the *béké* class, Razyé offers his sardonic spin on a frustration several characters in this novel express about Guadeloupe at the turn of the century (and which a plethora of critics similarly observe regarding systemic white privilege in our globalizing, neocolonial world of today). Namely, despite the myriad upheavals of the age, from the changes brought about by abolition and the importation of new labor forces from Asia to the impact of the U.S.'s early imperialistic incursions in the region and nascent ideas of social revolution (both Marxist and Socialist) – not to mention the early rumblings of independence movements— the racial injustices at the root of Guadeloupe's plantation economy remained stubbornly persistent. Aymeric de Linsseuil's plantation, Belles-Feuilles, stands as a monument of this persistence as it both grows ("chaque génération de Linsseuil avait ajouté à la construction d'origine, datant du XVIIe siècle") and resists change ("à plusieurs reprises, elle ait été incendiée par des esclaves en révolte. Chaque fois, elle avait été rebâtie puissante, identique à elle-même" (58)). It is therefore this repeated pattern of destruction and resurrection, the ultimately fixed shape of the social landscape, that Razyé strives to alter through his attacks on Aymeric—to be replaced, perhaps, by the indelible mark he wishes to make on the country that is not really his home: "Et mon histoire passera dans celle de ce pays" (109).

Moreover, because his reference to “le ciel” in his critique of this structure evokes the Christian notion of heaven (the “ciel”/“terre” distinction being much more significant in that faith than in many New World spiritual belief systems where the relationship between the visible and invisible inhabitants of the world is of more profound significance), Razyé offers a glancing commentary on the way Christianity has been used to perpetuate injustices in a colonial context. This is, in fact, a critique that Razyé has a long history of making. When he and Cathy were together, they routinely transformed the imposed ritual of reciting nightly prayers into a satirical performance by loosely rewriting “The Lord’s Prayer” in the name of social justice: “nous te haïssons, toi qu’on ne voit jamais, mais qui es assis là-haut dans le ciel. Tu partages sans justice la couleur, les habitations, les terres. Nous ne t’appellerons jamais notre père parce que tu ne l’es pas” (121).

As forceful as this disavowal of the Christian God is, it is matched by the zeal with which he seeks knowledge from other faiths, such as Santería and Vaudou (which he designates as “toute autre chose” (121) than Christianity), about how to impose his will and “remodeler le monde à sa guise” (19). In short, he draws upon non-Christian notions of the supernatural when he wants to pair his critical words with action, and more precisely when he shifts, following the loss of his place at Cathy’s side, from making critiques that are limited to sardonic commentary to seeking vengeance and recognition on a grand scale. As implied by his earlier aspiration to become part of Guadeloupean history, this recognition necessitates the intricate weaving together of word and deed, such that neither can stand alone. In Razyé’s formulation, vengeance is composed of one part declaration, one part action, and a third part verbal (even cosmic) testament to that

action. When his newfound association with the Socialist party energizes his quest for vengeance, which had flagged following Cathy's death, Razyé frames his ambition in terms that vividly portray the accomplishment of vengeance as a linguistic act—a kind of sky-writing through which he aspires to “inscrire sa vengeance en jambages étincelants dans le ciel de la Guadeloupe” (123).

In this way, Razyé's trajectory from irreverent prayer-rewriter to active invoker of higher powers in the promise and pursuit of vengeance and (at least nominally) social justice reverses the evolution Elliott traces from “primitive satirist” to “literary satirist”: that is, from one who offers blisteringly direct critiques in the explicit expectation that they will engender direct action to one who filters critiques through “devices of indirection [i.e. literary effects such as parody and irony]” (264) and allows the critiques to stand for themselves. In other words, the literary satirist points out wrongs that could and should be righted without necessarily leading to immediate action. By drawing a direct line from the “literary satirist” back to the “primitive” one and framing the magical impulse as the ancestor of the satirical, Elliott emphasizes the potential power, as the title of his study asserts, contained in satire. In this way, he distills satire down to its essence rather than focusing on its literary history: “for us, in short, satire has to do with tone and spirit (perhaps also purpose), but hardly with form” (101). In fact, despite the tentative nature of his reference to satire's purpose in the preceding statement, Elliott's discussion, once freed from formal questions, very naturally leads to questions of purpose. Indeed, he even offers his own succinct maxim on the subject, stating that the satirist's highest aim is to “change the world through the power of language” (165). In this sense, satire becomes a potential meeting ground for censorious language, action, and change: in other

words, a method for addressing (and, at the outset, redressing) wrongs. By reversing the trend observed by Elliott (from curses, invective, and schemes of vengeance to purely verbal, indirect satire) through Razyé, Condé unleashes satirical social critique in the world of her text in its rawest, most virulent form.

Because he backs up his frequently voiced “diatribes contre l’injustice” (147) with both his almost superhuman public persona and the political might of the Socialists, the latter of which he prevails upon to set fire to the sugarcane fields surrounding Belles-Feuilles and thus successfully ruin Aymeric at a time when he cannot afford to recuperate the losses, Razyé poses a clear threat to the denizens of Guadeloupe and the surrounding islands. As Madhi, one of the numerous *kimbwazè* whom Razyé consults observes, Razyé’s reputation precedes him: “comme tout le monde en Guadeloupe, j’avais entendu parler de lui ainsi que d’un cyclone et d’un tremblement de terre réunis, plus mauvais que tous les deux à la fois” (216). In fact, the mere sight of Razyé passing through town is capable of raising an alarm that resonates on a number of levels: “les bois-sans-soif qui sortaient des débits de boisson...le prenaient pour un esprit à la recherche de quelque malfaisance et se signaient. Quand il passa auprès de la cathédrale, saint Pierre fit claqueter ses clés en se rencognant dans son niche, et il y eut un grand froissement d’ailes de chauves-souris dérangés là-haut dans les gouttières” (211). As the details in this passage illustrate, Razyé inspires an unease in the world of the text that spreads across the realms: humble human (“les bois-sans-soif”), lofty spiritual (“saint Pierre” and his keys to heaven), and animal (“chauves-souris”).

These details also provide the reader a glancing gothic parody through the evocation of such undeniably clichéd images as the ominously significant scattering of

bats or the sudden eerie animation of a statue or painting. This simultaneous reinforcement and mockery of Razyé's power is characteristic of Condé's treatment of him, as she delimits his satirical control by subjecting him to the satirical control she wields over him. In this way, Razyé resembles not just Elliott's "primitive satirist" but also his more nuanced notion of the "satirist satirized": i.e. "the created character, hurling curses and invective, using language as a magical instrument, function[s] in effect as a primitive satirist" while at the same time "he [is] satirized, in the sophisticated sense of the term, by his creator" such that the character's views are "qualified, contradicted, by the structure" of the text (167). In Condé's case, this qualification involves troubling the straight line Razyé attempts to draw from large-scale social change to personal aspirations, such that the former serves as a means of achieving the latter. Indeed, although Razyé possesses the power both to bring harm to others and to promote efforts toward social justice, he is almost entirely powerless when it comes to realizing his fondest wishes. Even as his mere passage in front of a cathedral sends ripples of unease through the building and its occupants, Razyé is careening toward his own uneasy encounter with Madhi, one in a series of New World spiritual guides he consults in his attempt to master knowledge of the invisible world and, most importantly, contact Cathy in some way. As Madhi explains in his récit, Razyé has been relentless in his pursuit of this knowledge: "Je savais qu'à travers le pays il avait épuisé *gadèdzafè* et *kimbwazè* comme un cavalier trop exigeant sa monture" (216).

Like the other masters of the invisible, Madhi will inevitably disappoint Razyé and contribute to a series of cosmic refusals of Razyé's deepest desires which, by dint of repetition, become comic. To this effect, Razyé is not merely thwarted in his pursuit of

happiness; he is outright taunted in the process. Already in the first chapter, Condé establishes the futility of Razyé's attempts to use the cosmos to promote his own happiness through the reflections of Melchior, the first master we see Razyé consult and the focalizer through which we get our first glimpses of Razyé. Melchior reflects candidly on the fact that although he plans on initiating Razyé into Santeria and the secrets known to the *babalawo*, he does so entirely against his will ("en dépit de lui-même") because he is in the thrall of Razyé's inherent power ("il ne pouvait lui résister" (16)). When Melchior is murdered before the initiation, it is the reader's cue that Razyé's quest is not meant to be fulfilled, his power not meant to be augmented any further. In fact, he nurtures his hopes and blusters forward in his pursuit of access to the secrets of the invisible world even while recognizing that all signs point toward its inevitable failure. He even seems to divine what the reader can clearly see through Condé's running gag of the seemingly obliging master of the spirit world who raises Razyé's hopes only to die suddenly before fulfilling them: that he is the butt of a cosmic joke. Rather than considering the horror of the *babalawo's* death, Razyé immediately begins to suspect instead that "la mort de Melchior était un mauvais tour que le *babalawo* lui avait joué" (19). Later, when Ciléas the *kimbwazè* is found stone dead of no apparent cause the morning after he promised Razyé that he would capture the now deceased Cathy's soul for him to keep, Razyé goes so far as to say that "pour la deuxième fois, les invisibles le moquaient" (103). The repetitive nature of this form of mockery, as well as confirmation of the futility of Razyé's quest, are emphasized even in the structure of the text not only by the title of this chapter ("Arrive ce qui est déjà arrivé" (100)) but also by the chapter's location: it directly follows the chapter in which the deceased Cathy authoritatively

informs the reader that Razyé will never be able to contact her after her death because the masters of the invisible “sentaient qu’avec [lui] leurs secrets seraient entre de mauvaises mains” (96). In this way, the mystery and ambiguity of Cathy’s haunting of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* is here replaced by an ironic gap between Razyé’s knowledge of the spirit world and Cathy’s (as well as the reader’s), all combined with a judgment levied against Razyé’s ambitions, if not his very nature.

Against this backdrop of irony, these encounters, fatal for the *kimbwazè* and *babalawo*, also follow what is commonly known in humor writing as the ‘rule of three.’ Borrowing from the application of a similar concept in the field of rhetoric, the ‘rule of three’ suggests that a humorous effect will result from creating a pattern of three repeated elements in which the third element both fits the pattern and offers a surprising deviation from it, thus playing with the expectations raised by the preceding two elements. In this case, the pattern established by the deaths of Melchior and Ciléas involves the slow raising and sudden thwarting of Razyé’s hopes, with the former occurring over the course of relationships Razyé nurtures with the men and the latter made possible by their subsequent, sudden deaths. It is through the cruel final twist – hope drawn out over time before being snatched away at the last moment— that Razyé is taunted. His own comments after Ciléas’ death point to the almost slapstick nature of the game the cosmos seems to be playing with him: “par deux fois, [les invisibles] l’avaient laissé cogner sa face à la lucarne opaque de la mort, pour, en dernière minute, lui cacher son secret” (103).

By contrast, the third encounter of this nature (which adheres to the pattern insofar as it involves the thwarting of raised hopes through the sudden death of, in this

case, a clairvoyant), differs from the first two in being a heightened, accelerated experience, involving more dramatic events that take place in a shorter period of time. For one thing, the clairvoyant dies within minutes of meeting Razyé. For another, Razyé visits this last clairvoyant not under the influence of a carefully sustained hope but rather at a moment of extreme perturbation. Having traveled to Marie-Galante for the ostensible purpose of helping to resolve tensions amongst the Socialists at a high-powered meeting, Razyé is primarily concerned with hunting down his first-born son (a general disappointment to him, rather than a supporter of his schemes of vengeance, who angered him by bedding his mistress). However, what he finds instead is an island besieged by a hurricane that seems to echo (and amplify) the inner turmoil he experiences there. As the narrator notes: “ce qu’il n’avait pas calculé, c’est que le mauvais temps se jouerait de ses plans” (249). Instead of being able to follow through with his plans, he is carried away by an almost farcical series of events (in terms of their speed and their reliance on coincidence) that progressively wrench away his sense of control. First, his search for his son leads him instead to a first-time face-to-face confrontation with Cathy II, his daughter with Cathy who (in his mind, perversely) looks nothing like her mother and everything like himself, down to the rage she mirrors back to him (since, having been raised as the daughter of the recently ruined Aymeric, she hates Razyé with a passion). While still reeling from Cathy II’s appearance, rage, and the myriad implications of the fact that she is apparently dating his son, Razyé, in quick succession, inadvertently gets a friend fired, incites rumors that he fathered that friend’s baby, and then, “en plein désarroi,” he is forced by the sudden violence of the storm to seek shelter in the nearest house, which just happens to belong to a clairvoyant who ironically tells

him “tu n’as plus qu’à laisser faire , à present. C’est toi qui gagnes. À tous les coups.”

By the time the flood waters literally wash the clairvoyant and Razyé away before the latter can “le presser de questions” (252), Razyé seems to have lost all hope of achieving what he wants most. Indeed, once the wave carries him helplessly away from this last clairvoyant, he never regains his footing; he simply returns home, his violence and will to live depleted, to die.

In light of the fact that Razyé’s strongest motivating force has always been the search for a way to maintain or rediscover permanent contact with Cathy, it is logical that the discovery of a daughter who looks nothing like her would figure largely in Razyé’s emotional undoing. Indeed, the pain of this resemblance manqué (as “cette fois encore, la cruelle se dérobait et le laissait les mains vides” (250)) is all the more acute insofar as it evokes an earlier disappointment in the search for traces of Cathy in the second generation. To wit, that which Cathy’s daughter lacks, Justin-Marie, Cathy’s nephew via her brother Justin, has in abundance. Widely acknowledged as a startlingly accurate look-alike of his aunt, Justin-Marie provides a kind of torment not only for Razyé, but also for Aymeric, both of whom fervently desired to be haunted by Cathy as a way of finding comfort after her death. Razyé, for his part, is uncharacteristically attentive (and even physically affectionate) with Justin-Marie because of his “ressemblance...hallucinante” to Cathy. This resemblance particularly strikes Razyé when he sees the teenage boy emerging from a bath and thinks that Justin-Marie could actually be a reincarnation of “celle qu’il cherchait vainement tout partout qui, dans un jeu pervers, lui revenait travestie” (125). Aymeric echoes these sentiments some time later when he realizes that he thinks of Cathy and Justin-Marie “comme s’ils n’étaient

qu'une seule personne. Comme si elle s'était couchée femme, avait dormi et s'était réveillée quelques années plus tard avec toute la grace d'un adolescent pour le séduire à nouveau" (207).

As the men's comments suggest, Justin-Marie's resemblance to his aunt is rooted in a distinct physicality that intensely attracts Aymeric and Razyé even as it plays freely with gender boundaries. Indeed, through its suggestion of elusiveness and indeterminacy, the young man's striking androgyny, inherent in his first name (which joins the male 'Justin' with the more typically female 'Marie') and noticeable to all who meet him (many of whom can't quite discern his gender at first (163, 189)), recalls the uncertainty and confusion that Cathy has traditionally inspired in her admirers. More precisely, his androgyny recalls the confusion and then warps it; for, unlike Cathy's inconstancy, the indeterminacy of Justin-Marie's adolescent form creates a sense of unease in the reader, leading as it does to the conflation of familial gazes (of an uncle in Aymeric's case and a surrogate father in Razyé's) with the sensual, possessive gazes of the husband and lover. At no moment is this conflation more disconcerting than when Aymeric, having just informed Justin-Marie that the tuberculosis he suffered from would likely kill him, is so reminded of Cathy that he pulls his nephew, unsuspecting and clad only in a nightdress, into his embrace to kiss him at the base of his neck: "une place... chère aux baisers d'autrefois" (146), i.e. the 'baisers' he shared with Cathy.

If Cathy may be said to be thus haunting her former lovers in the form of Justin-Marie, it would have to be described as a mocking kind of haunting designed only to force them to relive painful events, as Justin-Marie's likeness of form is matched by a likeness of deed. Like Cathy, Justin-Marie betrays Razyé by leaving him for Aymeric.

An ardent admirer of Razyé's dubious accomplishments, Justin-Marie collects newspaper stories about his fear-inspiring exploits with the Socialists and dreams of inspiring that same fear in others when he grows up (137). Razyé therefore believes that their relationship is special and feels confident that when Justin-Marie spends time at Belles-Feuilles, he will act as Razyé's 'inside man' in his plans for vengeance because he sees Aymeric as nothing more than "le symbole d'une class haïssable et qu'il fallait abattre" (135). He is therefore shocked when Justin-Marie turns to his uncle for support once he learns he is gravely ill. Just like Cathy before him, Justin-Marie takes advantage of Aymeric's social position and affection while still preferring Razyé to him. Although he accepts his uncle's comfort and support, allowing himself to be seduced by all the luxuries Belles-Feuilles and his uncle have to offer (170), Justin-Marie continues to brag about Razyé to new acquaintances and hold his uncle at a distance. In fact, he reminds Aymeric precisely of Cathy in the way he reproduces exactly the way "d'un mouvement secret de son corps, Cathy refusait ses caresses" (180). Finally, like Cathy, Justin-Marie dies following a lingering illness, leaving the men to mourn the loss of someone they never really had.

Both Razyé and Aymeric are acutely aware of the sense of repetition Justin-Marie brings into their lives as he forces them into familiar roles. They both also assign a mischievous intent to this repetition on Cathy's part. Aymeric simply notes that his nephew's lack of affection for him proves that "une fois de plus, il était floué" in that, if Cathy had indeed returned to him "ce n'était sûrement que pour le moquer!" (183) Similarly, when Justin-Marie dies, Razyé believes he can hear Cathy in the distance "qui riait" and "qui se moquait" because she "n'en finissait pas de se réjouir du bon tour

qu'elle venait de lui jouer. Voilà maintenant qu'elle le laissait le coeur brisé à nouveau, avec un deuxième cadavre à veiller, à pleurer, à mettre en terre" (208). Furthermore, Condé joins her voice with Cathy's (and invites that of the reader as well) in mocking these men for remaining unable to free themselves from this pattern of pain and loss despite their awareness of its hold over them. She gives the sardonic, nearly tautological title "les perdants sont toujours les perdants" (150) to the chapter that sees both men demoralized in the midst of the Justin-Marie narrative: Razyé by the discovery, via letter, that Justin-Marie has devolved from acting as the arm of his vengeance to becoming the cosseted puppet of his arch nemesis, Aymeric by the burning of his cane fields (at Razyé's behest, though under the aegis of the Socialist party) that leads to his economic ruin. In this way, despite being entangled in a love story that pits them against each other as surely as their respective positions in society do, Razyé and Aymeric are united in their intuition that they are the object of a kind of supernatural mockery orchestrated by Cathy. This mockery furthermore highlights the fact that their very entanglement ensures that their opponent's losses do not amount to their own gain, whether in matters personal or public. Thus are the "revolutionary hero" and "patronizing *béké*" (Mardorossian 56), Razyé and Aymeric, respectively, brought to heel and their respective approaches to social change in post-abolition Guadeloupe (the one seeking dramatic change in the social structure, through violence if necessary, and the other attempting to make improvements on the existing structure while preserving his own status) simultaneously opened to satirical probing.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Mardorossian focuses on the demythologizing of the Razyé type, accomplished in part through a comparison between his work and the reform created by Aymeric, despite the patent "paternalism" in the latter's attitude (56). Equally important, I would add, is the fact that Aymeric falls into the classic trap of the 'bleeding-heart liberal': his sincere desire for all men to live together "libres" and "égaux" and able to

In the spirit of multi-directional satire, the mockery Cathy directs toward both Razyé and Aymeric turns toward her as well. This becomes particularly clear if one reads the Justin-Marie narrative arc as a kind of intra-textual parody of Cathy's story that creates critical distance between the reader and the characters even as it diminishes the romantic or tragic impact of the novel's love triangle(s).⁴⁹ Arguing that *La migration* as a whole may be read as a parody (though one whose target is less Brontë's novel than certain practices of reading postcolonial literature), Nicole Simek describes the creation of distance as an essential function of parody: "as a repetition of *Wuthering Heights*, Condé's parodic text allows the reader to experience the visceral pleasures associated with popular literature and also elicited by Brontë's text...while also providing mechanisms through which to claim distance from that pleasure, that is, to self-ironize" (99). When this distancing operates on the reader's response to the characters rather than the reader's experience of pleasure in the text, it works to disentangle the reader from the character's emotions and cast a harsher light on the characters' actions.⁵⁰ When this

"abolir jusqu'au souvenir de l'esclavage" (45) fosters only resentment in everyone he encounters. Razyé facilitates the mocking of an idealized type, the "messianic" hero (Mardorossian 56) revealed to be rather 'devilish.' Aymeric facilitates the mocking of an idealistic type, the supposedly heavenly "Chérubin céleste" (45) who aims to please but only irritates.

⁴⁹ Of course, the Justin-Marie arc also has an intertextual relationship with *Wuthering Heights*. On the one hand, it borrows largely from Linton's story, with the important exception that Heathcliff is able to profit from his sickly son's mewling ways as a means of torturing the young Catherine whereas Razyé only suffers through Justin-Marie. On the other hand, Condé's parody expands on a single moment in which Heathcliff is struck by the resemblance between Cathy and both Hareton and Catherine: a moment which marks the end of hostilities. The resemblance between Catherine and the next generation is at once more filial and more soulful (or, at any rate, much less sensual) than what Condé creates. The effect of this resemblance on Heathcliff is also of a much shorter duration: "[Catherine and Hareton] lifted their eyes together, to encounter Mr. Heathcliff: perhaps you have never remarked that their eyes are precisely similar, and they are those of Catherine Earnshaw...I suppose this resemblance disarmed Mr. Heathcliff...but it quickly subsided" (294).

⁵⁰ This parodic repetition represents only one distancing mechanism in Condé's arsenal, as distancing is, in fact, a reoccurring element of Condé's work, where tragic and horrific events frequently touch characters' lives without quite touching the reader. Carine Mardorossian demonstrates how the reader is distanced from Razyé (whereas the reader of *WH* is drawn to Heathcliff) by the contrast between the way several of

distancing process is furthermore coupled with the process of “parodic diminishment” (Ball 28) through which all that is noble, aspirational, and transcendental is brought low, the reader is left with a narrative that is more grotesque than romantic.

Notably, Justin-Marie represents a greatly diminished, grotesque version of Cathy. As mentioned above, his androgenous body invites gazes that uncomfortably blend the amorous eye with the paternal or avuncular one. Additionally, Justin-Marie’s is a body that, unlike Cathy’s initially healthy one, unites youth and attractiveness with a terminal disease. The following passage illustrates the disconcerting effect Justin-Marie is capable of producing, here in a scene that shortly precedes his death (which itself is preceded by his first sexual encounter): “dans ce vêtement [a cotton nightshirt with a large lace ruffle], sous le dais de ce lit à baldaquin, . . . il ressemblait plus que jamais à une grande poupée peinte en rouge et en blanc, une figure mi-séduisante mi repoussante dont on ignorait si elle était homme ou femme, ou les deux” (189). That Justin-Marie presents this absurd image moments before initiating a relatively violent sexual interlude with a young woman to whom he is drawn by nothing stronger than their mutual disenchantment, and that he dies at the climax of this interlude in a gurgling mess of blood and tissue spurting out of his nose and mouth offers a further diminution of Cathy’s story. Her own death occurs during childbirth, but follows only hours after her passionate but transgressive final encounter with Razyé. Thus, their personal endings signify the shift from Cathy’s relatively dynamic motivations to his rather more unappealing ones. Condé’s Cathy, strong-willed and independent, experiences the same tension that plagues Brontë’s Cathy, such that she suffers greatly from having bowed to

the characters idolize and “mythologize” him and the critiques the narrator makes both of these characters and of Razyé (55).

social pressure (with the important addition of a sense of racial shame) and material self-interest by choosing the status and financial security Aymeric could provide over the sublime, self-transcending passion she shares with Razyé, her professed soul mate. Read as a parody of Cathy, Justin-Marie suggests that, once Cathy's passion is stripped away, all that remains is an arrogant, unlikable, selfish person. In Justin-Marie's case, this manifests as a particularly petulant form of self-interest as he decides to turn away from Razyé, for example, because the latter failed to stop him from getting sick. In a show of failed logic, Justin-Marie reasons thusly: "Il avait cru en [Razyé]...et voilà qu'il lui laissait connaître la pire qui soit: la mort à seize ans! Lui qui parlait de défendre et de protéger les ouvriers du pays, il ne pouvait meme pas défendre et protéger celui qu'il appelait son enfant!" (147).

As Razyé's private disappointments repeat and accumulate over the course of the novel, with Justin-Marie's betrayal and death representing the penultimate blow before his ambitions finally crumble, they occupy increasing space in the text while pressing his public life and accomplishments into the background. In the end, Razyé is left exactly where he was at the beginning of the novel: imbued with the promise of power he will never be able to wield where it counts most for him. The conundrum Razyé represents to Melchior (and the probable reason why the latter is killed) in the first chapter still holds true in the final chapter in which he appears. Even though Melchior had already "révélé des secrets réservés aux seuls *babalawo*" to him, "il sentait bien ce que sa conduite comportait de danger. Razyé risquait de prendre contact avec ces *egun* dont il était le portrait et de se server de leur pouvoir pour son intérêt personnel" (16). In the final analysis, Razyé's transgressive desires won't be realized. He doesn't achieve vengeance

writ large in the sky—or in the annals of Guadeloupean history— as a compensation for past betrayals at the hands of Cathy and displacement within society as a whole. Instead, he receives posthumous poetic justice in the form of his wife (also Aymeric’s sister), Irmine de Linsseuil, who, after years of mistreatment at his hands, applies herself to refurbishing his reputation and his house. She seeks not only to give meaning to her own existence but also to help their children (around whom “le souvenir de leur père flottait...comme une mauvaise odeur” (290)) gain acceptance into the same “bonne société pointoise” that, ironically, he sought to burn to the ground (both literally and figuratively).

The Fantastical Satirist: Célianire from *Célianire cou-coupé*

In both *La migration des cœurs* and *Traversée de la mangrove*, Condé employs the supernatural as a mechanism to limit the potency and self-determination of her central characters. As they attempt to engage with the present in terms of the past, whether personal or ancestral, they are both led into social activism: with Razyé following a desire for vengeance into Socialism and Francis Sancher following a desire for atonement (for the guilt he inherited through his family curse) into anti-colonial and Marxist movements originating in Cuba. But Condé gives various supernatural forces the final word on Sancher’s and Razyé’s efforts to impact their world and their own destinies: the reward for Razyé’s active resistance and Sancher’s passive submission being the same teasing thwarting of their plans and hopes.

Vastly different is Célianire’s relationship with supernatural forces in *Célianire cou-coupé*, the novel with which Condé closed out the 1990s and reached the apogee of

the trajectory she outlined from writing “militant” novels to writing “muddled” ones. *Célanire* does indeed seem ‘muddled.’ Much critical writing on the novel has tended to support Condé’s own assertion that this novel’s “message, if indeed there ever was a message” is intentionally “difficult to perceive.” Following a train of thought that evokes Condé’s own understanding of her oeuvre in the 1990s, Dawn Fulton notes that *Célanire* has “a narrative structure that suggests an amplification of *Traversée de la mangrove*’s interpretive indeterminacy” (*Signs* 106). Françoise Mugnier describes the novel’s composition as a kind of postmodern muddle. Because the plot itself is “invraisemblable,” requiring a “détachement amusé de la part du lecteur” (104), appreciation of the novel derives from reading it as a text, in the most literal sense: i.e. “comme un tissu, souvent humoristique, de citations et de transformations de matériaux littéraires et sociaux” (105). Nicole Simek observes that the “dizzying mélange” that results from *Célanire*’s many sources “functions...to make the novel, like its title character, *incompréhensible*, in the etymological sense of that which cannot be grasped or contained within the normative parameters of categorization or representation” (104).

However, although her ethnicity certainly coheres with Simek’s definition of “incompréhensible” (as she is “pas franchement négresse” but “plutôt métisse d’on ne savait combien de races” (14)) and her presence in the novel, for all its centrality, might best be described as distant (she is never truly the focalizer and her words are frequently presented to the reader through indirect discourse—even when her thoughts are being reported at length (e.g. 67-69, 88, 120)), *Célanire* herself is anything but ‘muddled.’ Rather, she is animated by a strong sense of purpose. Her ultimate goal is to avenge herself against all those who were involved in slashing her throat during the botched

ceremony during which she was meant to be an infant sacrifice to the “super-démon Okokpi.” Though only just arrived in Ivory Coast when we first see her, she is already gathering her forces for an eventual return to her birthplace of Guadeloupe: “elle prenait tout son temps: la vengeance est un plat qui se mange froid. Elle aiguisa l’une contre l’autre ses jolies dents carnassières” (20). Unlike Razyé, who plans to return to Guadeloupe to pursue plans of vengeance even as his ambitions are checked by Melchior in the first section of the novel, Célanire is granted free rein to plot her revenge. As the remainder of the novel illustrates, from her mischievous escapades in Ivory Coast to her more serious endeavors in Guadeloupe, Célanire inhabits her world in perfect harmony with the supernatural forces at work there. In fact, suppositions abound that Célanire is part of the supernatural realm, a *cheval* possessed (or mounted) by a malevolent spirit. Certainly, forces stronger than nature seem to do her bidding, as people who stand in her way (whether they are a target for revenge or simply have a job that she would like to have herself) are routinely ‘killed off,’ usually off-screen and often in the form of violent animal attacks that seem less than entirely natural (as, for example, when a horse suddenly becomes enraged, throws its rider, and heads straight for one of the men involved in her sacrifice, trampling him to pieces without doing harm to anyone else in the area (234)) or unexplained (as when two characters’ bodies are found, drowned, outside a house that one of them had earlier identified as belonging to Quimbois siren maman Dîô (185)). Additionally, she exercises with impunity an apparent ability to bend others to her will, as several characters feel they have been “ensorcelé” by her. Her lover (soon-to-be husband) Thomas is particularly in her thrall, and happy to stay there: “On aurait dit que sa maîtresse l’ensorcelait. À côté d’elle, il était sans volonté et ne

distinguaît plus le bien du mal” (50). Accordingly, the longer Thomas stays by Célianire’s side, the more happily he languishes (gaining weight and taking laudanum), content to watch approvingly as she follows her every whim.

Thus does Célianire, a character who enjoys the full power of free will and self-determination, stand out in Condé’s oeuvre as an exercise in fantasy and wish-fulfillment. Entirely unlike Francis Sancher and Razyé, Célianire desires nothing that she is unable to obtain, in matters both personal and public. It therefore remains to be determined how Condé’s choice to endow Célianire with such an unusual degree of not only autonomy but also supernatural authority advances her exploration of themes of vengeance and social activism already addressed in *Traversée de la mangrove* and *La migration des cœurs*.

As a starting point, it is useful to consider the supernatural origins and authorial nature of Célianire’s power to follow through with her plans of vengeance while almost effortlessly effecting change in two colonial societies. As Fabienne Viala notes, although Célianire is literally possessed by a demon throughout most of the novel,⁵¹ in a more figurative sense, it might be understood that “ce démon est celui de l’invention et de la création.” By extension, then, “Célianire se fait *alter ego* de la romancière guadeloupéenne dans une ultime métaphore métatextuelle, où l’émancipation féminine se dit bel et bien par le pouvoir de la fiction” (146). In this sense, Célianire emerges as an embodiment of the liberating power of fiction available to the novelist (and, more specifically, the woman novelist) through the power of creation. Both her husband Thomas and one of her female lovers, Éliissa de Kerdoré, independently recognize

⁵¹ Although, as is typical of Condé, Célianire’s supernatural status is never absolutely and explicitly confirmed in the text, I second Viala in her assertion that the relentless references to this status (especially as they are made in several countries by wholly unrelated individuals) “peu à peu accrédit[ent] la thèse du démon qui habit Célianire” (146).

Célanire's writer-like capacity. The former consciously considers his wife to be "une sorte d'artiste, de poétesse, qui se mouvait dans le royaume de la fiction" (203) and who freely blurs the lines between truth and fiction. The latter similarly thinks of her lover as "une tireuse des contes qui metamorphose à fantaisie le matériel oral, une romancière qui rédige son autobiographie...selon son humeur de l'instant" (274). Living her life in a way that mimics the creative powers of the writer, Célanire deftly adapts her entire demeanor to her circumstances. Depending upon which mood is most likely to influence her audience of the moment, she can appear alternatively seductive, virginal, aggressive, disarming, maternal and more. In this way, she offers an inversion of a statement Condé once made regarding the nature of creative inspiration (in response to a question about whether or not the spirit of Tituba really lived with her while she was writing *Moi, Tituba...*); not only is "the very act of writing... 'supernatural' in itself" (Pfaff 59), but so, too, can 'supernatural' power become an act of writing.

In Célanire's case, this supernatural, demon-inspired life-writing additionally has strongly satirical overtones that eventually earn her a reputation as a "dangéreuse féministe" (121), among other things. Both her public activities in Adjame-Santey/Bingerville and their more shadowy counterparts offer a commentary on the matrix of race, gender, and cultural issues in French Colonial Africa that is always mordant – if sometimes presented through the indirection of seduction and non-verbal ironies. This commentary is literally mordant in the case of the sudden death of M. Desrussie, the director of the Foyer des métis whose job Célanire subsequently takes. Something of a sexual predator himself, he becomes the prey of a large mygale spider that "l'[a] mordu à la verge" (20) while he was in bed with one of his many teenaged

mistresses; thus, the instrument of his dominance becomes the source of his greatest vulnerability. This gender commentary, while striking, is secondary to the fact that M. Desrussie's death is the first of several sudden deaths that conveniently clear the path for Célianire to pursue her various plans

It is in her role as director of the Foyer des métis that Célianire makes the greatest impact on Bingerville. In the spirit of its focus on the 'métis' experience, she turns the foyer into a utopic haven for all those wronged by powers both tribal and colonial. In a play on her ostensible, missionary purpose for being in Africa (as an oblate), she manages to turn the foyer into an improbable "Éden" (44). Not only do the métis children flourish there at alarming rates, the boys and girls being educated in the same way and succeeding equally at national exams, but so do fruit trees, palm groves, and vegetable gardens, which helps toward her goal of making the foyer self-sufficient ("en autarcie" (35)) and relatively independent from the vagaries of both the colonial government and the rulings of king Koffi Ndizi. In addition, she ensures that the foyer functions as a "paradis pour les femmes" (41) where women displeased with their lot in life (their subservience to men, the drudgery of their daily tasks) may find not only shelter but fulfillment.

Joining together these distinct missions for the foyer is her central vision: to make of the foyer an educational and nurturing space for métis children by day and a 'house of love' by night, where colonized African women and white men can forge intimate bonds with each other. In this way, Célianire suggests, colonizing men might be literally seduced out of the colonial mindset—as she claims to have done with her husband, Thomas. As outrageous as this proposal is (although it is less so than Swift's 'modest' one), it effectively strikes out in several directions at once, offering a concise example of

Ball's satirical multidirectionality. In addition to turning a recurring theme in Condé's work on its head, such that, instead of one's personal life inevitably thwarting one's attempts at social activism, social change is accomplished through one's most personal life, Célianire's proposal also turns the foyer into an ironic space. She is essentially attempting to invert the colonial power dynamic that necessitated the creation of a Foyer des métis in the first place, making the out-of-the-way receptacle for the "rejetons" (53) that result—primarily— from couplings of white men and women of color made under varying degrees of constraint the site where the seeds of social transformation are planted. Finally, through this plan Célianire transplants Condé's own vision of the importance of métissage in the Antilles into Africa in the early twentieth century. As Condé explains in *Penser la créolité*, one of several texts in which she bristles against what she considers the dictates of the Créolistes, métissage (particularly as an ongoing process) stands as the antithesis of stagnation:

Le métissage a toujours été la terreur des sociétés constituées qui veulent protéger le ventre de leurs femmes contre le sperme des mâles étrangers et par conséquent contre le changement. Car tout changement terrifie. Par sa littérature, l'Antillais exorcise sa peur de l'avenir et se persuade de la pérennité du présent. (*Penser*, 309)

In this sense, Célianire's plan addresses a different set of gender issues, subsisting this time between colonized women and colonized men. By actively engaging African women in the process of métissage, Célianire is combating the belief of "certains hommes" that 'the' African woman should, on principle, resist all social reform as synonymous with colonial invasion and accept the responsibility of remaining "la gardienne éternelle des traditions" (122).

But for all that these plans for the foyer would seem to make of Célanire the ultimate opponent of all forms of oppression, whether colonial, sexual, or gender-oriented, the ensemble of her actions in Bingerville does not quite bear this out. Her overall worldview being unquestionably heteronormative, she subtly threatens, via letter, to ‘out’ Hakim, a mixed-race, closeted gay man, in retaliation for his threefold offense: he turns down Célanire’s offer of a teaching position at the foyer, rejects her (eventually violent) sexual advances, and accidentally sees the scar on her neck (which she always covers). Despite her repeated claims regarding women’s rights, Célanire cannot be called a proponent of universal solidarity among women (particularly since she is likely the reason why Thomas’ first wife Charlotte was killed in an apparent wild animal attack), or even among colonized women, in light of her callous treatment of women like Madame Desrussie, whom Célanire loves and then leaves once they cease to be of use to her. Nor can Célanire be considered a consistent opponent of colonization or colonizing gestures, as she blithely takes land from the Ebrié people in order to expand the gardens of the foyer (36) and smilingly approves of King Koffi Ndizi converting to Christianity because of his love for her (65).

What is more, although Célanire has an enormous and lasting impact on Bingerville — in fact, the majority of chapter eight is dedicated to the narrator’s review of Célanire’s legacy, which includes the women of the foyer helping to foster the “naissance d’une véritable aristocratie” (122) in Ivory Coast and former students becoming important educators and politicians — her interest in the town is revealed to be more playful than serious. A range of characters observe her shallow level of interest and investment. Despite barely knowing her, Hakim suspects that Célanire is motivated by

the desire to “narguer [those around her], mesurer son pouvoir de retourner les esprits” (56). Easily believing her stepmother capable of killing her mother Charlotte, Céciliane’s stepdaughter Ludvine is nevertheless extremely shocked to see that Céciliane’s deep grief at leaving her dear friends at the foyer behind to move to Guadeloupe dissipates entirely the moment said friends are out of Céciliane’s sight (128). Most persuasively, her husband Thomas displays a surprising ability to offer clear-sighted reflections on her behavior despite being thoroughly “ensorcelé” by Céciliane’s charms (both feminine and otherwise). When she first arrives in Bingerville, he perceives that lurking beneath her pious discourses are very different feelings: “elle s’en moquait pas mal...de l’Afrique” (32). Once they leave Bingerville, he provides a more precise formulation of her overall attitude: “À Bingerville, elle s’était amusée à mettre les esprits à l’envers par jeu, pour se divertir” (203).

The significance of this combination of detachment and playfulness (play for play’s sake, with any consequences that come from it being incidental) derives from its contrast with Céciliane’s more profound investment in Guadeloupe. Although she employs similarly playful and mocking tendencies while there, her goal is not merely “pour se divertir.” As Thomas observes, “elle était revenue à Guadeloupe pour des motifs autrement sérieux” (203), although he attributes these ‘motifs’ to a desire to discover the identity of her parents rather than avenge herself and her mother. As she therefore moves from playful gestures made for the sake of subversion to playfulness with serious intent, Céciliane follows a slightly different trajectory than Razyé in reversing Elliott’s vision of a satirical shift from the ‘primitive’ satirist to the ‘sophisticated’ or literary one. Céciliane’s experience suggests that the reversal of this shift signifies an

increase in satirical potency. In Ivory Coast, she professes great interest in a variety of issues without seeming able to sustain or deepen her interest in any of them, and to some extent she replicates this behavior in Guadeloupe. In particular, whereas in Ivory Coast she revolutionized the Foyer des Métis, in Guadeloupe she opens the Au Gai Rossignol, a musical conservatory designed to expose children to various types of local and global music. Whereas the foyer leads to the development of a secondary project (a part-time brothel), the opening of the conservatory sets off a chain reaction of association-founding, one to help bored bourgeois women find social and cultural fulfillment and another to facilitate the development of an openly Lesbian community in Guadeloupe.

But in Guadeloupe, as evidenced during the reception she holds to make her first public appearance as the new governor's wife, her professed public interests operate in parallel with her darker, personal plans. In a complexly layered scene with regard to Célianire's mindset as well as her relationship with both the narrator and Condé's real-world context, Célianire speaks to a gathered crowd to deliver an "éloge de la culture traditionnelle," with a special emphasis on the importance of creole, the "lang manman-aw" of Guadeloupeans, to their collective identity. From the reader's perspective, the content of Célianire's speech is both anachronistic (part of a general pattern of anachronistic references in the novel⁵² and a sign of Célianire's supernatural/authorial access to knowledge located beyond her fictional context) and manifestly satirical. More than a decade after portraying Lucien Évaristes's struggles to please his "amis patriotes" in *Traversée*, the Créolistes are still a favorite target of Condé's, particularly as regards

⁵² For more on this, see, for example, Makward, Fulton, and Mugnier. Even the Foyer des métis is anachronistic. The actual foyer in Bingerville opened in 1949 and was soon converted to the Orphelinat National in 1953. <<http://femmesensante.e-monsite.com/pages/coup-de-coeur/orphelinat-de-bingerville-les-collegiens-oublies-par-les-textes-mais-sauves-par-generosite.html>>

the emphasis on Créole. Célanire's speech does not revolutionize the early twentieth-century mindset with late twentieth century wisdom. Instead, her ideas simply puzzle them and leave them "scandalisés." In this way, Célanire's speech directs a literary form of satire at Condé's reader. Simultaneously, the speech also suggests Célanire's deeper engagement with what Elliot would call her 'primitive' satirical intent toward the land of her birth. As even Célanire's contemporary audience might have noticed, her interest in these proto-Créoliste concepts is strictly performative:

s'ils avaient su écouter, ils auraient pu remarquer que Célanire...ne prêtait aucune attention à ce qu'elle disait. Elle avait grimpé là où elle était pour être vue de tous, pour narguer son monde. Elle se moquait: ... 'Regardez-moi bien. Je vais vous faire tourner en bourriques. Oui, à cause de moi, la Guadeloupe va chavirer.' (202)

In a rare instance where the narrator seems to have access to Célanire's inner monologue, the reader learns of her serious interest to seek revenge. More significantly, aggression and mockery (or even humiliation) go hand in hand with her plans to do so: it is notable that on the path to making Guadeloupe "chavirer," Célanire will first seek to "narguer" its inhabitants and make them "tourner en bourriques."

In this way, Célanire signals that the revenge narrative (promised in the first pages of the novel) is about to begin in earnest. Accordingly, the narrative begins to focus on the series of increasingly loaded attacks Célanire launches (though her involvement is sometimes implied rather than affirmed) against those who participated in the failed sacrifice. The 'malfaiteur' Madeska, who had been attempting to hide on Montserrat, is literally eviscerated during a hurricane (218). His son Zuléfi, who, as a Christian convert, believes that "le bon Dieu pardonne...à tout le monde" (225), is trampled by a horse almost as soon as he resolves on clearing his conscience by confessing his role in the

sacrifice to the authorities. Agénor, the ‘blanc pays’ who requested the sacrifice in order to further his political career, reluctantly realizes that Célanire’s return to Guadeloupe heralds the end of his life and is granted the fate he unintentionally asked for. He attends a costume ball in order to see Célanire and decides to dress as Roman Emperor Nero not only because he thinks he looks good in a toga but also because “il aurait volontiers fait son modèle de cet empereur” (264). Appropriately, then, he dies shortly thereafter in a fire (267).

The most grotesque fate, however, is the one that awaits her biological father, Yang Ting, who stole her from her biological mother, Tonine, moments after her birth so she could be delivered to the sacrifice. Yang Ting’s battered body is discovered in his room in Peru the morning after he takes home a young woman who happens to look a great deal like Tonine (the reader easily presumes that this woman is possibly Célanire herself, who also happens to be in the area at that time). The details of this death tell the story of its vengeful nature. The blood splattered over the walls and floor, as well as the cuts, scratches, and bite marks on his body, testify to the extended duration of the attack—prolonged even further by the rumors that the room is thereafter haunted every night by sounds of screaming and fighting (314-5). Most disturbingly, a single lewd detail illustrates the personal nature of this attack, the outrage behind it, and the real desire to humiliate the victim. Yang Ting was found with his penis torn off and placed in his mouth “tel un cigare” (314), his manhood taken from him and perverted much like Tonine’s motherhood had been.

To understand the importance Condé unflinchingly places on vengeance in Célanire’s life, it is important to note that Yang Ting’s death not only represents the

spectacular culmination of the revenge narrative, but it also triggers an important stage in her personal development. By contrast, it is important to note that this stage is not triggered, for example, by Célianire's experience of finding her birthmother's grave and learning about her life. An angelic martyr and candidate for sainthood, Tonine performs miracles for others (particularly in terms of helping infertile women conceive) but suffers endlessly for herself, involuntarily mimicking Jesus' tortures (stigmata and scratches as if from a crown of thorns— every Easter). Uncharacteristically touched by her mother's overwrought goodness, particularly in light of her own tendency to be associated with all that is diabolical, Célianire "sanglot[e]" while a sermon is given in the new church that has been unofficially named "Sainte-Masoeur-Tonine" (289).

Yet this experience with a "Jésus-Christ femelle" (285) does not encourage her to believe in forgiveness or bring her anything like the closure she experiences after creating the "vision d'enfer" (313) that was Yang Ting's death. After his death, she essentially experiences something akin to a second rebirth (the first having occurred when Dr. Pinceau saved her life and the demon likely 'mounted' her). The desire for vengeance having been her sustaining life force, she is left aimless and listless once her final plan is carried out, as if "elle venait de livrer une bataille qui l'avait complètement vidée." That her eyes "d'habitude si étincelants" were now "comme morts" (320) clearly suggests that something in Célianire has come to an end, and it is, moreover, possible to interpret this ending as a sign that the spirit inhabiting her, now satisfied, has dismounted to allow the 'real' Célianire to take over. Thus is Célianire reduced to an infant-like state. Stricken with whole-body weakness, she gets carried "comme un bébé" (326) and chooses to drink milk instead of eating food (323). Once nursed back to health (by a possible witch who

decides that “plus que du lait, il lui fallait du sang” (332) and to whom Célanire holds out her arms at first sight in an instinctual recognition of a mother figure), Célanire is entirely altered. The vibrant, often wild-animalistic ferociousness of her former self has now given way to an energy that is rather “lente, réfléchie, languide.” Her eyes have lost their “éclat” but gained in “mystère” (334).

Thus transformed, when she returns to Guadeloupe in search of a new goal in life (“un nouveau but pour continuer son existence” (335)), the goal she settles on is diametrically opposed to her previous one. Whereas vengeance suggests a connection between the present and the bitterness of the past, Célanire’s new goal (“c’est tout ce que je peux être à présent: une bonne mere” (342)) looks to the future while also honoring someone treasured in the past: i.e. her mother, Tonine, who devoted her entire adult life to promoting motherhood even after her own opportunity to be a mother was stolen from her. In keeping with this shift from vengeance to reproduction, the image of male sexuality in the novel’s final lines provides a hopeful, life-affirming purification of earlier, horrific images. In place of M. Desrussie with his mygale-bitten genitalia and Yang Ting with his unorthodox cigar, these lines present Thomas who, generally indolent enough to worry about his ability to provide Célanire with a child, suddenly, “miraculeusement...sentit son member se raffermir” (342)). In this way, Célanire trades the controlled, reality-shaping creativity granted by her supernatural authority for the commonplace but uncontrollable creativity of reproduction, leaving open the question of what, precisely, being a “*bonne mère*” entails.

By concluding this revenge narrative in such an upbeat, almost comic way, former social ills purged before a new way of living is heralded, Condé provides both Célanire

and the reader with an unusual degree of what feels like closure. Célanire succeeds not only in avenging herself but also in locating her parents, providing the reader with a relatively coherent narrative of how she became involved in the sacrifice and how she made those who got her involved pay. Moreover, her plans for revenge are not just successful; they are also fruitful as a necessary step in helping her achieve peace of mind.

Conclusion

As suggested by the closure she experiences at the conclusion of the novel, Célanire's life is a less muddled narrative than Condé's novel about Célanire. In this sense, the indeterminacy which critics attribute to this novel might best be understood as a tangle (of voices, of characters whose stories are only partially explored and partially entwined with Célanire's, for instance) around the solid but inaccessible core of Célanire.

Her strength and authority being undoubtedly supernatural in origin, they form a necessary part of the progression Condé creates (ironically, in light of Elliott's emphasis on a movement in the opposite direction) from "sophisticated" social critique to the raw energy (and violence) of "primitive" critique in *Traversée de la mangrove*, *La migration des cœurs*, and *Célanire cou-coupé*. Moreover, the progression from Sancher to Célanire is one from passive victim of these forces to active wielder of them: from a kind of reluctant fatality (where the future is born entirely of the past) to the freedom of self-determination.

Francis Sancher's life is a lesson in impossibility and failure. The very title of *Traversée de la mangrove* is rooted in an impossibility: "on ne traverse pas la mangrove, on s'empale sur les racines des palétuviers. On s'enterre et on étouffe dans la boue

saumâtre” (192). It is only fitting, then, that *Traversée* begins with the image of Francis Sancher on the ground, “la face enfouie dans la boue grasse” (14). He strives to “démêler l’écheveau de la vie” (170), but learns that he cannot extract the thread of his own narrative from the knot of the past. Nor can he, in accepting the hold the past has over him, control what happens in the future, either in terms of discontinuing his cursed family line or in preserving his personal legacy in a never-to-be-written novel: “j’essaie de fixer la vie que je vais perdre avec des mots. Pour moi, écrire, c’est le contraire de vivre” (221). Sancher’s mistake, therefore, is that he refused to live his life on his own terms in the present, even when life comes looking for him.

Razyé also struggles to live in the present. But rather than passively accepting that his past is his destiny, as Sancher ultimately does, Razyé actively tries to relive his past. On the one hand, he is able to act on his knowledge of the past and, like Célianire, successfully avenge himself against those he feels have wronged him, with social justice work being achieved as a side-effect of those efforts. On the other hand, however, he can’t shape his legacy or determine how others will remember and interpret his actions. His desire to “inscrire sa vengeance en jambages étincelants dans le ciel de la Guadeloupe” (123) culminates only in his life being rewritten; the community works to “rabort[er]” his reputation (268) and his wife Irmine tries to spruce up his house as well as her memory of him in order to reenter the bourgeoisie. More important for Razyé is the fact that his inability to accept the fact that he will never get Cathy back limited both his power and his life in the present.

Célianire, by contrast, avenges the past in a way that allows her to live fully in the present and, eventually, move forward into the future. She delivers her vengeful blows

with a satirical flair that combines violence, poetic justice, judgment, and dark humor. As such, the sharp edge of Célanire's satire cuts (literally, in terms of her father) right through past and present tangles to create a fresh start for herself, represented by her concluding focus on starting a family. But unlike Razyé and Sancher, she does not have a set image of her life or her actions that she would like to fix in writing. Rather, she stays attuned to the changeability of the present. When Élissa de Kerdoré describes Célanire's way of moving through the world, she does so in terms that recall Condé's own approach to her own legacy and the legacy of her work. Célanire is like "une romancière qui rédige son autobiographie, ajoute, supprime, rallonge, ampute tel ou tel fait selon son humeur de l'instant" (274). Like Condé, she is changeable and opaque because she refused to be defined by her past. She is powerful because she is aware of the past but doesn't try to live in it, and because she is engaged with her community, but ultimately focused on herself. As an extension of Condé, she shows that Condé's form of literature is one that seeks individual empowerment above all else.

CHAPTER 3

HUMOR, MOCKERY AND IDENTITY QUESTS IN THE CARIBBEAN

DIASPORA

Introduction

The literary trope of the identity quest takes on a special significance in the twentieth century, an era called the “Age of Migration”.⁵³ It earned this moniker through the increase it saw in the volume and velocity of migration across the globe, caused by the ripple effect of the seismic shifts of global war, crumbling empires, and the rise of new nationalisms. With people coming into contact with each other and with changing contexts more than ever before, the question of how to belong (in what space, to what community) presented itself with new urgency, particularly in literatures emerging from immigrant or diasporic communities. In an era, therefore, where the displacements of migration are often fracturing experiences, the notion of an identity quest promises a kind of reconstruction and serves as a reoccurring theme. Yet while the need for identity construction is very real, the idea of journeying to ‘discover’ a sense of self coexists uneasily with the concomitant postmodern distrust of overarching narratives that promise any such neatness, wholeness, and certainty. As the postmodern mind reminds us, we construct reality through our perception of it, and although national borders and the legal

⁵³ S. Castles and M.J. Miller famously gave this title to the twentieth century in their *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. They emphasize the scale of modern migration: “the hallmark of the age of migration is [its] global character” (260). Paul White opens *Writing across Worlds: Literature and Migration* by echoing this proclamation as he outlines the ways in which migration causes identities (both of the migrants and of the already settled populace) to shift (1).

consequences of crossing them are very real, our communities are largely imagined and our homelands often imaginary.⁵⁴

In a series of three novels that portray characters embarking on identity quests while within the orbit of Caribbean diasporas (of Guadeloupe, Jamaica, and Haiti, respectively), Maryse Condé and Zadie Smith strike a balance between the pressing desire for a cohesive identity and a postmodern awareness of its inevitably contingent, constructed nature by exposing their questing characters to mockery. The characters' quests begin in all earnestness: Marie-Noëlle's search for her father in Condé's *Desirada*, Irie's search for acceptance as a mixed-race adolescent girl in a changing London in Smith's *White Teeth*, and Levi's search for a group worthy of identifying with in Smith's *On Beauty*. Taken together, these characters represent a progressively inverted relationship between the 'authenticity' of their Caribbean connections and the zeal with which they try to lay claim to them. Whereas Marie-Noëlle is herself a migrant who leaves Guadeloupe as a young girl and maintains an ambivalent attitude toward it, Irie develops a certain theoretical curiosity about Jamaica as the daughter of an immigrant from that nation, and Levi becomes totally immersed in the Haitian American community that is part of his world in Boston but with which he has no familial relationship whatsoever. Yet regardless of the depth of their connection with Caribbean communities, each character encounters similar epistemological stumbling blocks that they can only get over through the experience of mockery. As Andrew Stott writes in the "Comic Identity" chapter of his overview of *Comedy*, characters inspire mockery or laughter when they

⁵⁴ In "Imaginary Homelands," Salman Rushdie speaks of both the loss experienced by migrant writers in exile who try to capture the true homeland but create only "fictions, not actual cities or villages but invisible ones" (10) and the creative freedom afforded by their uprooted condition: "it is perhaps one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his [literary] parents" (21).

exhibit a “failure of self-awareness” or “inability to reflect on the nature of experience” (39). The experience of mockery, therefore, jolts these characters into a new level of self-awareness about the nature of their quests. This then redirects their quests toward the development of a critical apparatus and humor perspective necessary to construct an identity that is at once self-conscious and functional, sensitive to external influences but not liable to collapse into itself under their pressure.

Although humor is most often discussed in relation to dramatic comedy, where its function is generally to bind people (and therefore societies) together through laughter,⁵⁵ there is significant precedent for considering humor as a means of strengthening an individual’s inner self. In his influential essay on the subject, Freud describes “Humour” as an individual’s psychic armor in a hostile world:

humour has in it a *liberating* element. But it has also something fine and elevating....It refuses to be hurt by the arrows of reality or to be compelled to suffer. It insists that it is impervious to wounds dealt by the outside world, in fact, that these are merely occasions for affording it pleasure....Humour is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies the triumph not only of the ego, but also of the pleasure-principle, which is strong enough to assert itself here in the face of the adverse real circumstances. (5-6)

In this interpretation (which begins by sounding like Freud’s answer to Hamlet’s question of how ‘to be’ in this world), humor allows the conscious self not only to deflect attacks from the outside world but to transform them into its own pleasure.

⁵⁵ This understanding of humor’s communal focus exists both in canonical studies of humor and more recent studies of humor and laughter in postcolonial contexts. For instance, whereas Northrop Frye writes that “it is a commonplace of criticism that comedy tends to deal with characters in a social group, whereas tragedy is more concentrated on a single individual” (207), Suzanne Reichl and Mark Stein write in the introduction to their *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial* that “during processes of identification, laughter that is shared by in-group members wields cohesive powers. The laughter at someone outside the community strengthens the ties within” (13).

Without wishing to apply a series of Freudian constructs to the work of Smith and Condé, it is nevertheless significant to note the striking similarities between his analysis of humor as a strengthening agent that allows the individual to feel free from, if not superior to, his environment and Condé's comments about the constructive potential of a sense of humor in navigating a postcolonial context. In an interview at the 2008 Festival Étonnant-Voyageurs de Saint-Malo on the subject of migration, Condé fervently advocates for the role of humor as a necessary foundation for a strong self that develops over and against external difficulties:

J'ai toujours eu beaucoup d'humour. Parce que la vie que nous menons, nous ex-colonisés, est très dure, et que le seul moyen de la supporter, de la sublimer aussi, c'est de rire. Si l'on rit, si l'on arrive à voir le côté un peu dérisoire, humoristique, on a déjà gagné la partie. Autrement, on est dans une espèce d'atmosphère dramatique, mélodramatique même à mon avis, qui n'apporte aucun résultat. Il faut savoir rire de soi, c'est le seul moyen de devenir, un jour, fort et vainqueur. Le rire est le premier pas vers la libération. On commence par rire. On rit donc on se libère. On se libère donc on peut combattre. C'est comme ça que je vois les choses. ("Repenser l'identité")

For Condé, therefore, humor is once again transformative and strengthening, with the added element of the importance of laughing at oneself. Moreover, humor is productive; by implication, it "apporte...[un] résultat" for an individual who might otherwise wallow in melodrama. As Condé is an author who is often seen as working toward deconstruction,⁵⁶ her clear emphasis on construction in this instance suggests the significance of the individual in Condé's vision as the essential structure (composed not of ideology but rather of a humor perspective) through which everything else must be

⁵⁶ In the interview titled "Créolité Bites," for instance, Patrick Chamoiseau questions Condé for being critical of Négritude and Créolité but "incapable of proposing any alternative" (150). Less accusatorily, Nicole Simek offers a useful and insightful catalogue of Condé's tactical use of deconstructing gestures both inside her work and outside of it in "Rusing with the Canon: Insolent Imitation, Parodic Intertextuality." See, in particular, the section titled 'Staging Insolence' (111-117).

filtered. Leah Hewitt further suggests that mockery is a defining characteristic of Condé's authorial voice. In her words, "[Condé writes] tough-spirited, unsentimental novels that mock their heroines' delusions while simultaneously sympathizing with their predicaments" (163). In other words, Condé rides a razor's edge between mockery and sympathy in the name of self-awareness, for herself and for others. In this, she distinguishes between her brand of formative, delusion-shattering mockery and malicious mockery that serves only to belittle its target.

Humor is also the bedrock of Zadie Smith's personal vision, as almost every review written about her first three novels loudly proclaims.⁵⁷ Philip Tew describes Smith's humor in a way that echoes Condé's stance on humor when he asserts that "Smith paradoxically affiliates humour and suffering" (47) in her work. However, he locates the humor entirely in the narrator-reader relationship, at a remove from the realm of the characters where the suffering takes place: "the characters laugh very little."⁵⁸ They do not share humour among themselves. They suffer, seeing a world verging on the tragic" (48). In his analysis of *On Beauty*, Roy Sommer echoes Tew's observations about

⁵⁷ Indeed, Molly Thompson even finds it necessary to argue that readers should not allow Smith's widely acknowledged "humorous, buoyant tone" (123) to distract them from the serious social commentary she is offering— despite the fact that Smith's humor is most often an integral part of her social commentary.

⁵⁸ A notable exception to this observation occurs in *On Beauty* when the overly detached, unemotional Harold Belsey has a sudden emotional breakthrough. He becomes fully engaged in his environment through his inability to contain his hysterical laughter at a glee club performance. The laughter overtakes his whole body, forcing him to leave the room (347) to avoid the sight of their "swaying and clicking" and, the final straw, "moonwalk[ing]" (347). I read this scene as an inversion (in terms of sentiment) of the scene in *Slaughterhouse five* (a text whose humor remains quite definitively separate from the main character's mindset) where Billy Pilgrim has an out-of-character emotional breakdown (into tears) while watching a barbershop quartet perform, as it reminds him of the way the German guards looked when they first saw Dresden devastated by the bombing (227). Smith has spoken powerfully about her appreciation of Vonnegut's work: "The effect of *Slaughterhouse Five* on me was something akin to being doused in cold water at five in the morning, turned upside down and hung from a lamppost in the middle of a town square until dry" ("An A-Z").

the separation between diegetic suffering and extradiegetic humor, particularly in terms of Smith's portrayal of adolescent characters: individuals who are by definition in flux (biologically and socially) yet cling to illusions of certainty. He describes the way the three Belsey children "struggle through all the illusions, delusions, and obstacles which Smith, a true expert in sympathetic (and, from an external perspective wildly funny) portrayals of the sad experience of growing up, throws at them" (184). In this reading of Smith's work, her use of humor bolsters her own voice (and creates a rapport with the reader) while leaving the characters untouched by her insights.

In this chapter, I explore how, when it comes to the construction of an individual identity through an external quest, both Smith and Condé allow their mockery to transgress the border between the world of narration and the world being narrated. They place their mocking insights in the mouths of characters who serve as helpers able to offer the questing characters necessary redirection toward self-improvement by planting in them the seeds of their own humor perspective.

Monstrous Liberations in *Désirada*

Christiane Makward converts Maryse Condé's characterization of her novel *Desirada* as "triste à tous les niveaux" and "un récit très dur" (Sourieau 1097) into a tidy epithet, reminding her readers several times that *Desirada* is, indeed, a "sad novel" (406, 418). Yet despite the sadness of *Desirada*'s overall tone, the generally muted emotional colors of its main character Marie-Noëlle (who is "peu sympathique" because she is both "peu aimée" and "peu aimante" (Scharfman 141)), and her ultimate failure to discover her father's identity (and, therefore, the truth about her mother's past), Marie-Noëlle's

identity quest nevertheless leads her to a state of relative contentment derived from a new sense of herself. Having abandoned her expectation that she would find answers by retracing her family's trajectory through Europe, Guadeloupe, and la Désirade, Marie-Noëlle reconciles herself to her post-quest identity and life in the United States at the novel's conclusion:

[Mon beau père Ludovic] s'irritait quand je parlais de ma monstruosité... Il ne comprenait pas qu'en fin de compte, réelle ou imaginaire, cette identité-là avait fini par me plaire. D'une certaine manière, ma monstruosité me rend unique. Grâce à elle, je ne possède ni nationalité ni pays ni langue. Je peux rejeter ces tracasseries qui tracassent tellement les humains. Elle donne aussi une explication à ce qui entoure ma vie. Je comprends et j'accepte qu'autour de moi, il n'y ait jamais eu de place pour un certain bonheur. Mon chemin est tracé ailleurs. (281)

Marie-Noëlle thereby accepts the fact that reclaiming her "monstruosité," which is to say her irreparable (and incurable) deviation from a 'normal' way of being, requires relinquishing not just her desire for the certainty of a straightforward, rooted identity but also the happiness necessarily attendant upon it. Yet the loss of this "certain bonheur," which is by definition a singular, limited manifestation of the overarching sentiment, does not cause Marie-Noëlle despair. After all, it does not preclude the discovery of other forms of 'bonheur.' Indeed, her "monstruosité," which she previously feared would serve only to alienate her has now begun to please her ("avait fini par me plaire"). In this sense, the ability to envision alternate forms of happiness constitutes the fundamental insight of Marie-Noëlle's quest; an insight which speaks, moreover, to the preoccupation of the novel's epigraph, which states that "à part le bonheur, il n'y a rien d'essentiel." The question the novel leaves the reader with, then, is how to make sense of her new identity and her new form of (potential) happiness.

In order to understand how Marie-Noëlle's new 'monstrous' identity provides liberation and contains the potential for her future happiness, I will consider this identity in terms of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, a concept that suggests the possibility of accomplishing change and joyful "renewal" through "liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (*Rabelais* 10). More precisely, this liberation is achieved through forms of laughter⁵⁹ and humor derived from a disorderly, bodily⁶⁰ sense of the world –then exaggerated through the grotesque-- and illustrated through "mock crownings and decrownings" ("Characteristics" 35). Although it may be "temporary," ending along with the season of carnival, this liberation bears great revolutionary potential in Bakhtin's view because it testifies to the reservoir of organic transformative power that lurks beneath the veneer of daily social life. In Marie Noëlle's case, it is her grandmother's laughter that eventually leads her to overturn the established narrative of 'normal' identity construction: the "sempiternelle-quête-de-l'identité" (231) that falsely promises to return every questing pilgrim to the natural seat of her genetic and geographical origins ("l'arbre de leur placenta" (211)). At the end of the novel she has turned instead to the search for happiness. She is free from expectation, poised for change, and anticipating the potential joy to be derived from "the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10).

⁵⁹ Bakhtin notes that carnival laughter is at once "gay, triumphant" and "deriding, mocking" (*Rabelais* 11-12)

⁶⁰ Bakhtin connects the essence of the carnivalesque with the body in the following way: "the mighty material bodily element of these images [i.e. those in "the non-official, popular-festive language of the marketplace"] uncrowns and renews the entire world of medieval ideology and order, with its belief, its saints, its relics monasteries, pseudoasceticism, fear of death, eschatologism, and prophecies" (*Rabelais* 312).

Of course, for the majority of her life, Marie-Noëlle experiences not the joyful pleasure of suspending norms but the pain of trying but failing to conform to them. Joy and pleasure are merely feelings that haunt the margins of her world, making a brief appearance in her youth before reemerging as a tentative possibility in the conclusion. When Scharfman evokes Bakhtin to explore the “proliferation multivoque et hétérogène” of times, places, languages, and migrations in *Désirada*, she notes that although the novel’s opening scene – Marie-Noëlle’s birth— is set against the backdrop of Carnival, the carnival spirit remains at a distance. Indeed, Condé is careful to note that Marie-Noëlle is born in a room where “on n’entendait pas... les hurlements de plaisir de la foule” (*Désirada* 14) as they celebrated. More specifically, Scharfman emphasizes the total disconnect between the carnival mood and the response to Marie-Noëlle’s birth: “Si, selon Bakhtine, l’un des aspects les plus saillants du carnavalesque dans la culture populaire médiévale est la joie de la célébration, nous nous étonnons de la totale absence de joie maternelle à la naissance de Marie-Noëlle” (Scharfman 142).

However, it is not entirely accurate to describe this absence as total. Although Marie-Noëlle's birth mother Reynalda certainly languishes in abject misery and shows no regard for her newborn daughter, Ranélise, Marie-Noëlle’s self-appointed adoptive mother, experiences an expansive, maternal joy as soon as she gazes upon the baby: in that moment “des rayons d’amour partirent du cœur de Ranélise et irradièrent le petit corps” (15). The bright goodness of her love elevates the baby lying forgotten and covered in blood and fecal matter out of its wretched condition. After Reynalda abandons her in Guadeloupe to make a life for herself in Paris, Marie-Noëlle passes the

first ten years of life, a period she describes as “une magie” (19), in the glow of Ranélise’s maternal love.

But this blissful period in Marie-Noëlle’s life comes to a swift and definitive ending with the arrival at the beginning of the second chapter of a letter in which Reynalda requests that Marie-Noëlle join her in France. Because Ranélise’s relationship with Marie-Noëlle was never “régularis[é]...par une adoption” (27), this letter has all the force of an official, legal summons. In moral sense, it serves as an interpellation, both for Marie-Noëlle and for Reynalda, who only wrote the letter at the behest of her idealistic husband Ludovic, into the normative narrative that insists that a child always belongs with her biological mother. As we learn in the penultimate chapter, however, even Ludovic eventually realizes how false this narrative can be. He confesses to Marie-Noëlle that he insisted that Reynalda send for her daughter because: “j’étais persuadé qu’il suffirait à Reynalda de jeter un coup d’oeil sur toi pour se mettre à t’aimer. Ce n’est pas ce qui s’est produit” (277).

In fact, every instance of contact between mother and daughter engenders only pain and discomfort for both. Ludovic’s normative intentions actually constitute an initiation into deformity since Ranélise, not Reynalda, is the woman able to offer ‘normal’ motherly love to Marie-Noëlle, who suffers merely at the prospect of being deprived of it. The very evening the letter arrives, Marie-Noëlle suddenly falls deathly ill of an unnamed sickness, as if her mother’s reentry in her life signals her rebirth into bodily wretchedness. Not only does the fever leave Marie-Noëlle alternating between declaring that she wants to stay with Ranélise and “gei[gnant] et couin[ant] comme un tout petit enfant” (27), but it also causes her to vomit, which the narrator likens to “un

chodo épais et nauséabond” (27-8). As a “chodo” is a sweet, vanilla-flavored drink prepared to celebrate baptisms in many areas of the French-speaking Caribbean, this incongruously graphic description suggests that Marie-Noëlle’s sickness is an anti-baptism, or perhaps Marie-Noëlle’s bodily rejection of her initiation into life with her biological mother. In either case, she emerges from the illness a changed person: the one who earns Scharfman’s description of “peu sympathique.” On both the physical and the spiritual level, Marie-Noëlle’s natural vibrancy has been stripped away, her round, healthy shape deflated and her characteristic playfulness and humor replaced by morose introspection:

la fillette joufflue et lutine, capricieuse et caressante qui avait enchanté le coeur de Ranélise, n’était plus. Avait pris sa place une grande gaule, la peau sur les os et les yeux éteints, fixant les gens à l’entour d’une manière qui les mettait mal à l’aise, car elle semblait poursuivre à travers eux une obsession intérieure.” (28)

Although the lack of maternal love is the immediate cause of Reynalda’s deforming impact on Marie-Noëlle, the deeper cause of this lack is Reynalda’s past, which warps them and the relationship they are trying to forge across it. The open question of this history works relentlessly on Marie-Noëlle, whether because of its potentially traumatic nature (Reynalda’s suicide attempt while pregnant suggests a trauma in her past, as does her implication that her mother’s employer Gian Carlo raped her), or because of Marie-Noëlle’s inability to learn the certain truth about it (as her grandmother Nina’s version of events directly contradicts Reynalda’s version and other sources, such as Ludovic and Ranélise’s sister Clara-Alta provide no further clarification). It is no accident that the narrator shifts with no transition from Reynalda’s (incomplete and partial) narration of her past, told to her daughter when she reaches the age Reynalda herself was when she became pregnant, to Marie-Noëlle’s second brush

with serious illness: the discovery of “une cavité tuberculeuse au poumon droit” (71). Ultimately, Marie-Noëlle embarks on her identity quest in an attempt to mitigate the deforming power of the past by clarifying it. She believes that if she can fill in the gaps in her family history, she can flatten it out into the straightforward history she needs it to be.

Instead of finding answers, however, she will develop her “difformité” (266) and “monstruosité” into a way of living with the unresolvable uncertainty and the trauma of the past. Unlike the “monstres” of the Renaissance who “ne [pouvaient] que causer le vide autour d’[eux]” for having been born of “copulations interdites” (260), Marie-Noëlle seeks to use her monstrosity to contain the emptiness. Speaking of the unfillable gaps, unanswerable questions, and unresolved pain embedded in her lineage, Marie-Noëlle asserts her realization that “désormais, il me faudra tout simplement vivre avec cet inconnu, ce noir derrière moi. Je suis sortie du noir” (252).⁶¹ Although this declaration merely illustrates her resolution to abandon aspects of her quest, she later receives advice from Ludovic that suggests the possibility of transforming the morose emptiness of the past into the potential happy plenitude of the future. In Ludovic’s words, “il y a devant toi toute une place faite pour le bonheur que tu rempliras quand tu cesseras d’épier par-dessus ton épaule” (277).

Ludovic’s piece of advice may provide a significant insight, but it does not represent the turning point in Marie-Noëlle’s quest. It is part of a conversation that

⁶¹ Condé’s language here bears a striking resemblance to the oft-repeated opening line of Jamaica Kincaid’s *Autobiography of My Mother*, published one year before *Désirada*, but likewise narrating the desultory wanderings of a woman who suffers from a want of maternal love: “My mother died at the moment I was born and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind” (3).

directly precedes the final chapter, in which she speaks entirely in the first person as a sign of her renewed focus on herself rather than her roots— what Dawn Fulton terms her “self-affirmation based not on the epistemological appropriation of her mother’s narrative but instead on a rejection of genealogical and spatial groundings” (91). But Marie-Noëlle started heading in that direction much earlier. Indeed, Ludovic’s advice represents the crystallization of insights she has been gathering for herself since a pivotal encounter with her maternal grandmother Nina midway through the novel. As Lydie Moudileno asserts in her article “Le Rire de la grand-mère: insolence et sérénité dans *Désirada* de Maryse Condé,” Nina is the character who changes the stakes of Marie-Noëlle’s identity quest.⁶²

Instead of providing the confirmation Marie-Noëlle was seeking for her mother’s story, which she expressly went to Guadeloupe to obtain, Nina quickly dismantles both the coherent narrative Reynalda had constructed and the confidence Marie-Noëlle built on the strength of it. First, she openly laughs at her granddaughter and then she offers her a narrative to counter Reynalda’s. Since the reader has no reason to believe Nina’s narrative is any more reliable than Reynalda’s, the end result of Marie-Noëlle’s encounter with Nina is the undermining of both narratives and, by extension, the reliability and instructive force of ancestral female wisdom. In Moudileno’s words, Nina puts into question “l’autorité des ascendants maternels à assurer la cohérence du sujet,” which in

⁶² Also recognizing Marie-Noëlle’s visit to Nina as a turning point, Fulton observes that this “scene of grandmotherly rejection” serves as an “embedded catalyst toward less linear modes of inquiry in Marie-Noëlle’s quest.” As part of her analysis of the implications of this quest for a collective Caribbean identity, Fulton notes the importance of eschewing straightforward narratives in favor of “a more indirect relationship to memory, a sense of personal narrative that might not be tied to the absolute revelation of human interactions or the stability of a fixed landscape, but that envisions instead a fluid, redirected notion of time, space, and knowledge” (87).

turn triggers Marie-Noëlle's subsequent "détourne[ment du] trajet de la quête identitaire classique vers une subjectivité qui tente de s'affirmer...en dehors de ce que Maximin declare 'l'aire de la mère'" (1152).

Moudileno further shows how, for the most part, Condé overturns normative narratives of selfless maternity, particularly the revered figure of the "bonne grand-mère antillaise" represented in Caribbean literature as being always "toute de retenue, de compassion, de solidité matrilineaire" (1155) and furthermore "dépositair[e] d'une expérience et d'une sagesse indispensables" (1151) which she is only too eager to put at the disposal of descendants seeking the primary materials with which to construct their identities. The distinguishing trait of the type of subjectivity Marie-Noëlle begins to construct in *Désirada* is therefore its independence from ancestral influence. Yet, implicit in Moudileno's argument is the unavoidable irony that Marie-Noëlle ironically follows Nina's explicit advice when she establishes her independence from her mother and grandmother. In that sense Nina's "sagesse" is indeed "indispensable" to her granddaughter. Toward the end of their visit, Nina imperiously plots what will become the exact course of action Marie-Noëlle ultimately follows at the end of her quest when she returns to her academic career in Boston: "si j'ai un conseil à te donner c'est d'oublier tout cela et de retourner là d'où tu es sortie. En Amérique?... [et] ne demande plus rien à personne. Tu as l'instruction. Tu as l'éducation. Tu as ta belle santé. Vis ta vie. Qu'est-ce qui te manque?" (202-3). Notably, Nina's advice is based on her belief in the strength and fullness of Marie-Noëlle's integral self, a healthy mind and body that, rather than propagating emptiness instead lacks for nothing.

Through Nina, therefore, Condé paradoxically reaffirms the essential advisory function of the Caribbean grandmother in order to void the relationship of its traditional content (or even cut it off entirely) and subvert expectations of its emotional impact. As the forceful laugh with which she greets Marie-Noëlle clearly indicates, Nina offers mockery instead of compassion and destabilization instead of affirmation. According to Scharfman, this laughter is cruel: “dramatique et brutal” (145). According to Moudileno, the physical horror of her laughing face is not only cruel, but also grotesque: “tordu, monstrueuse, obscène dans la jouissance qu’elle éprouve de sa propre indignité” (1155). Moudileno notes the cruelty of this laugh’s timing, occurring as it does at a moment of uncharacteristic certainty for Marie-Noëlle. After introducing herself to her grandmother as the daughter of Reynalda and Gian Carlo (the man Reynalda claimed raped and impregnated her), Marie-Noëlle “sentait en elle un surgissement de confiance...comme si enfin, elle prenait possession d’elle-même et qu’elle marquât sa trace sur la terre” (180). Indeed, at this moment Marie-Noëlle sounds confident for the first time as she eagerly anticipates the imminent culmination of her identity quest. Her shock is therefore only the greater when Nina’s exaggerated laughter (“un rire sans fin”) entirely uproots her newly-acquired confidence, “anéantiss[ant] [s]es certitudes [et]...la rejet[ant] vers ce territoire du doute et de l’angoisse qu’elle avait cru quitter pour toujours” (180). Marie-Noëlle thus finds the destination she thought she had reached reduced to a starting point and her claim to knowledge revealed as a foolish pretense.

In Moudileno’s interpretation, the reader, fully sharing Marie-Noëlle’s faith that she has correctly identified her father, feels equally targeted by Nina’s laughter and equally foolish for having allowed himself to be “manipul[é] par la mise en scène de la

confession [de Reynalda]” (1155) that Condé carefully constructed. However, it is perhaps more likely that someone who habitually reads Condé’s novels would be highly skeptical of language such as Marie-Noëlle’s that so readily meets all the normative readerly expectations of satisfying closure. Moreover, a typical reader of any stripe would likely be skeptical that such definitive language could truly be conclusive when it occurs two-thirds of the way through the novel. For these reasons, regardless of their affective response to Reynalda’s story, readers should be able to distance themselves enough from Marie-Noëlle’s feelings at this moment to experience this scene as humorous: because of the incongruity created by the gap — which is as wide as it could be — between Marie-Noëlle’s triumphant declaration and Nina’s dramatic response. In addition, this incongruity is humorously reinforced by the narrator’s superfluous understatement: “la réaction de Nina ne fut pas celle qu[e Marie-Noëlle] attendait” (180).

This moment of humor puts the reader in a state of relative detachment from the accumulated results of Marie-Noëlle’s identity quest, which allows them to assimilate the notion that Nina’s mockery, while destabilizing, is less destructive than deforming and, ultimately, transformative. Just as Nina’s laugh deforms Marie-Noëlle psychologically, shaking her out of her expectations of discovering the normative narratives that would fill in all the ‘unknowns’ in her identity, it deforms Nina physically, “[lui] distenda[nt] les lèvres” et “découvra[nt] le fin fond de sa gorge et la vipère violacée de sa langue” (180). Nina’s face at this moment is, to borrow the narrator’s own term, “monstrueuse.” However, it is a form of the ‘monstrous’ that must be understood in light of both Nina’s obvious pleasure (“jouissance”) in the moment and Marie-Noëlle’s ultimate acceptance of her own “monstruosité” and “difformité” as sources of potential happiness. Serving as

the turning point in Marie-Noëlle's shift toward a potentially joyful monstrosity, Nina's laughter functions in terms best described through the lens of the grotesque body, which Bakhtin describes as a "grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" form that takes on a "positive, assertive character" through its associations with growth and renewal (Bakhtin 19). Significantly, according to Bakhtin, "the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth" which functions as a "wide-open bodily abyss" (317) that connects the body with the world and its cycle of endings and beginnings as it "swallows and generates, gives and takes" (339). By forcibly shifting Nina's bodily connection with her granddaughter from the womb (once removed) to the grotesque mouth, Condé thereby associates Nina with the process of life-giving through metaphor rather than matrilineal essence. In this way, Nina transcends the baggage of gender and genetics while offering guidance in rewriting both Marie-Noëlle's narrative and her own expected role in it.

Rather than affirm Marie-Noëlle's position in an established lineage, therefore, Nina initiates her granddaughter into the grotesque. Although this initiation does not immediately end Marie-Noëlle's desire to pursue her identity quest, it does lead her to critique the normalcy she encounters where previously she lamented her exclusion from it. This shift is clearly revealed through Marie-Noëlle's relationship with Guadeloupe, a space which Condé presents as a 'hotbed' of normalcy to which Marie-Noëlle cannot and will not belong. She arrives on the island with clear expectations of finding the story of her origins there, a preconception that withstood earlier mockery, the nuance-free mockery of exclusion, from Aristide Démonico, the husband of her mother's childhood friend. When he learns of her plans to visit her grandmother for the first time, he

responds with the confidence of one who has no need to question his place in the world. He mimics and then openly laughs at a quest he believes doomed to failure, because in his view no information it uncovered could compensate for her long absence from Guadeloupe. As his comments presented in free indirect discourse reveal, Démonico defines identity in national terms: “Comme cela, elle était venue à la recherche de sa famille? (Il riait). À la recherche de son identité? (Il riait plus fort)... Elle ne serait jamais une vraie Guadeloupéenne” (172). Yet it is only after Marie-Noëlle meets her grandmother that she is able to craft her own explanation as to why she felt like an “étrangère” in Guadeloupe. Guadeloupe, in her experience, is a space where the inhabitants self-consciously shape their experience to conform to normalizing narratives: “ils gardaient toujours, quant à eux, la religion du succès. La vie devait avoir l’apparence—au moins l’apparence—d’une marche en avant, victorieuse, depuis le ventre du négrier toujours amarré, à l’attente, dans la mangrove, jusqu’à la pleine lumière de la tête du morne” (240). In Marie-Noëlle’s interpretation, the adherence to this collective (and cliché) narrative of straightforward social progress requires the kind of blind faith that the Christian images it evokes – of hell (“le ventre du négrier”), purgatory (“l’attente, dans la mangrove”), and heaven (la pleine lumière de la tête du morne”) – would suggest. As her quasi scholarly analysis indicates, Marie-Noëlle is much more interested in holding this faith at a critical distance than in adopting it for herself.

More significantly, in the process of establishing her distance from such narratives and developing her critical eye, Marie-Noëlle begins to show signs of a new personality trait: the ability to respond to her environment with internalized humor. Although she has often tried to situate herself in the world through her relationships with

men, from her attachment to her first husband Stanley to her jealousy of her step-father Ludovic's love for her mother to her hunt for her biological father, she is not at all tempted to accept the offer she receives shortly after her meeting with Nina for a 'normal' life of love and stability with a man. When Judes Anozie, a kind and generous man she meets in Guadeloupe, asks her to live with him there, she responds with an internal, mocking dismissal: "la proposition prononcée avec timidité effleura l'esprit de Marie-Noëlle comme une mouche fâcheuse la figure d'un dormeur et elle faillit la chasser de même" (205). Just as she mockingly dismisses Judes' offer of a 'normal' romantic life, Marie-Noëlle also later dismisses Ludovic's attempt to chide her into adopting the role of devoted granddaughter who feels obligated to "entourer de son mieux la vieillesse de sa grand-mère." In a dramatic departure from her usual oscillation between moroseness and indifference, she responds to Ludovic's normalizing instructions with pure amusement: "ces conseils de circonstance, aussi inopérants que l'onguent gris, avaient fort diverti Marie-Noëlle" (230). (Significantly, Judas continues to visit Nina in Marie-Noëlle's place, even after she leaves Guadeloupe). Additionally, Marie-Noëlle notes her discomfort at finding herself fulfilling the role of academic advisor in light of her own uncertainty with wryness and "ironie" rather than angst. Having concluded her identity quest unsure of how to go about discovering the individualized form of happiness she now seeks, she is as circumspect about dispensing advice as receiving it: "ironie des ironies, moi qui ne peut pas me conduire, j'ai la tâche de les aider [i.e. les étudiants] à trouver une solution à leurs difficultés" (279)

This emergent attitude of amused, critical distance is the development that truly distinguishes her post-quest self from her pre-quest state: one where melancholia and

alienation twice overwhelmed her to the point of physical illness, the second time to the point that she had to leave Reynalda's home in Paris and live in a sanatorium for a time. Marie-Noëlle herself draws a link between her bodily sickness and her emotional well-being. She even explicitly uses medicinal terms to explain how wrong she had been to believe that a husband could fill the void her mother had left in her: "elle avait espéré que Stanley pourrait la guérir, mais il était un mauvais médecin et puis, de toute façon, son mal était incurable" (96). In the end, however, her 'mal' only remains 'incurable' so long as she seeks a cure through "normal" relationships with others. Instead she must accept her "monstruosité," that is, her permanent yet fully operational deviation from normality, in order to initiate "le début de [s]a guérison" (281). "Monstruosité," the only identity to which her quest leads her, thus becomes synonymous with independence: it makes her "unique" and resistant to "[d]es tracasseries" such as nationality, language and other identity markers that depend mostly on one's relation to others.

This independence is not synonymous with alienation, however. As a corollary to her developing resistance to external angst, her new perspective also reveals a sensitivity to aesthetic pleasure which, if not a marker of positive happiness, reveals at least an openness to positive aspects of her environment: "Je me sens comme une personne qui relève d'une grave maladie....mes sens me sont revenus. J'ai distingué des formes et des couleurs. Jaunes, rouges, noires, des tulipes pointent la tête dans les plates-bandes et l'air avait le goût du lait frais" (279). Where once a sickly Marie-Noëlle vomited milky *chodo*, the new, monstrous Marie-Noëlle relishes the invigorating "goût du lait frais" in the air. In addition to forming a renewed sensory connection to the world, the attitude of amusement she has fostered allows her to engage with others without making herself

vulnerable to them. Initially aspirational, this attitude was conceived shortly after Nina's narrative-overturning revelations, when she was at her most distraught. At the time, she envied the distant moon onto whom she projected a certain kind of amused indifference: "là-haut, celle-ci, bien calée sur un coussin de nuages effilochés, se moquait à son habitude, car elles l'amusaient, les affaires embrouillées des humains" (210). By the time she is holding office hours in the final scene of the novel, safely ensconced in her "bureau perché au quatrième étage de l'université" (279), she has achieved something like this detached amusement, free of "ces tracasseries qui tracassent tellement les humains." For all that her students are very earnest in discussing their projects with her, her attitude toward them is both universally approving and blithely unconcerned: "Qu'est-ce que ce garçon-là me raconte?... il entend faire sa thèse sur Rachid Boudjedra. La Répudiation. Pourquoi pas? Je l'encourage. Passons au suivant" (280). In this way, Marie-Noëlle ends the novel in a state approaching what Bakhtin calls the "joyful relativity of all structure and order" ("Characteristics" 36) through her "mock crowning" as someone who takes over the role of advisor without truly intending to advise – much like Nina adopts the role of wisdom-dispensing grandmother only to the extent that she advises Marie-Noëlle to dispense with seeking wisdom from others.

Although the novel concludes with Marie-Noëlle in this uncertain state of only relative contentment, one way of imagining Marie-Noëlle's trajectory continuing toward happiness and satisfaction is to read it in the light of *Célanire cou-coupé*, Condé's next novel. If Marie-Noëlle is just beginning to enjoy the idea of her "monstruosité" at the end of *Desirada*, the eponymous heroine of *Célanire cou-coupé*, by contrast, is a fully-realized beautiful monster with a "monstrueuse cicatrice" (96) who seeks her own

pleasure before all else in a way that Marie-Noëlle hasn't quite managed and Nina never could. Whereas Nina thinks wistfully of her frustrated ambitions ("un peu d'instruction, un peu de bonne chance, j'aurais fait la Guadeloupe chavirer" (*Desirada* 202)), Célanire returns triumphantly to Guadeloupe after years of living abroad and confidently asserts, in an interior monologue: "Oui, à cause de moi, la Guadeloupe va chavirer" (202). Even more strikingly, Célanire also manages, though perhaps more successfully, to laugh another woman into finding self-fulfillment. Amarante is a rare example in the novel of a former lover of Célanire's who not only survives her relationship with Célanire but also follows a trajectory that tends towards happiness. However, it only curves in that direction after a dramatic confrontation with Célanire. Confident in their love and in Célanire's desire to make a life with her, Amarante expects Célanire to welcome her with open arms when she leaves her husband. Instead, she encounters Célanire's laughing incredulity: "elle vivrait centenaire qu'elle ne pourrait oublier le choc: le rire de Célanire" (245). Although Amarante feels deeply betrayed by Célanire's rejection, she realizes after a certain amount of time that this dismissive mockery actually signaled the first step of her liberation from dependence on others. By laughing at her, Célanire stopped Amarante from exchanging her selfless devotion to her husband for her idolization and imitation of Célanire. As a direct result of Célanire's rejection, Amarante turns to herself, eschewing both a return to her ancestral territory and a potential relationship with a steady man who offers to support her, to discover the joy of expressing and sustaining herself through music: "l'insatisfaction de son coeur et de son corps se transformaient en ce flot précieux et magique qui coulait d'elle-même" (255). The last the reader hears

from Amarante is her declaration of independence: “Elle n’avait plus besoin de rien ni de personne. Elle était libre et guérie” (255).

Mocking Mirrors in *White Teeth*

If Marie-Noëlle is mocked into a quest for happiness by her grandmother, *White Teeth*'s Irie takes refuge from the complications of her identity quest in her grandmother's apartment in central London. Although a multigenerational, multi-family saga such as *White Teeth* naturally features a multitude of characters and their perspectives, the two main characters are clearly Archie, whose dramatic actions and narrative perspective both open and close the text, and his daughter Irie, the only member of the novel's second generation whose perspective occupies significant sections of the narrative. Her role is literally central to the extent that the section labeled “Irie” begins almost exactly at the midpoint of the novel. Thematically, her role is central in that by the end of the novel her womb becomes the site where several narrative strands regarding the compelling uncertainties of history and identity (both national and familial) are woven together in the DNA strands of a child who will irrevocably unite (despite its indeterminate paternal origins) the London-based families featured in the narrative. In a more literal way than FutureMouse™, this child represents the novelistic world's unwritten future.

Having previously made only fleeting appearances at ages nine and twelve, Irie emerges in the middle of the novel as a fifteen year old deep in the thralls of an adolescent identity crisis that will send her across London on a quest for belonging. The cause of her crisis is her profound sense of exclusion (in terms of her class, race, and

gender) from England's image of itself, which has been slow to integrate the "arrival of the world in London" (Amine 74) following the collapse of the British Empire: "there was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land" (222). Evoking Lacan-like⁶³ concepts of mirrors, recognition, culture, and identity, where the symbolic order of culture and language becomes a mirror that reflects not the illusory wholeness of an "Ideal-I" ("imago")⁶⁴ but the desire for reciprocal recognition, Smith presents identity in terms of the adolescent need to see the image of oneself reflected in society, both physically and culturally, in order to reaffirm one's emergent adult form. Accordingly, the trauma Irie experiences is not that of misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) through identification with the unattainable perfection of the *imago*⁶⁵ but of the lack of recognition she faces before the illusory wholeness of a uniform, closed image of Britishness.⁶⁶ It is the desire to compensate for this lack that

⁶³ Smith's ideas might be said to verge into Lacanian territory to the extent that her use of mirror imagery (and, later, literal mirrors) suggests an individual seeking to construct an identity in preparation for dialogue with a broader cultural context, rather than a more commonplace notion of mirror-gazing as a moment of uniquely truthful self-evaluation.

⁶⁴ "The *mirror stage* is a drama...which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development" (Lacan 192).

⁶⁵ Lacan suggests that because individuals initially identify with the Ideal-I, an illusion of perfect wholeness, they are driven to strive toward this impossible perfection and therefore recoil from the Real: "This form [the I in its "primordial," "specular," pre-symbolic form, the 'imago' with which the child identifies] would have to be called the Ideal-I, if we wished to incorporate it into our usual register, in the sense that it will also be the source of secondary identifications....But the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being (*le devenir*) of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality" (Lacan 191).

⁶⁶ The degree to which the "new" immigration of the post-WWII era (of which Irie's mother and grandmother were part) was perceived as an unprecedented shock to the notion of British identity is apparent, for example, in Enoch Powell's famous observation that because of immigration, there were "areas ...already undergoing the total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history."

compels her to journey from the lower and upper Middle Class areas of Willesden and West Hampstead in Northwest London to a lower class apartment in central London's Lambeth in search of a reflection. Equally willing to discover herself as to create herself, Irie tries out different hairstyles, lifestyles, and ideologies in each new location.

Although a reciprocal reflection continues to elude Irie, her ability to turn her inevitable frustrations into philosophical insights sharpens as her quest continues. In the course of her quest, the once overly earnest (read: "impossibly pompous") twelve-year-old who speaks as though "whatever she believed was not formed by faith but carved from certainty" (198) becomes a fifteen-year-old whose sense of self can be shaken by a poster advertising a weight-loss scheme, before finally evolving into a young woman who sees the ridiculous in the world around her and is not afraid to confront the people in her life about it. Once mocked for taking first her own and then other people's ideas too seriously, she ultimately learns to entertain the ideas of others with a healthy dose of irony. In other words, she develops a sense of humor, the mental alchemy that transforms pain and frustration into wisdom.

Significantly, as this humor develops, Irie's inner and spoken dialogues increasingly resemble Smith's narrative voice. It is important to note here that although *White Teeth* is certainly not a roman à clé, Irie Jones indisputably reflects key aspects of Smith's identity: like Smith, she was born in northwest London in 1975 to her Jamaican-born ex-Jehovah's Witness mother and much older (white) British father who fought in World War II when he was seventeen.⁶⁷ Also like Smith, she has a nearly generic

⁶⁷ In "Dead Man Laughing," an essay written shortly after her father's death to pay homage to their shared love of comedy, Smith describes her father's characteristically wry reaction to "hearing the rough arc of his life in the character of Archie Jones": "He had better luck than me!" (252) she quotes her father as saying. In her typically self-deprecating manner, she additionally notes in "Accidental Hero," an essay on her

English last name and grew to be a heavier-than-average teenager. Despite this resemblance in broad strokes, however, Smith is not inviting the reader to search for the ‘truth’ of the novel by seeking correspondences between her biography and her life. Indeed, Smith has expressed deep skepticism about the desire of both readers and writers to identify with fictional characters based on their equivalence with themselves in sociocultural terms. While acknowledging the power of such identification processes, both in *White Teeth* and elsewhere,⁶⁸ she also enumerates their limitations. Regarding the writerly impulse toward autobiography, Smith asserts that “some writers will always mistake the readerly desire for personal truth as their cue to write a treatise or a speech or a thinly disguised memoir in which they themselves are the hero. Fictional truth is a question of perspective, not autobiography.... It is language as the revelation of a consciousness” (“Fail Better”). Accordingly, the connection between Irie and Smith in

father’s war experience, that her father “caught a senior Nazi, an episode I turned into idiotic comedy for a novel” (234): i.e. Archie’s encounter with Dr. Sick.

⁶⁸ In “*Their Eyes Were Watching God: What Does Soulful Mean?*” Smith discusses her initial reluctance to read Hurston’s novel when her mother gave it to her because she felt she was expected to like it merely because of her racial similarity to the main character Janie. She preferred to believe she was a “colorblind reader” (12) for whom all texts to be read were “freely chosen” for the quality of their writing, with never a thought for “sociopolitical reasons” (3). Upon reading it, however, she grappled with the fact that although she appreciated the novel primarily for “the perfection of the writing” (7), she couldn’t deny a “vital aspect of [her] response” to the novel: “Fact is, I *am* a black woman, and a slither of this book goes straight into my soul, I suspect, for that reason” (12). Yet even as she writes this article Smith continues to struggle with the role of sociocultural identification in the reading process, as the preceding declaration follows her assertion that “when [she] began this piece, it felt important to distance [herself]” from seeming like a “black wom[an] talking about a black book” (12). At the same time, she continues to recoil from “forms of criticism that make black women the privileged readers of a black woman writer” (10). Regardless, her affection for Hurston continues unabated, as evidenced by the presence of relatively gratuitous references to Hurston in her novels: “monstropolous sky” (*White Teeth* 10), a character named Zora whose mother Kiki is from Hurston’s birthplace of Eatonville, Florida (19) in *On Beauty*. More pertinently, Susan Alice Fischer compares Janie’s “journey to herself” (295) in *TEWWG* to Kiki’s experience in *On Beauty* in her article declaring Hurston’s influence to be as important as E.M. Forster’s in supporting the theme of transcending social classifications to connect through overarching humanity. I would argue, however, that a similar comparison between Janie and Irie would be at least equally fruitful, to the extent that Janie’s journey through the lifestyles provided by her succession of three husbands might resonate with Irie’s journey through London.

White Teeth is better understood in terms of a shared perspective than a shared experience or essence. By the end of the novel, Irie has culled specific insights from her frustrated identity quest that resemble insights one might garner from the novel as a whole: namely, that it is necessary to accept, through humor, the impossible necessity of the past – although the present (of both self and society) is in many ways composed of the past, the latter will never wholly reveal itself and provide a lens for viewing (and understanding) the present. When Irie shares her insights into the messiness yet inaccessibility of the past in an impassioned monologue to friends and family as they travel together on a city bus to the novel’s “Final Space,” she becomes something of a *porte-parole* for Smith, used to bolster the novel’s concluding sentiments from within.

But first Irie must gather these insights. When she begins her identity quest, she does not yet realize that the elusive reflection she is searching for is not so much missing as it is blurred by the unacknowledged history and context out of which it emerges. More precisely, Irie confronts the strange relationship between beauty, history, and belonging that, in many ways, shapes a women’s social identity. Irie’s apparent problem is that she falls short of the standards of attractiveness, the image of British Womanhood, set by society in general and, more immediately, by Millat, the family friend and fellow student with whom she is wildly in love. The narrator and her mother Clara attempt to refocus the problem as a deeper question of cultural difference. The narrator observes that Irie bears her grandmother Bowden’s “substantial Jamaican frame, loaded with pineapples, mangoes, and guavas” (221) in a field of “English Rose[s]” (222), while her mother desperately says to her daughter “Irie, my love, you’re fine—you’re just built like an honest-to-God Bowden—don’t you know you’re fine?” (222). Irie, however, sees only

that her figure matches the 'before' picture on a weight-loss ad and that Millat likes "exclusively size 10 white Protestant women aged fifteen to twenty-eight" (306). Unable to contextualize her notion of 'Englishness' with her mother's understanding of 'Jamaicanness,' Irie remains intent on fitting into the former by any means available.

First, she tries to impose a reflection of herself on one of the foremost figures of the English tradition: Shakespeare. In so doing, Irie's initial instincts as a reader differ markedly from those of Smith's younger self. For her part, Smith sought to transcend her specific self through literature and tap into the "neutral universal" (9) until her reading of Hurston revealed to her "the marvelous feeling of recognition that came with these characters who had [her] hair, [her] eyes, [her] skin, even the ancestors of the rhythm of my speech [because of Janie's encounters with 'workers from the Caribbean']" (12). By contrast, Irie's reading is guided entirely by her desire to experience that "marvelous feeling of recognition" (12) which discovering a character similar to yourself can create. She believes she has realized that desire in her literature class when they read Shakespeare's Sonnets 127, 130, and 131 from the 'Dark Lady' sequence. Moved by the frequent presence in them of the term "black" and phrases such as "if hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head," Irie believes that Shakespeare is expanding English standards of beauty to include black women: "she had thought, just then, that she had seen something like a reflection" (227).

However, the teacher's swift rejection of Irie's interpretation when she tentatively but hopefully offers it to the class causes "the reflection that Irie had glimpsed" to "sl[ink] back into the familiar darkness" (ibid.). In this moment, it is clearly not enough to see a reflection of yourself; one must also be recognized in order for positive

identification to take place. But the teacher's refusal to affirm Irie's identification with Shakespeare's sonnets is categorical: she not only tells Irie that she has entirely misinterpreted the sonnets, she also turns Irie's misinterpretation into a general lesson for the other students on how not to read:

[The woman referred to in the sonnets is] not black in the modern sense. There weren't any...well, Afro-Carri-bee-yans in England at that time, dear[...]I mean I can't be sure, but it does seem terribly unlikely, unless she was a slave of some kind, and he's unlikely to have written a series of sonnets to a lord and then a slave, isn't he?[...] No, dear, she you're reading it with a modern ear. Never read what is old with a modern ear. In fact, that will serve as today's principle—can you all write that down please?" (227)

More than simply thwarting her attempt to identify with Shakespeare, the teacher here is effectively bludgeoning Irie with an English history to which she could only belong in the most traumatic and peripheral of ways. By turning the likely inaccuracy of Irie's interpretation into the lesson for the day rather than discussing the historical context of the sonnets while also recognizing parallels between Shakespeare's representation of alternative standards of beauty and contemporary questions of a similar nature, the teacher formalizes Irie's exclusion from British social and literary history.⁶⁹ This formalization is further authenticated by the teacher's position within the institution of English education (which contributes to what the title of this chapter describes – in a nod

⁶⁹ In an article exploring Smith's use of Shakespeare's sonnets as an attempt to "write back" at the canon, Petra Tournay does a brief Lacanian analysis of this scene to show how Irie experiences the typical Lacanian "lack" in her identity because she is relegated to "the position that has been predefined for her by British culture" and reinforced by the teacher whose role is to "represent the symbolic order" (226). While I heartily second Tournay's notion that the teacher withholds the "approbation of Irie's reflection by another (significant) person which is...crucial to bring about unity and auto-identification" (ibid), I would simply argue that this lack of approbation doesn't so much leave Irie in an undesirable position as abandon her with no clear position at all.

to Lauryn Hill's hit debut solo album of 1998⁷⁰ – as “The Miseducation of Irie Jones” (221)), and then reinforced, in a one-two punch, by mockery from Irie's peers. Having learned the day's lesson well, they parody Irie's effort to get Shakespeare to say that ‘black is beautiful’ in an anonymous note that highlights the apparent anachronistic and racial incongruities of Irie's reading as well as what they see as its inherent absurdity: “By William Shakespeare: ODE TO LETITIA AND ALL MY KINKY-HAIRED BIG-ASS BITCHEZ” (227).

The rebuke suggested by this note becomes the final word on Irie's desire to locate a ready-made place for herself within the existing tradition. Faced with this multi-faceted rejection, a thoroughly discouraged Irie trains her analytical eye not on her critics but on herself as she decides to try to conform to tradition. This pursuit takes her first to ‘P.K.'s Afro Hair’ beauty salon to get her hair straightened and dyed red. Narrowly focused on her goal of “Straightness. Flickability.” (236), Irie spares not a thought for the larger cultural implications of her desire as she simply joins the other women in the salon who are trying to summon more acceptable images of themselves into being: “biting their lips, staring intently into a long, dirty mirror, waiting for their straighter selves to materialize” (229). Although the characters don't question what they are doing, the narrator offers a satirical indictment of the way the beauty industry exploits the impossible expectations placed on black women for profit: for example, that P.K. King, a wealthy white man, opened this salon only because he read that “black women spend five times as much as white women on beauty products and nine times as much on their hair”

⁷⁰ Hill's album is titled “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill,” which in turn refers to *The Education of Sonny Carson* (see Checkoway), the autobiographical tale of Carson's experience of gang-life and racial strife on the streets of Brooklyn in the 1960s.

(232), that the hairdressers there had “none of the obligations of white hairdressers, no need to make tea or kiss arse” because the women who patronized the salon “were not customers...but desperate wretched patients” (229) for whom “there was no question of suing—they *expected* the burns [from the straightening agents],” and that an “Afro Hair” salon is therefore a “[p]erfect business” (232).

As one of those “desperate wretched patients” who expect to suffer, Irie doesn’t protest when her hair gets burned off in the straightening process and she has to purchase red hair extensions (grown and sold by women of various ethnicities experiencing various economic difficulties) and then have them glued to her head. When she heads immediately afterwards to Millat’s house to show off her new look, feeling “straight, unkinky. Beautiful” (236), she finds neither the affirmation nor the person (i.e. Millat) she was looking for. Instead, she encounters his cousin Neena and her girlfriend who alternately insult her (“You look like a freak!”), mock her (“I mean, what was the grand plan? The Negro Meryl Streep?”), and laugh at her (“Neena folded over like a duvet and laughed herself silly” (236)) before telling her how beautiful her natural hair was: “You had *beautiful* hair, man. All curly and wild. It was gorgeous” (237). By blending an affirmation of her former look with mockery and an injunction to “reeducate” (237) herself, Neena penetrates the fog of Irie’s disillusion enough to bring an end to this particular stage of her quest, which Irie’s next glance in the mirror reveals. She sees not her “straighter self” but a distorted image with which she cannot identify: i.e. “the love child of Diana Ross and Englebert Humperdinck” (241). Irie’s self-mockery thus signals a moment of self-awareness: the ability to recognize the inauthentic nature of her altered

image and to reject it as undesirable. Subsequently, she rips “someone else’s hair” from her scalp “with her bare hands” (241).

Irie is still not enlightened enough to engage in a broader cultural critique, however, nor does her revelation lead her to accept herself as she is. Instead, she switches tracks, entirely abandoning her exploration of the gender and race inflected question of physical beauty to pursue a socio-cultural shift in her identity. After meeting the Chalfen family, a prototypical example of that “strange and beautiful thing, the *middle class*⁷¹” (267), living in nearby Hamstead, yet worlds away from her own family, she decides to imitate them. If she can’t expand the definition of Englishness to include someone like herself or look the part of a ‘true’ English rose, she will at least try to act the part of the ideal English citizen. Headed by Marcus, a successful scientist, and Joyce, a homemaker who, nurturer par excellence, not only devotes herself to raising their four well-adjusted sons but also writes moderately well-received tracts about horticulture that double as parenting advice books, the Chalfen family is a model of the solidly rooted contentment typical of their class. This is what Iries craves in her own life: “She just wanted to, well, kind of, *merge* with them. She wanted their Englishness. Their Chalfenishness. The *purity* of it” (273). Irie’s desire for this purity is thus both transformative and transgressive, as she wishes to infiltrate this pure Englishness in order to employ it as a camouflage for her true self: “when Irie stepped over the threshold of

⁷¹ This yearning for (upper) middle-class Britishness marks more than just Irie in *White Teeth*. In fact, Magid Iqbal desires elsewhere in *White Teeth* to be part of a more middle-class family that keeps “a piano in the hallway in place of the broken door off cousin Kurshed’s car,” owns “cats and not cockroaches,” and has a mother who “makes the music of the cello, not the sound of the sewing machine” (126), all of which reflects her own middle-class yearnings. As she says in 2005: “I think when I was growing up I was very very aware of not being middle-class; much more aware than of being black as an unusual thing. I never wanted to be white, but I always wanted to be middle-class. I liked the big house, I liked the piano, I liked the cats, the cello lessons” (Edemariam). In that same 2005 interview, Edemariam additionally notes the role of middle-class yearnings in Howard’s past in *On Beauty*.

the Chalfen house, she felt an illicit thrill...She was crossing borders, sneaking into England; it felt like some terribly mutinous act, wearing somebody else's uniform or somebody else's skin" (273). In other words, she wishes to enact the figurative, social-position version of gluing "someone else's hair" (241) to her head. Ironically, despite the fact that she values this purity for the depth of stability and rootedness it promises, she can only do it as a surface trait.

More precisely, she admires "Chalfenishness" for its known contours, transparency, and consistent composition – even across generations – that is born of a stable history: a history that brings the uncertainty of her own family background (about which she has only begun to think in earnest) into sharp relief. On the one hand, the Chalfen family history has been neatly catalogued and curated for display: "the Chalfen family tree, an elaborate illustrated oak that stretched back into the 1600s and forward into the present day" (280) hangs in Marcus's office and a series of daguerreotypes line the mantelpiece for easy reference during recitals of ancestral achievements. On the other hand, the Bowden-Jones family 'known' history is as brief as it is convoluted. When Irie tries to imagine what her family tree would look like, she envisions it covered in question marks and unverified, anecdotal information, its branches dotted (not solid) and fading away into oblivion two or three generations back (281-1). Rather than lending itself to a coherent linear narrative, Irie's family story reveals gaps that either can't or won't be filled by her parents.

Most remarkable about the contrast Irie thus establishes between her family and the Chalfens is that the superior appeal of the latter derives as much from the impact their family history has on present family interactions as from the social status afforded by that

history. Although Smith provides little direct information about Irie's home life, her description of Irie's appreciation of the Chalfen family dynamic creates a portrait in negative of life at the Joneses:

Irie was fascinated, enamoured after five minutes. No one in the Jones household made jokes about Darwin, or said 'my foot and mouth are on intimate terms,' or offered choices of tea, or let speech flow freely from adult to child, child to adult, as if the channel of communication between these two tribes was untrammelled, unblocked by history, *free*" (265).

In Irie's understanding, a coherent and known past remains safely circumscribed, but an unknown or unspoken past is unruly; it takes on an irregular, uncontrollable form that intrudes on the present and creates barriers between different generations. It is therefore to find this freedom of communication in the present—freedom from the barriers in her own family—that Irie happily dons the Chalfenist "uniform" or "skin." As Joyce Chalfen notes to Clara while giving a tour of the Chalfen daguerreotypes, the family considers Irie to be "a kind of addition, in a way" (293), an intellectual grafting onto their heritage of intellectual achievements, made possible by the "good English education" (294) Marcus provides Irie by tutoring her and involving her in his research. Irie therefore wholeheartedly accepts the stability of the Chalfen way as a solid platform for the future, both hers (as she wishes to emulate Marcus's career path as a researcher in the hard sciences) and the world's (as she supports the Futuremouse-based vision of making the future as obedient and unruly as the Chalfen past).

Several critics have commented on the unique way in which ancestral pasts are present for Irie's (and, by extension, Smith's) generation of newly multiethnic Londoners: and how these pasts impose hermeneutic imperatives that must be contended with in some way. Pilar Dominguez suggests at one point that the novel's "young

protagonists inherit the pieces to the puzzle of identity” (176), with the implication that these pieces—although disparate—are meant to fit together neatly to form part of the “multicultural mosaic” of London (183). As a puzzle furthermore represents identity is a kind of composite image, Dominguez suggests that Irie’s search for a reflection (i.e. an image reflected by society) need not be in vain as long as she can discover the pieces she needs to put it together and make whole what was fractured in the past. Identity, in this sense, is a solvable mystery. Elsewhere, however, Dominguez shies away from the notion that identity is constructed from the materials of the past, suggesting that, regardless of what they inherit, second-generation Londoners choose to be “creative” with their identities, where ‘being creative’ is synonymous with hiding one’s true background. For instance, Samad’s son Magid introduces himself to his classmates as ‘Mark Smith’ (184) long before Irie attempts to disappear into the Chalfen family. By contrast, Rebecca Dyer quite optimistically argues that despite the burden it represents, the past offers the second generation an opportunity for self-expression and cultural correction. She suggests that, whereas first generation immigrants tend to find themselves hopelessly bogged down by “colonialism’s continuing influence on contemporary London,” second-generation characters such as Irie “can on occasion find...the *unclean* slate of London [that is, a London thoroughly marked by colonial history] liberating” (81) to the extent that they feel themselves able to alter an already marked slate (and therefore “counte[r] white Britons’ versions of that city” (97)).

It is worth noting that Dyer does not discuss the fact that Irie cannot offer alternatives to official London histories, nor does Dominguez address the fact that Irie cannot truly make an informed decision about whether to piece together the inherited

puzzle of her identity or hide it. After all, the ability to manipulate the past artfully requires knowledge of it. Matthew Poproth describes the way Irie's ancestral past works on her against her will Poproth asserts that Irie's ultimate motivation is to become independent of the past: "living in the wreckage of her family history, Irie Jones wants to prune away the roots she feels clutching at her...[and] escape the clutches of her past" (16). While Poproth rightly observes that the past does not liberate Irie, pointing instead to the protagonist's active attempts to liberate herself from the past, it is important to add that her desire to "escape its clutches" by turning to the Chalfens is born of her frustration that she cannot dig down to expose her roots first.

This frustration is reinforced and thematized by the structure of the novel. *White Teeth* is divided into four sections of five chapters each, the first three of which bear a heading linked not only to a particular character but also to two years of particular import to that character⁷²: one in the present (during which important events in that section take place) and one in the past (during which events important to the present took place). In the case of prototypically English Archie and first-generation Bengali immigrant Samad, these dates in their past (Archie's 1945 war experience and Samad's convictions about his ancestor Mangal Pande's heroism during the First War of Indian Independence in 1857) refer to known elements of their history that actively inform their present. For Irie, however, the second date mentioned in the chapter heading (1907) refers to a series of complex events surrounding the conception and birth of her grandmother Hortense, events about which Irie has (and will always have) only bits and pieces of

⁷² By contrast, the fourth section lists three characters (Magid, Millat, and Marcus) and the second date refers to the future (Futuremouse's projected death in 1999), not the past.

decontextualized information. By the time she reaches her grandmother's house, she has given up the expectation that she will ever be able to fit these details into their proper context, as her response to enigmatic comments made in her presence show. For instance, while introducing Irie to her housemate Ryan, Irie's grandmother fervently implies that Irie could have been his daughter: "Nothing surprised Irie about this final, whispered aside; she just added it to the list: [Her great grandmother] Ambrosia Bowden gave birth in an earthquake...[Her great-grandfather] Captain Charlie Durham was a no-good djam fool bwoy...false teeth in a glass...*she might have been yours...*" (322)⁷³

However, although this houseguest is a stranger to Irie, the reader knows that the stranger is her mother's ex-boyfriend and can therefore understand Hortense's comment (while also finding humor in how incongruous it must seem to Irie). Such is the pattern: whereas Irie must contend with the ellipses in her family history, the reader gains access to all the material needed to fill in the blanks. First, her parents' history—how they met as well as some of what their lives were like before—comprises the first two chapters of the novel. Second, chapter thirteen, "The Root Canals of Hortense Bowden," tells the story, in an isolated narrative rupture that flashes back to 1907, of Charlie Durham's seduction and impregnation of Ambrosia Bowden under the guise of tutoring her in all things British. Through this, the reader learns that the disillusionment caused by that relationship is what ultimately led to Ambrosia's conversion to the Jehovah's Witness faith that forms the bedrock of Hortense's existence (and was the bane of Irie's mother Clara). Ambrosia's story not only fills in the gaps for the reader, but it does so in the precise form that Irie craves, as a linear narrative neatly rounded out with a moral lesson

⁷³ Ellipses and italics are in the original text.

announced at the beginning and repeated at the end of the chapter: “a little English education can be a dangerous thing” (295, 301). The presence of this chapter in the midst of Irie’s encounters with the Chalfens, just before the chapter in which she becomes disillusioned with both the Chalfens’ confident forthrightness and her parents’ silences, coupled with the fact that the moral of this story that Irie will never hear is highly relevant to her life, adds a slightly mocking edge of ironic amusement to the reader’s otherwise empathetic engagement in Irie’s plight.

In a similar narrative gesture, Irie’s admiration for the Chalfens is undermined by the narrator from their first appearance in the novel. Where Irie sees a family composed of individuals with stable identities, the narrator shows the reader a family that is inert, closed upon itself, paradoxically alienated from society by the very complacency that is the hallmark of its members’ inherent sense of belonging. Returning to mirror imagery once again, the narrator portrays the Chalfens as undergoing an identity crisis of a kind diametrically opposed to Irie’s. In other words, they suffer from an overabundance of reflections and recognition:

The century was drawing to a close and the Chalfens were bored. Like clones of each other, their dinner table was an exercise in mirrored perfection. Chalfenism and all its principles reflecting itself infinitely, bounding from Oscar to Joyce, Joyce to Joshua, Joshua to Marcus, Marcus to Benjamin, Benjamin to Jack ad nauseum across the meat and veg. But having cut all ties with their Oxbridge peers—judges, TV execs, advertisers, lawyers, actors, and other frivolous professions Chalfenism sneered at—there was no one left to admire Chalfenism itself. Its gorgeous logic, its compassion, its intellect. They were like wild-eyed passengers of the *Mayflower* with no rock in sight. Pilgrims and prophets with no strange land. (262)

The Chalfens have ostensibly achieved the elusive “impossible perfection” which the Lacanian mirror stage promises but never delivers. Having disdained the need for affirmation which Irie feels so strongly, they nevertheless cannot forgo the desire for

admiration, a desire which Smith slyly connects to the British colonial impulse through her reference to the *Mayflower*. Thus does Smith offer the reader what Irie can't see: a satirical portrait of insufferable 'Brits' eager to 'colonize' Irie, Magid, and Millat, the novel's second generation, in order to validate their worldview.⁷⁴

What Irie can eventually see, however, is that the clarity and stability of the Chalfen vision that so attracted her with its promise of freedom and openness will offer her only limitations and restrictions. Having believed herself to be fully integrated into the Chalfen world as Marcus' assistant (although she is doing exclusively clerical work), she is dismayed to discover that Marcus has developed a much closer intellectual, epistolary relationship with Magid (whom Samad ironically sent to live in Bangladesh so he wouldn't be corrupted by English life) than with her. Their letters, which Irie reads as she files them for posterity, testify to the fact that Marcus and Magid are two intellectual equals joined by "the boundless joy of mutual recognition" (304). More upsetting than their reciprocal bond, however, is the image of herself she discovers in their letters. Instead of languishing without a reflection, Irie must now suffer from being assigned a slightly mocking verbal reflection that relegates her to an unsatisfactory position in her society while simultaneously critiquing her appearance.⁷⁵ Marcus describes Irie to Magid

⁷⁴ This portrait has received mixed reviews. Whereas the otherwise critical James Wood praises the "gently satirical portrait of the Chalfen family" in all their "impeccable smugness" as "one of the novel's best chapters" in his June 2000 review (189), Caryl Phillips contends in his January 2000 review that "the depiction of the dysfunctional Chalfen family, while often funny, finally seems too cartoon-like." By the time *On Beauty* was published, Aida Edemariam suggests that consensus has fallen on Phillips' side: "In a section of *White Teeth* that attracted some slightly shocked, disapproving comment, Smith ruthlessly mocked an upper-middle-class liberal family, the Chalfens. It is overdone, cartoonish in places, but what is hard to miss is its anger and envy, channeled through Irie."

⁷⁵ I would argue, in contrast with Petra Tournay's argument, that it is in this scene, more than in the sonnet reading scene, that Irie encounters "the position that has been predefined for her by British culture" (226), where Marcus stands as a representative of British culture whom she furthermore looked up to as a mentor.

in the following way: “Sadly, I don’t hold out much hope for her aspirations in the field of ‘hard science’ [...] she’s sharp in a way, but it’s the menial work that she’s good at—she’d make a lab assistant maybe, but she hasn’t any head for the concepts [...] it might have to be dentistry for our Irie (she could fix her own teeth at least)” (305).

Though this reflection is disappointing, Irie is not unwilling to grasp onto it for lack of anything better. In fact, this reflection alone is unlikely to have deterred her from her emulation of the Chalfens (indeed, after reading this she silently plans to become a dentist, just as Marcus suggests) were she not shortly thereafter destabilized by a mocking attack from her mother. Ostensibly, Clara and Irie clash over Irie’s desire to take a year off before university to travel the world (Africa, in particular), like Marcus’ son Josh plans to do. But what is truly at the heart of the conflict is, on Clara’s side, her fear that her daughter will entirely disappear into the Chalfen family (and, by extension, white England), and, on Irie’s side, years of built-up frustration. When Irie wakes Clara up in the middle of the night to trick her into agreeing to the Africa trip while she is disoriented from sleep, she receives only denial and mockery. First, Clara scoffs at Irie’s plans in a way that reveals her disgust with the Chalfens. Speaking in a voice that somewhat undercuts the sharpness of her comments because she is not wearing the false teeth she has needed since she lost her top row of teeth in a scooter accident, she reframes Irie’s desire to “see the people of the world” in terms of the imperialistic impulse endemic to a certain kind of Englishness (to which Chalfenism belongs), sardonically reducing it to its simplest racial form: “Permishon for *what?* Koo go and share and ogle at poor black folk? Dr. Livingstone, I prejume? Iz dat what you leant from da Shalfenz?”

Because if thash what you want, you can do dat here. Jush sit and look at me for six munfs!” (313).

Marginalized by the Chalfens, on the one hand, and accused of a desire to marginalize others by her mother, on the other, Irie is finally brought to a paroxysm of frustration by a small but highly suggestive twist of fate when Clara’s past bites Irie on the foot. Mid-argument, Irie’s reality shifts as she steps on the dentures that had fallen from her mother’s bedside table to the floor. Feeling the biting mockery of those fake teeth, which she didn’t know her mother wore, she suddenly realizes that she had quite literally been staring yet another family secret in the face for her entire life: “this was another example of the Jones/Bowden gift for secret histories, stories you never got told, history you never entirely uncovered, rumor you never unraveled, which would be fine if every day was not littered with clues, and suggestions” (314). It is at this point that, buffeted by competing ideas and overwhelmed by the meaningless clutter of the past, Irie beats a strategic retreat from both families by, ironically, going to live with her grandmother Hortense (currently estranged from Clara) in Lambeth.

Poproth hints at the irony of Irie’s decision to escape complications of the past by delving one generation deeper into her lineage, asserting that, unlike her mother and Marcus “her grandmother...while technically a part of her past, poses no real threat to her autonomy” (16). In fact, I would argue that Hortense helps provide the conditions necessary for her to cultivate a sense of autonomy. Not unlike Marie-Noëlle’s grandmother in *Désirada*, Hortense represents a break with the tradition that holds, as Moudileno argued, that the Caribbean grandmother’s main function is to serve as a reservoir of wisdom garnered from the past whose depths are waiting to be plumbed by

the younger generations.⁷⁶ Accordingly, the wisdom that Hortense offers Irie is more along the lines of burning bridges than providing a gateway to the past: “De past is done wid. Nobody learn nuttin’ from it” (338). The situation of Hortense’s apartment also contributes to Irie’s sense of autonomy. It is cut off from Irie’s community by being located in a different section of London and from society in general by being an urban cave of sorts: a basement flat, its windows reveal no more of the world than the feet of the various passers-by. As Irie herself reflects, being at Hortense’s apartment was like “being cocooned, and she was as curious as everyone else to see what kind of Irie would emerge” (330).

The autonomy she experiences there is all the more vital to her development for the fact that she nevertheless faces some familiar challenges while living with her grandmother. The certainty and confidence that reigns in the Chalfen household is at least matched by the certainty of the Jehovah’s Witness faith in the Bowden household (as highlighted by the title of chapter fifteen: “Chalfenism Versus Bowdenism”). Furthermore, as at her parents’ house, she receives affirmation she doesn’t accept and hears enigmatic comments she can’t understand. Her mother’s way of contextualizing Irie’s beauty is enthusiastically echoed by her grandmother: “Bwoy, sometime it like lookin’ in a mirror-glass,... You built like me, big you know! Hip and tie and rhas, and titties. My mudder was de same way” (318). But perhaps more significantly, Hortense is, if anything, more elliptical than Clara. For instance, she is inexplicably living (platonically) with Clara’s ex-boyfriend Ryan, the driver of the scooter in the accident

⁷⁶ Quoting Edouard Glissant, Moudlieno writes: “le rêve d’une ‘remontée dans le *cela* qui [s’est] perdu,’ passe par des figures ancestrales féminines dépositaires d’une expérience et d’une sagesse indispensables” (1151).

that cost Clara her teeth but a man of whom Irie has never heard. Not only does Hortense not explain Ryan's connection to the family to Irie, but she even adds to the mystery of his presence by making cryptic comments such as the above referenced remark about Irie to Ryan: "'Clara's darter,' repeated Hortense in a tearful whisper. '*She might have been yours*'" (322).

Having already passed her saturation point for enigmas with the discovery of Clara's false teeth, Irie does not fully engage with either the emotion or the implications of her grandmother's "tearful whisper." Instead she responds "halfheartedly, with no expectation of an answer," simply asking "What?" (ibid). If Irie experiences a greater measure of autonomy in her grandmother's house than elsewhere (for instance, showing no interest in adopting the Jehovah's Witness faith despite Ryan and Hortense's exhortations), it therefore derives not from any circumstantial difference but rather from a change in Irie's response to her circumstances. In accordance with Freud's notion that humor allows an individual to become "impervious to wounds dealt by the outside world" (5), Irie begins to react to the comments and worldviews of others with calculated wit rather than guileless sincerity. To reframe Freud's terms to reflect mirror imagery, Irie uses humor to deflect others' views of her rather than reflect them. When, for instance, Ryan delivers a long, pompous diatribe filled with overblown rhetoric (including statements such as "allowing earlier incarnations of myself to be enveloped into a great smog" (322)) just to say that he doesn't think about Clara anymore because she is a part of his irreligious past, Irie's response is both clever and cutting. As succinct as he was bombastic, she simply says: "She never mentioned you either" (323). Later, when Joshua Chalfen has decided to rebel against Chalfensim in general and his father in

particular by joining an extremist animal-rights group, he proudly announces to Irie that he has decided to boycott all animal-sourced products. Irie's reaction to his bold declaration once again offers a subtle, sardonic critique of his naïve certainty, his zeal as a new convert: "After a while of watching the feet go by [out the window of Hortense's apartment] —leathers, sneakers, heels—Irie said, 'That'll show 'em'" (335). As Irie's inner monologue here suggests, her new way of responding to her environment brings her into greater harmony with the narrator's voice. Where once she was the object of its fond mockery regarding her understandable but often misguided earnestness, now she and the narrator often work in concert. In some instances, such as when Irie hears Joyce on the radio speaking at length in her usual long-winded style while doing an interview, Irie's wit is entirely voiced by the narrator: "Irie switched Joyce off. It was quite therapeutic, switching Joyce off" (332).

Further proof of this nascent intellectual independence may be found in Irie's new proclivity toward making decisions and developing ideas without immediate reference to the opinions of others. Although these ideas are occasionally ill-conceived, she demonstrates through them a will to shape her life on her own terms, in the realms of both imagination and reality. She develops a fascination (not at all encouraged by her grandmother) with Jamaica, which she imagines to be an unmarked space—"a beginning, the beginningest of beginnings" (332)—where she could access the "perfect blankness of the past" (332). For all that this fictional construction is undoubtedly erroneous, it is also remarkable for its difference from Irie's previous approaches to the past. Here, the past is not a puzzle to be solved, a solid lineage to join, or a reflection to seek or create, but rather an opportunity to impose her vision on a world that is not pre-determined (as, in

fact, she lays the past under erasure). Sounding truly proprietary for the first time, Irie “laid claim to the past—her version of the past---aggressively, as if retrieving misdirected mail.... This all *belonged* to her” (331). The mirror that offers no reflection has become her very own blank slate onto which she can project whatever she chooses.

Complicating Irie’s active invention, however, is her sudden proclivity toward taking decisive action on her own terms, which ironically roots her in the here and now even as she begins to yearn for the ‘elsewhere’ of her imagined Jamaica. More precisely, she impulsively seduces Millat and his twin brother Magid on the same day, satisfying her longstanding desire to be with the former twin and humble the latter in some way for being his father’s favorite, all of which results in her becoming pregnant at the age of sixteen. Although certainly not the hallmark of good judgment, Irie’s seduction of the twins is striking for being actions she undertook based on her own ideas. More precisely, this transforms her from the helpless plaything of her family’s past and impressionable subject of discourses on English womanhood to the independent author of her own destiny: a destiny which furthermore coincides with her child’s inevitably unruly past and indeterminate origins, as “no test on earth would tell her” (426) which identical twin is the father of her baby. In this way, her actions trigger her acceptance of the messiness of entanglement and the unpredictability that it inevitably creates. After she feels a pang of guilt over the questions she predicts her child will have about his or her paternity, “she thought: *whatever*, you know? *Whatever*. It was always going to turn out like this, not precisely like this, but *involved* like this” (427).

Having first constructed a solid foundation for her independence and integrity via a sense of humor, Irie begins, in the novel’s final chapters, to build on that foundation.

She is therefore temporarily buoyed on the one hand by the imagined sense of place she derives from her personal, invented Jamaica and on the other by the deep, inner reality of her baby's tangled roots that entwine both of their identities in the complicated 'here and now' of modern London. In this spirit, Irie's search for reflection and external affirmation comes to a definitive end in her final dialogue in the novel. As Irie has spent most of the novel moving from place to place in London looking for affirmation and listening to what everyone else wants for her and thinks of her, it is fitting that this dialogue should take place in a bus that is careening across the city with a cross-section of people in her life who are arguing over their competing visions of the world on board. It is also fitting that this dialogue should occur so close to the end of Smith's novel, throughout which all of the central characters have been burdened by specific moments in the past. Irie seems to echo the attitude with which Smith desires to wrap up her very long debut novel when she stands up on the bus and loudly commands the bickering crowd to "shut *up*" (425). More specifically, she exhorts them to cease with their petty bickering and get on with their lives so that "every single day is not this huge battle between who they are and who they should be, what they were and what they will be" (426).

This is not only the battle that Irie and her fellow characters must cease to wage, but also a battle that England must cease to wage. As Caryl Phillips wrote in his early review of *White Teeth*, "the 'mongrel' nation that is Britain is still struggling to find a way to stare into the mirror and accept the ebb and flow of history that has produced this fortuitously diverse condition and its concomitant pain. Zadie Smith's first novel is an audaciously assured contribution to this process of staring into the mirror" ("Mixed"). As

the conclusion of the novel suggests, it is time to accept this reflection if only to make it easier to turn away from it and move on.

Constructive Delusions in *On Beauty*

Indeed, Zadie Smith turns away from the space of England with her third novel and toward the realm of U.S. academia, which does not represent for her characters, as it does for *Desirada's* Marie-Noëlle, a space of liberation. Since the 2005 release of Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*, an "homage" to E.M. Forster's *Howards End* that satirizes the public squabbles and personal hypocrisies of two Rembrandt scholars of opposing ideologies, critical attention has focused mainly on evaluating the success of Smith's portrayals of Forster, Elaine Scarry's aesthetic theory, and the author's representation of the culture wars and black womanhood. By contrast, critics have spent comparatively little time exploring in depth the difficult character of Levi, the teenaged, mixed-race son of the liberal Rembrandt scholar whom the narrative routinely mocks for pretending to be what he is not (i.e. 'from the streets'). Guided by his love of hip hop and his dislike for the wealthy suburb in which he grew up, Levi embarks on a decidedly quixotic search for racial identity and ideology in the streets of Boston. Unlike Marie-Noëlle and Irie, Levi is inspired to embark on an identity quest not to find a sense of self where he feels none but rather to escape the solidity of an identity that fails to live up to his ideals. Unlike his brother and sister in *On Beauty* who achieve new forms of clarity through dramatic and painful disillusionment,⁷⁷ Levi is most engaged with the world when he is most deeply

⁷⁷Levi and his two siblings, Jerome and Zora, form a composite of Helen from *Howard's End*. Jerome's relationship with the Kippes mirrors Helen's with the Wilcoxes, Zora initiates a misunderstanding over a Discman with Carl (a lower-class man looking to move up socially, very much like Forster's Carl) when

deluded about his place in it. As the mockery of Levi moves from the narrative level to the diegetic one, mocking characters attract and guide Levi's behavior without actually piercing his delusions. Nevertheless, by the narrative's end, Levi has become, through this mockery, an important conduit for the novel's social critique.

Outside of his involvement with this social critique, Levi is a secondary character in an expansive novel which is furthermore saddled with heavy expectations. Following the extraordinary success of *White Teeth*, Smith was heralded as a standard bearer of twenty-first century literature and tasked with finding a way to carry fiction forward while shouldering the literary and historical baggage of the 20th century. Her second novel, *Autograph Man* failed to impress, however, when compared with its predecessor. Michiko Kakutani's early review is representative of the general trend of responses to a novel she deemed "a flat-footed, grudging performance" and something of a betrayal of *White Teeth's* spirit. She describes *Autograph Man* as: "Dour where *White Teeth* was exuberant; abstract and pompous where *White Teeth* was brightly satiric; tight and preachy where *White Teeth* was expansive" (Kakutani). It fell therefore to *On Beauty* to redeem Smith as a literary standard-bearer.⁷⁸

she attends a performance of Mozart, and Levi tries to fight for social equality by confronting his family about class issues they don't want to address. After having become enamored with the Kipps' lifestyle as well as Victoria Kipps during his internship with Monty, Jerome quickly becomes disenchanted with the Kipps and then humiliated when his father descends on the Kipps' family home after Victoria has already rejected him. Zora's illusions are twice shattered as she finds out in one moment that Carl has no romantic interest in her and that her father has cheated on her mother with Victoria. A new clarity of vision is the almost immediate result: "She could not remember ever feeling as focused as she did this morning. The first day she wore glasses had been a little like this: lines sharper, colours clearer. The whole world like an old painting restored. Finally, she understood" (420). Levi, by contrast, embodies the eternally idealistic aspect of Helen's character.

⁷⁸ Frank Rich's review of *On Beauty* is emblematic of both the impulse to assign Smith the role of cultural spokesperson ("Some fearless outside referee had to barge in and try to adjudicate the culture wars, so let us rejoice that it's Zadie Smith") and to use *White Teeth* as a benchmark after the disappointment of *The*

Smith was likely responding to these great expectations when she elected to use two texts bookending the twentieth century as the framework of her third novel. On the one hand, Smith borrows *On Beauty's* basic plot structure from *Howard's End*, E.M. Forster's 1910 novel that pits a capitalist, imperialistic family against a family of impractical but open-minded intellectuals in a tale that foreshadows the deconstruction of the British Empire. On the other hand, Smith derives inspiration from Scarry's 1999 manifesto *On Beauty and Being Just*, taking Scarry's attempt to reclaim beauty from postmodern, Marxist, and postcolonial deconstructions as a jumping-off point for her own interrogation of the balance between aesthetic and political concerns in contemporary Academic discourse.

More precisely, the two Rembrandt scholars Smith pits against each other in her novel represent a noticeable imbalance between Academic aesthetics and politics. While Liberal, British, white, Howard Belsey, seeks to deconstruct Rembrandt to prove that "prettiness" is "the mask that power wears" and "art is the Western myth" (155), Conservative, Trinidadian, black Monty Kipps uses Rembrandt to argue that universal standards of beauty exist, genius is God-given, and policies such as Affirmative action do more harm than good. Throughout the novel, these two professors are equally unable, because of their inability to live up to their own firmly-stated ideals, to integrate generous scholarship with generous politics, or reconcile professed ideology with actual behavior. As such, they are the primary instruments of Smith's academic satire, which she issues

Autograph Man ("Those who were enraptured by Smith's startling 2000 debut, *White Teeth* will find that "On Beauty" is almost literally a return to form").

from a position presumably located somewhere between Monty's and Howard's ideological positions.

Accordingly, *On Beauty* is often classified as a "campus novel" in the grand satirical tradition of Vladimir Nabokov, Don DeLillo, Kingsley Amis, and David Lodge. In an interview, Lodge himself describes how the cloistered, disconnected nature of campus life naturally shapes the aesthetic of the campus novel which, in turn, inscribes the genre in a long comic lineage. He says: "If you think of a comedy such as *As You Like It*, you get all these eccentric characters, all in one pastoral place, interacting in ways they wouldn't be able to do if they were part of a larger, more complex social scene. There's often an element of entertaining artifice, of escape from the everyday world, in the campus novel" (Eidemariam).

Smith, who wrote *On Beauty* after a year-long stint as a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard, appears to share Lodge's sense of the unreality of academia. Indeed, she describes many of the interactions between members of the academic community in self-consciously theatrical terms: When Howard disappoints his family, he thinks of them as a "Greek chorus," laying judgment on him and "rushing from the stage the moment he stepped on it." (308). While talking with her husband's colleagues, Howard's wife Kiki muses to herself that each couple is "its own vaudeville act" performing a "routine" (56) while trying to be charming and 'schmooze.' Zora Belsey, Howard and Kiki's daughter and a very ambitious Wellington Student, wonders whether everyone else actually had real opinions or "were all play-acting, as she was" (209-10).

As the only character who strives desperately to escape this world of academic artifice, Levi raises the most complex and difficult questions about the relationship between aesthetics, academic discourse, and authentic political engagement. A hip hop aficionado, Levi is clearly embarrassed that his father is a professor at Wellington College, and that his family lives in a stately old house in the upper-middle class suburb in which the campus is located, a situation he considers as “far from his idea of where he lived as seemed possible” (82). Levi’s desire to separate himself from the world to which he ostensibly belongs is reflected in the novel’s structure. Not directly implicated in the central dramas that shape much of the text, Levi rarely appears in the company of the other main characters, unless he is literally passing through a scene on his way out the door. Forced to attend a Wellington college event at his house one night, Levi heads home grumpily listening to his ipod and melodramatically musing that “the fate of the young man in his earphones, who faced a jail cell that very night, did not seem such a world away from his own predicament: [that is,] an anniversary party full of academics” (80). Whereas the halls of academia represent enclosure and repression to Levi, the streets of nearby Boston promise enlightenment, insight, and an authentic sense of collective identity. The narrator elevates Levi’s preference for Boston over Wellington to an established aesthetic principle: “Levi treasured the urban the same way previous generations worshipped the pastoral” (79).

As the touch of mockery in the narrator’s descriptions of Levi suggests, Smith in no way uses Levi to establish a naïve or simplistic opposition between the unreal, artificial world of academia and the real, authentic world of the city. In fact, in his romanticization of what he calls “the global Street” (245), Levi escapes the artificial

world of academia only to enter more fully into his own urban illusions. He makes weekly pilgrimages to Boston, entering the city like a conscious, urban Don Quixote, inspired by hip hop music rather than tales of chivalric adventure to re-imagine his own history and the world around him. Notably, his version of the role of wandering knight derives from an idealized vision of urban blackness, and the persona he adopts is that of an inner-city youth (with a geographically inappropriate Brooklyn accent), whose street-and-hip-hop-derived wisdom and aesthetic principles guide him in protecting his marginalized brethren from sociocultural injustice. Buying into the corporate pablum on the application form, Levi naively considers his part-time job in the “Hip Hop, R & B, and Urban” (181) section of a music mega-store as an entrée into a multinational “community, with shared ideas, values, interests, and goals” (180)—and his chance to share his musical values with customers. Similarly seduced by the overall image the company projects through the media, he incongruously reimagines corporate branding as free-form, unsanctioned self-expression on the urban landscape: “Levi liked the way the mythical British guy who owned the brand was like a graffiti artist, tagging the world” with his “simple bold logo” (ibid).

The script changes quickly, however, when his managers require him to work on Christmas day, which inspires an outraged Levi to recast the corporation as an exploitative force against which he and his colleagues are duty-bound to rise in protest. If he naturally accepts a leadership role in this mini-uprising, it is because he accepts the notion that his racial identity inherently provides him access to the inherent wisdom and will to fight of the historically oppressed: “it was the same weird sense he had in his prep school: that unless he spoke no one else would. He was being gifted with an authority,

and it was something complex and unspoken to do with being the black guy—deeper than that he could not penetrate” (186). Perhaps it is because Levi is unwilling to engage with this complexity, to delve into the highly contextual nature of the “authority” granted to him by the perception of his racial identity in a location like a prep school (with its particularly homogenous racial and economic make-up) that he is not prepared to handle the more diverse context of an urban mega-store. At the store, his suburban white coworkers are the only ones who follow his lead in the protest, and therefore recreate the pattern Levi recognizes from his prep school days. His African-American coworker LaShonda, by contrast, is thrilled at the idea of earning extra money by working on Christmas day and immediately assumes that Levi (whose persona she does not question) will feel the same way. More significantly, his African-American boss Bailey, who actually grew up in the type of neighborhood Levi pretends to come from, angrily confronts Levi about his pretensions to ‘street cred’ and threatens to expose him, thus bringing the protest to a staggering halt. Levi offers no response to Bailey other than to quit his job at the store. In this way, far from causing Levi to rethink his posturing or finally reflect critically on the shifting, contextual nature of the matrix of race and class he inhabits, this open confrontation only causes Levi to latch more strongly onto his paradoxical illusions of straightforward, heroic authenticity. In Maeve Tynan’s words, Levi “thus occupies a contradictory position: while assuming ‘blackness’ to be a fixed, stable category, his desire to *become* authentically black highlights a view of the concept as contingent and available through identity construction” (Tynan 86). An important corollary to Tynan’s observation is the fact that, at this point in Levi’s life, the “fixed, stable category” of race is inextricably tied into his notion of the urban: “to Levi, black

folk were city folk. People from the islands, people from the country, these were all peculiar to him, obstinately historical—he couldn't quite believe in them" (*Beauty* 81). In Levi's limited vision, 'authentic black identity' constitutes an essence that can paradoxically be acquired or, alternatively, that only exists when certain circumstantial conditions are met.

Since one of those circumstantial conditions is 'place,' it is only natural that when Levi becomes disenchanted with the corporate retail environment he once attempted to assimilate into his vision of the 'street,' he turns to the streets themselves for reaffirmation of his world view. There, he finds not only the wherewithal to sustain his illusions but the opportunity to realize his ideal version of himself more fully than ever. While Levi walks around Boston after quitting his job, his senses are seized by the synesthetic beauty of bootleg street vendors setting up their wares on the sidewalk to the beat of a boom-box: "Levi began to nod his head and watch the activity of the men, itself a visual expression of the frantic bass line. Like a patchwork quilt knitting together a zillion computer-generated colours, the DVD covers were lined up in rows...and these new announcements of colour brought a rush of delight to Levi, so strong because so unexpected" (193). Though clearly affected by the richly aesthetic experience of underground commercialism, Levi remains at first the distant spectator of a pleasing spectacle performed by people who are 'other.' As he thinks to himself, the men selling the bootlegs are "splendid beings, from quite another planet than the one he had been in only five minutes ago" (194). However, the simple act of one of the men speaking to him directly, "like an actor breaking the suspended disbelief of the fourth wall...reach[ing] out his long fingers to Levi" (194), operates on him as an interpellation, transforming his

distant admiration into active identification with a collective. Levi sharpens his idealization of the streets into an ode to “hustling,” the essential, unifying component of Black male identity: “To hustle is to be alive,” Levi explains to an utterly bemused Choo, his newfound Haitian-American bootleg-selling colleague. “And you ain’t a brother if you can’t hustle. That’s what joins us all together—whether we be on Wall Street or on MTV or sitting on a corner with a dime-bag. It’s a beautiful thing, man. We hustling!” (ibid). Far from seeking to destroy Levi’s illusion or even merely humoring him for it, most of his colleagues actively participate in it in order to benefit from its elevating qualities: “the reflection of themselves in Levi’s eyes was, after all, a more than welcome replacement for their own realities.... Who wouldn’t rather hustle than sell? Who would choose their own lonely, dank rooms over this Technicolor video, this outdoor community that Levi insisted they were all a part of?” (245).

Ironically, the only one of Levi’s new colleagues who doesn’t encourage his illusions is also the one whom Levi admires the most: i.e. Choo, whose only response to Levi’s “We hustlin’” proclamation, which Levi considers “the most complete version of [his] personal philosophy that he himself had ever articulated” was to sigh and say “I don’t know what you are talking about” (245). Despite this dismissive response, or perhaps because of it, Levi increasingly seeks affirmation from Choo. Whereas Levi’s attitude towards his other colleagues is condescending to a cringe-worthy degree (he muses to himself at one point as he walks down the street with fifteen Haitians at his side that he must look like “Jesus taking a stroll with the lepers” (243) in terms of how uncomfortable they made other people), this dynamic is reversed with Choo. As Levi crouches to move DVDs around while lying to Choo about where he comes from, he

mentally notes that Choo “looked down at him like the tallest man who had ever lived” (248). Much later, Levi doesn’t object when Choo tells Jerome, albeit “affectionately,” that Levi is his “little American Mascot” (404).

From this position of superiority over Levi, Choo begins managing Levi’s illusions. Taking a more subtle tack than Bailey, whose angry dose of reality merely caused Levi to flee the music mega-store, Choo chooses to redirect Levi’s delusions rather than deflate them. More precisely, he subjects Levi to a steady stream of often indirectly undermining mockery that slowly coaxes him into turning his attention away from his abstract ideals to the issues that Choo himself considers important: namely, the question of social justice from a uniquely Haitian-American perspective. After listening to Levi mock his customers for being willing to pay thirty dollars for bags that cost three dollars to make, Choo calmly observes that Levi surely overpaid for his one-hundred and twenty dollar sneakers: “You’re the one being hustled, my friend” (247). In addition, it takes an embarrassingly long time, following many repetitions of the phrase “I grew up on the streets!” for Levi to realize that he inadvertently reveals to Choo where he’s from in small moments, such as when he responds to Choo’s comment about having friends who work at Wellington (by which he means they work as part of the janitorial staff) with the question “Oh yeah...which department?” (248). Far from willing to acknowledge openly the nuances of Choo’s attitude toward him, Levi wordlessly witnesses Choo’s growing amusement as he stops just shy of puncturing Levi’s pretenses: “‘maybe we shall see each other [in the lower-class neighborhood of Roxbury], Levi,’ said Choo, and his smile grew wider, ‘down in the hood’” (248).

The fact that Levi's devotion to Choo continues unabated (particularly in light of the fact that when we first meet Levi, he can in no way laugh at himself – "the mention of his own name was never an occasion for irony or humour...like his own avid lawyer, he took a personal interest in every mention or misuse of it" (62) — shows that the latter's mockery serves as a useful step in Levi's authentic engagement with the world around him. This interpretation contests the prevailing understanding of Levi and Choo's relationship. Indeed, many reviewers and critics suggest that Smith's primary intention in portraying this relationship is to highlight the incommensurate distance between the privileged and delusional Levi and the cynical, disillusioned Choo, formerly a teacher in Haiti, who struggles to support himself hawking bootlegs on the streets of Boston. Roy Sommer argues, for example, that Smith seeks to illustrate the absolute impossibility of friendship ever bridging such gaps. He asserts that Levi's "rather futile endeavors to make friends among the Haitian rappers...show that the street credibility usually associated with hip hop cannot be acquired, but is an essential quality that comes with the personal experience of growing up in less fortunate circumstances: it is a social or educational, rather than ethnic, gap that will always separate Levi from LaShonda, Bailey, or Choo" (190). According to Sommer, therefore, the possession of authentic street credibility born of shared experiences is the sine qua non for entering into friendship with someone of Choo's economic situation and background.

But it strains credibility to imagine that Smith would advocate such an impasse, especially as her novel takes its inspiration from *Howard's End*, best known for its tagline "Only Connect!"⁷⁹—which Smith reformulates as "there is such shelter in each

⁷⁹ Smith notes in "E.M. Forster, Middle Manager" that "connection, as everyone knows, was Forster's great theme: between people, nations, heart and head, labor and art" (17).

other” (93).⁸⁰ In fact, what Sommer does not allow for is precisely the possibility of expanding one’s perspective and capacity for identification through aesthetic, rather than lived, experience, a possibility suggested strongly by the text from which Smith takes her title. After all, when Scarry argues in her essay *On Beauty* that our moral selves are shaped by our aesthetic selves, such that an appreciation of beauty helps us make ethical choices, she anchors her observations in our impulse toward imitation: the fact that “beauty brings copies of itself into being” (4) through our desire to extend the duration of the pleasure beauty brings us. In Levi’s case, this impulse toward imitation takes the form—common to adolescents— of making oneself over in the image of what one admires and believes to be, by extension, what Smith calls “a good in the world” (“Middlemarch” 37).⁸¹ Before meeting Choo, Levi was only casually guided by his tastes as he constructed a palimpsestic identity to obscure his privileged, academia-based background. Once he meets Choo, however, whom he sees as an incarnation of his sense of the beautiful and good, Levi’s identification process becomes more profound, as Choo is able to elevate Levi’s vague discomfort with his background into a discourse on

⁸⁰ This line, in turn, suggests yet another connection as it is taken from “Pedigree,” a poem by Smith’s husband Nick Laird from his debut collection *To a Fault*, published the same year as *On Beauty*. In “Pedigree,” that line furthermore signals the shift from the poet’s musings on painful episodes in his family’s past (an ocean away) to the comforting presence of the love of his life, who is within hearing distance.

⁸¹ Smith uses this expression in “Middlemarch and Everyone,” her essay on George Eliot’s novel, to explain the way Fred Vincy is shaped by his love for Mary, a woman who he believes to be “a good in the world.” By trying to become a man worthy of her, he evolves from a “hapless” (27), reckless, and aimless young man into a responsible future husband. Smith argues, in a way that speaks to Levi’s trajectory in *On Beauty*, that Fred’s transformation illustrates the way “love enables knowledge. Love is a kind of knowledge” (38), although she emphasizes the fact that whether or not this particular kind of knowledge is edifying depends entirely on the chance that determines whether one happens to love a good object or person.

academic exploitation of underrepresented peoples, and mock him into asking serious questions about his real world.

Through this process, Levi evolves from someone who disappears into his illusions to distance himself from his world to someone who looks through his illusion to interrogate it. As he does so, he becomes the instrument that breaks down the carefully constructed wall of willful ignorance separating Wellington academics from their omnipresent Haitian-American support staff. Indeed, Smith repeatedly emphasizes the absurdity of Wellington College's constructed sociocultural reality. Beginning with the opening scene of the novel, in which the Belsey's new Haitian housecleaner Monique enters the house and barely speaks a word amidst the flurry of the family morning routine, the events in the lives of *On Beauty's* academic community are continually set against the backdrop of the Haitian-Americans workers' experience. As Susan Alice Fischer observes, "the Haitian people...populate the edges, yet gird the lifestyle, of white Wellington" (294), their presence a constant, if distant, drumbeat. Although most of the main characters have few meaningful encounters with members of this workforce, and the narrator never employs a Haitian-American focalizer to portray this community from an inside perspective, the reader's attention is persistently drawn (at least once every twenty pages of this 450 page novel) to the Haitian-American-dominated service industry in the Greater Boston area. Whenever a Wellingtonian wants to rent a limo, take a taxi, buy jewelry at a farmer's market, hire wait staff for a catered event, or get their house or office cleaned, a Haitian-American character, clearly indicated as such, appears. By contrast, any attempt two or more characters make to engage in an actual dialogue about Haitian-American issues, or Haiti in general, inevitably leads to a conversational impasse.

Kiki Belsey simply nods and “mmm hmmm” when the man she is buying an anklet from at the open air market tries to talk with her about Aristide, Haiti’s ousted president, because she is embarrassed not to be up-to-date on Haitian news. Carl, a young African-American man who had exactly the kind of upbringing Levi pretends to have had,⁸² is a talented rap artist who struggled to earn an official place in Wellington’s ivory tower as a *Hip-Hop Archivist*. Given his frequent frustration with the ignorance and prejudice he encounters at the college, it is humorous to observe his insensibility to similar complaints made by others. In particular, he grows increasingly frustrated when one workday is repeatedly interrupted by “some sort of Haitian protest thing” happening outside his building. As the sounds of protest increasingly intrude upon his notice, causing him to mutter such things as “*man*, there’s a lot of noise out there,” the reader begins to expect that they will operate on Carl as a call to action, or at least identification. However, instead of being drawn out of his office and into communion with the protestors, Carl abruptly short circuits any potential communication with the simple, prosaic expedient of closing the office window.

Perhaps the most striking instance of this type of communicational impasse in the novel occurs when a group of young Haitian American men decides to perform a political protest song during open mike night at a local hot spot. Although the performance is impassioned, the majority of the audience literally cannot understand it, as it is sung primarily in Creole. In an apparent attempt to bridge the gap between performers and audience, Claire, a Wellington professor specializing in modern poetry who brought her

⁸² The fact that Levi does not attach himself to Carl, whom he met first and half-heartedly attempted to befriend, the way he does to Choo highlights the uniqueness of Choo’s relationship with Levi. Whereas Levi is charmed by Choo’s critiques of Wellington, he is disgusted by Carl’s desire (the desire which aligns him directly with Forster’s Leonard) for entrée into the academic world.

class to the show and claims to be conversant in Creole, puts herself forward as a translator. While admitting that there were too many “unfamiliar terms” for her to understand it, Claire nevertheless permits herself to offer a pert formal critique of the aural text: “It’s a very worthy effort....They have the power of the troubadour voice...But I’d say they have a little to learn about integration of idea and form—you break a form in two if you have all this undigested political fury in it” (228-9). Having thus delivered her summation, Claire then shuts off further discussion by standing up and announcing that she was going to go outside and smoke a cigarette. Through such examples of absurd gaps between the reality of Wellington and the Wellingtonians’ ability and willingness to articulate it,⁸³ Smith defines academic Wellington’s specific artificiality in terms of its ability to resist acknowledging the extent to which even its day-to-day operations are always already integrated into a “larger, more complex social scene” (Edemariam). Claire, for example, can blithely and distantly inform her students that the Haitian performers “seem to be angry about America’s involvement in Haiti” and offer the following glib, big-picture answer to the young woman who asks “We have something to do with Haiti?”: “We have something to do with everywhere” (228).

⁸³ Through this portrayal of campus life, Smith is offering a kind of literary update of Patricia Hill Collins’s analysis of the institutional space of the college campus in “Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection,” an article that made the rounds of liberal arts campuses newspapers in the late 1990s: “For example, if you are from an American college or university, is your campus a modern plantation?...Are elite White men overrepresented among the upper administrators and trustees controlling your university’s finances and policies? Are elite White men being joined by growing numbers of elite White women helpmates?...Who are the support staff that produce the mass mailings, order the supplies, fix the leaky pipes? Do African Americans, Hispanics, or other people of color form the majority of invisible workers who feed you, wash your dishes, and clean up your offices and libraries after everyone else has gone home?” (248) Collins might have gone further and compared the physical space of the typical Liberal Arts college campus (with its beautiful buildings sitting on expansive grounds) to the southern plantation.

However, she chooses not to engage directly either with the performers or any other members of the Haitian-American community she encounters on a daily basis.

By contrast, Levi spends the second half of the novel going to great lengths to integrate himself into the Haitian-American community in every way he can: from forging friendships with his coworkers, to choosing to read a book about Haiti, a significant step for a young man who had never previously made a conscious choice to enter a library (248), to serving as the hype man for the political protest song that Claire critiques and participating in the protest on campus that Carl shuts a window to avoid hearing. In this way, Levi becomes the only character in the novel who simultaneously belongs to both worlds and tries to foster communication across their artificial divide. For this reason, as his 'Haitian-American' identity is simultaneously the one in which he invests the most energy and the one that brings him back into greatest contact with the academic world he was trying to leave behind, it begins to look less like an escapist illusion and more like the point at which invention and imitation transform into the potential for real change. Certainly, Levi's feelings for Choo are authentic and he is, moreover, clear-sighted about every aspect of them, including the very real possibility that they might be one-sided. While trying to console his mother Kiki as she grieves the loss of her friend Carlene Kipps (their friendship being *On Beauty's* analogue of the Margaret/Mrs. Wilcox in *Howard's End* and the most solid proof in Smith's novel of the possibilities of identification across difference), he explains to her his notion that the perception of connection is its own reward: "sometimes it's like you just meet someone and you just know that you're totally connected, and that this person is, like, your brother. Or your sister...Even if they don't, like, recognize it, *you* feel it...All you can do

is put the feeling out there...and wait and see what comes back to you. That's the deal" (304). What comes back to Levi from his friendship with Choo is the widening of his empathetic range, thanks to the combined effect of Choo's humbling jabs and his revelations about Haiti. The Levi who privately weeps while hearing how "the many harmonized voices" of a particular Haitian music group "sounded...like a whole nation weeping in tune" (408) seems to follow his feelings on a path that leads him outside himself in a way that would have been a challenge for the Levi who, at the beginning of the novel, imposed his feelings on the music he listened to by equating a prison sentence with forced attendance at an academic party.

It is perhaps because of Levi's expanding empathetic range that he emerges at the end of the novel as its ultimate linking force. Through his final significant action, he brings to light connections that had gone unnoticed, hidden, or ignored: from the way the academic world relies on its Haitian American support system to Carlene's last gesture of friendship toward Kiki. If *Howard's End* concludes with Margaret discovering that she was the chosen inheritor of Mrs. Wilcox's much loved home, *On Beauty* ends with Kiki learning that Carlene wanted her to inherit her favorite painting, Haitian artist Hyppolite's *Maitresse Erzulie*. Following Carlene's death, her husband Monty Kipps simply disregards his wife's wishes, choosing instead to hang the painting in Wellington's Black Studies department. In fact, Kiki only discovers that the painting was meant for her because she finds it under Levi's bed, where he stashed it after stealing it from the Black Studies department on a mission conceived by Choo to reclaim for Haiti what was rightfully hers: in his words, "taking back what has been stolen from our people" (404).

While it is certainly wrong, or at the very least illegal, for Levi to have stolen the painting, Kiki's simultaneous discovery of Levi's theft, Carlene's touching gift, and Monty Kipps' deception leads to one of the most stirring debates in the novel, and the only one that forces the question of Haiti into the foreground of Wellington affairs. As Nicole King notes, "when the Erzulie painting is stolen by Levi Belsey and his group of protestors and workers campaigning for better wages for Wellington's Haitian labourers...the Erzulie becomes a symbol of class war and cultural theft" (271), a symbol whose meaning becomes a point of contention between mother and son. Whereas Kiki shocks Levi when she tells him that the true owner of the painting was not the academically exploitative Monty Kipps but the sincerely admiring Carlene and scolds him for thinking that committing a crime is ever a way to create social justice, Levi challenges his mother by asking her whether she would ever pay an "American" as little to clean her house as she pays Monique. This hitherto unspoken but penetrating question which has been hovering over Kiki since the first few pages of the novel when her conscience is pricked by the sight of Monique's cheap weave (11), leaves Kiki momentarily speechless. In this way, Smith thwarts readerly expectations that Levi will have to confront his pretensions, as naïve, easily led adolescents in such narratives often have to do, and that Choo's mockery will ultimately be accompanied by a definitive judgment. Notably, although Choo's mockery does inevitably lead to Levi's unmasking as the son of a professor (as the fact that Choo uses Levi's connections to break into the Wellington building implies), this unmasking takes place entirely 'offstage.' Foregrounded instead in this final debate is Kiki's need to take a closer look at herself. Although ownership of the painting is still being resolved in the courts at the end of the

novel, Kiki takes definitive action in her life following this mother-son confrontation. She leaves her husband, who has been unfaithful to her several times over, and her house, and has decided that that if she should be granted ownership of the painting, she would sell it and donate the funds to a Haitian support group (437).

In this way, Levi's initially quixotic wanderings open real dialogues and suggest actual change, or at least new connections, in the Wellington world. By reading the character of Levi in this way, we can see Smith struggle to move beyond the precepts of her postmodern era to bluster through intellectual impasses about authenticity, and who has the right to speak for whom, or identify with whom, in a world of silenced subalterns. Through Levi's youthful idealizing, Smith suggests that imperfect identifications, imperfect politics, and imperfect relationships are important tools for improving an imperfect world.

Conclusion

In this series of novels that portray characters embarking on identity quests at or near the end of the twentieth century, Smith and Condé cover similar territory: some geographical, as both Marie-Noëlle and Levi orient around Roxbury and Bostonian academia, some genetic, as both Marie-Noëlle and Irie are influenced by grandmothers who, counterintuitively, nudge them away from roots, and some experiential, as both Irie and Levi attempt to invent their way through the uncertainty of adolescence.

But the most important territories are those that mockery allows them to map out in the spaces between self and one's community, between delusion and self-awareness. More specifically, it jostles their earnest attachment to their carefully constructed

pretenses of belonging. Whereas Marie-Noëlle and Irie absorb the mockery directed at them before wielding its critical power to create a protective distance between their inner selves and external, deforming forces, Levi remains focused on the external world of shifting and often illusory identifications between an individual and his community. In Levi's case, mockery's playful form of truth-telling serves the almost paradoxical function of converting his illusions and delusions into a sharpened critical gaze that reveals real issues in his actual background. In all cases, the mockery (a brief but incisive incursion of truth) helps create the kind of resistant yet flexible identity an individual needs in order to find stability in a world of tangling roots and ever-expanding networks: a world, that is, where opportunities for identification are constantly on the increase.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have argued that Maryse Condé and Zadie Smith present quests for national, ethnic, and even familial identity as erroneous paths that rarely lead to satisfying answers in societies that are ever-changing but always multicultural consequences of the colonial project. Instead, Condé and Smith focus on the individual need to construct, first and foremost, an identity rooted not in cultural certainty but in the (Chaotic) insight that the past is as capable of being unpredictable and unwieldy as the future. Rather than seek the shape of oneself in the images society projects, one must create a firm but flexible individual identity whose external influences are filtered through the protective membrane of a humor perspective. In the words of literary theorist Kenneth Burke, a humor perspective “should enable us to be observers of ourselves while acting. Its ultimate end would not be passiveness but maximum consciousness. [It should allow] one to ‘transcend’ himself by noting his own foibles” (quoted in Ellison, 184). Although the emphasis on critical self-evaluation is clear in Burke’s observation, I would add that “maximum consciousness” also facilitates critical engagement with one’s environment: in this case, with multicultural contexts where possibilities for both identification and alienation are multiplied.

Equally important is that this critical capacity is not synonymous with either “passiveness” or with deconstruction. Rather, the humor perspective is an important part of one’s integrity, in every sense of the word. By emphasizing this constructive aspect of humor, I bring humor to the forefront of critical evaluations of Condé’s and Smith’s work, not as style but as substance. For Smith, I am synthesizing two strands of response to her writing that are often kept separate. Perhaps because many reviewers of the novel

tended to regard Smith's writing as overly optimistic,⁸⁴ critics seriously invested in exploring the multicultural identity issues at the heart of her work tend to eschew sustained discussions of Smith's use of humor and comedy. In Tracey Walters' "'We're All English Now Mate Like it or Lump it': The Black/Britishness of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*", for example, all discussion of Smith's comic narrative strategy disappears in favor of a purely social and cultural reading of the identity politics at play in Smith's England. Additionally, Molly Thompson's entire project in writing her article "'Happy Multicultural Land?': The Implications of an 'Excess of Belonging' in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*" is to argue that *White Teeth* presents "a *critique* of multiculturalism" (137, emphasis in original) despite, not because of, its "humorous, buoyant tone" (123). Ten years into Smith's career, the title of Ulrike Tancke's 2010 article speaks volumes: "*White Teeth Reconsidered: Narrative Deception and Uncomfortable Truths.*" In it, Tancke tries to save Smith's novel from attempts to "dismiss" (27) it by arguing once again that Smith's comedy belies its serious intent—but on purpose. "By using ... surface comedy to highlight a profound poignancy," she argues, "the readers' credentials are deliberately tested and their unacknowledged penchant for easy answers and comic resolution is exposed" (32). Though she involves Smith's comedy in her serious intent, it is only in the form of misdirection. As for Condé, my argument contributes to discussions of her use of humor (which are far fewer in number than glancing references to the fact that she is sometimes humorous), but by weighing in on the side, again, of its constructive capacity. Lydie Moudileno has written more than once about Condé's

⁸⁴ Sean O'Hagan, reviewer for "The Observer" offers the following evaluation of Smith's work: "The terrain she maps out is both a recognisable, and at times, utterly idealised version of a present-day multiracial London populated by drifters, dreamers, losers and fanatics" (8/25/02)

“insolence” (“Le Rire de la grand-mère: Insolence et sérénité dans "Désirada" de Maryse Condé’,” “Positioning the ‘French’ ‘Caribbean’ ‘Woman’ Writer”), but to suggest how Condé likes to unweave the texts that others have put together, about her, about her work, about cherished cultural symbols. By contrast, Nicole Simek argues for the constructive impact of Condé’s use of parody as a way of “bring[ing] about imaginative, critical self-reflexivity and change” (*Eating Well* 71), but this is directed more at Condé’s readers than at her characters.

In a broader sense, I would like to add my voice to those who have warned against subsuming literature under the politics they engage with (à la Frederic Jameson’s national allegory) and for highlighting literature’s very literariness⁸⁵ (especially in light of the current ‘crisis of the humanities’) as central to its impact on the socio-cultural questions it raises. By focusing on individual identities in multicultural contexts, I hope to have illustrated how vividly literature can remind readers that individuals make up cultures, but they do not represent them, that we should see others, whether in novels or in real life, not as vehicles for conveying cultural content but as three-dimensional figures who are always in the process of learning to navigate their particular cross-section of the world.

⁸⁵ See Nicole Simek’s excellent catalogue, in *Hunger and Irony in the French Caribbean*, of postcolonial scholars who have tried, in the past twenty years, to “rectify the conflation of aesthetic and political effects judged all too frequent in postcolonial studies” (12).

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