

Women's Words
in *Traversée de la Mangrove* of Maryse Condé and
Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle of Simone Schwarz-Bart

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"Doesn't every narrative lead back to
Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a
way of searching for one's origin...?"
Roland Barthes, *The pleasure of the Text*¹

While the search for self definition is a preoccupation of all writers, it is of particular concern for those of post-colonial America, as they strive to define themselves in new ways, ways that are different from those of their European Other.

In the recent *Hispanic Issues' Latin American Identity and Constructions of Difference*, Alberto Moreiras takes issue with the "quasi-automatic recourse to difference, which seems in most discussions to mark the complementary, but not opposed, 'other' side of the rhetorical spectrum." (Moreiras, 205) He thus recognizes that the concept of "identity" is not treated in the Americas as "definition" (whose logical antonym would be "obscurity"), but rather as "similarity", the opposite of "difference" . In Latin American and Caribbean thought, the two concepts are almost invariably linked in an oppositional dialogue. The trauma of the conquest and colonization has left the Hispanic American and French Caribbean region with the need to define itself in connection with or in opposition to the European mode of being. As Leopoldo Zea said:

"The miscegenation of peoples and cultures as it occurs within a relation of dependency creates an aborted monster rejected by the dominator as well as the dominated. Making a child of it, as another expression of humankind and therefore legitimate, has been the preoccupation of Latin Americans persistently searching for a definition of their own identity." (Zea, 129)

The character of that "monster" and its struggle to find a new humanity and legitimacy in the late twentieth century have produced a literature of multiple and varied manifestations, filled with images of inner division, alienation and emptiness. Stylistically, these works tend to challenge the established (historically European) canon, with plots, characters and linguistic tropes that bifurcate, fragment and contradict themselves. Filled with disillusionment and irony, many of them end with a sense of defeat or failure.

Some of these works, such as Carpentier's *Siglo de las luces* and *El Reino de este mundo* or Fuentes' *Terra Nostra*, Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* or Zobel's *La rue Cases-nègres*, speak of a return to the past, to history -

personal or national - or to a descent into the self. But the attempts at self-definition are often thwarted, for individuals as well as nations, for they seek and fail to find the participation and affirmation of the recognizing Other. As Freud, Lacan, Winnicott, Klein and others have shown us, one defines oneself successfully only through an original acceptance or a therapeutic return. And while the literature of colonial America has sought this recognition for the past four hundred years, at first by imitation and then by opposition, it is only beginning to find it through an awareness of its own inner division and a reconciliation with the Other that lives within.

This effort has made unexpected inroads in two novels of the post-colonial French Caribbean: *Traversée de la Mangrove* of Maryse Condé and *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* of Simone Schwarz-Bart. Condé's novel is the story of a privileged moment in the life of a small village on the island of Guadeloupe. The inhabitants come together for a wake, each exploring his or her sentiments regarding the dead man and his effect on them. The experience that the reader encounters is a hiatus in their daily life: the habitual work is interrupted and everyday thoughts and feelings are set aside; death calls a halt to them, and in respect for the closing of this life, the villagers meet to sort out its reality and its meaning.

"Why does death have this power? Why does it silence hatreds, violence and bitterness and force us to bend down on two knees when it turns up? And even more than that, it hastens to transform people's minds. Soon someone will probably start to embroider a legend around Francis Sancher and make him out to be a misunderstood hero."
(Condé, 1995, 97) ²

The deceased central character, Francis Sancher or Francisco Alvarez-Sanchez, is an outsider, a Colombian, the descendant of the colonizers and, in particular, of a Frenchman, "...the son of a wealthy family, who, after committing the first of his crimes, had crossed the sea and settled these islands with his vileness." (Condé, 1995, 125-6) ³ Francis has come to this particular island and village in search of the traces of that ancestor and in an attempt to somehow expiate that crime. Feeling himself to be cursed by his background, he has tried, in a number of ways, to overcome the sins of his family, to recreate himself in a sense, only to realize that his effort is futile: "You are never born again. ... Once you're up on your two feet, you have to go on to the end, right to the grave." (Condé, 1995, 125) ⁴

The members of the village, who try to make sense of the limited and confusing information he has given them about himself, and to understand themselves through the experience of their contact with him, invest him, each with his or her own particular dreams and nightmares. For some, he is a

threat, for others, a savior. His position as a stranger in the community has clearly disturbed the status quo and attracted what Françoise Lionnet calls "the xenophobia and the distrust that is a part of any peasant community." 5 (all translations not otherwise footnoted are mine) But it has also created a "prise de conscience", a questioning of the quality and validity of their lives and their acts.

This large and imposing man with a slightly Spanish accent, has come to the village with a only a big trunk, taken up residence in a house that is generally believed to be haunted, and seems to live relatively well without doing what is commonly considered to be work:

"...And yet, wherever they are, the sons of Rivière au Sel are religious about work. In the dreary workshops or automobile assembly lines where they labor, they remember where they came from and the respect their parents commanded. What was Francis doing?

He set up a white deal table on the veranda, placed a typewriter on it and sat down in front of it. When the villagers, who were intrigued and itching to know what he was doing up there, stopped Moïse's van they were told he was a writer.

Writer? What's a writer?" (Condé, 1995, 21) 6

Resolutely courteous and friendly, he is treated with suspicion and disdain. Sturdy as an oak and able to defend himself when necessary, he is also racked by nightmares, memories - both personal and ancestral - of scenes of horror, and haunted by the fear of death. He keeps to himself for the most part, leaving his house only to walk alone in the woods or to drink in the evenings at the local pub, "Chez Christian", where he entertains the assembled company with tales that are tantalizing both in what they reveal and in what they conceal. He is seduced by and impregnates two of the young women of the village, who see in him an escape from the oppression and narrowness within which they live, and who thus bring down upon him the wrath of their families. He touches and changes the lives of a number of the villagers in the short time that he lives among them.

In a sense, he serves as an empty set into which others pour their needs and desires. Françoise Lionnet calls him "an "everyman", the prototype of the inhabitant of the archipelago with his hazy origins, his multiple geographical, emotional and sexual ties, his rebellious adventurer's nomadism and his unsatisfied intellectual's vulnerability." 7 Patrick Chamoiseau notes that he is "An obscure character whose obscure death is shrouded in enigmatic circumstances ...(who) inscribes himself in the anthropological reality of our countries." and in this connection, asks "...who among us can claim a distinct genealogy, with well defined, sketched and recognized branches?"

(Chamoiseau, 392) Clearly, he embodies the Hispanic and French American/Caribbean consciousness: both French and Spanish (he is known by both names), of European ancestry, but distinctly Creole, he carries the burden of historic guilt - a history, as Priska Degras says, that is "founded on a primordial violence: slavery." ⁸ He is the perfect scape-goat, as well as the catalyst for their own soul searching, the interiorized Other who forces them all to confront their inner division.

Francis is haunted by a curse which he says stalks the men of his family and strikes them down, brutally, inexplicably, at approximately his age, but his fear seems concentrated in the figure of Xantippe, a poor black man who arrived in the vicinity of the village at about the same time as he, whose house and family have been destroyed by fire and who is unable to communicate other than in incoherent phrases. Xantippe lives alone on an abandoned piece of land where he cultivates vegetables in "...an authentic Creole garden...using the old ways now long forgotten." (Condé, 1995, 199) ⁹ While his appearance is frightening - pregnant women pray for the protection of their unborn children, when he crosses their paths - he lives among them in a peaceful manner, taking part in his limited way in the life of the community. He too attends the wake, and in a poetic evocation by the narrator, expresses his experience of life on the island:

"I named all the trees on this island. ... The trees are our only friends. They have taken care of our bodies and souls since we lived in Africa. ... I too named the vines. ... I named the gullies..."

"Rivière au Sel I named this place." (Condé, 1995, 201-204) ¹⁰ Françoise Lionnet calls him "a sort of earth spirit who keeps the memory of the old times intact." ¹¹ He is the descendant and incarnation of the first slaves brought to the Caribbean basin. While Francis Sancher is the repository for the guilt of the conquerors and the colonizers, Xantippe is the embodiment of the oppressed, and thus, of the repressed unconscious of the community. Each in his personal life, has lived out his heritage: Francis, while trying to expiate his guilt, has committed further atrocities; Xantippe, who has lived in the manner of his forebears, has suffered the same violence and loss of those first exploited people, even though the political structures of slavery are no longer in place. As if it were he who had suffered it, he recognizes the object of Francis Sancher's search, the remains of the crime committed by Francis' ancestor:

"I know its entire history. It was on the buttress roots of its manjack trees that the pool of my blood dried. For a crime was committed here, on this very spot, a long, long time ago. A horrible crime whose

pestilential smell stank in the nostrils of the Good Lord. I know where the tortured bodies are buried. I discovered their graves under the moss and lichen. ... Nobody has pierced this secret, buried and forgotten. Not even he who runs like a crazed horse sniffing at the wind and snorting at the air. Every time I meet him my eyes burn into his, and he lowers his head, for this is his crime. His." (Condé, 1995, 204-5) ¹²

The two strangers are thus locked in an equivalence of shared and accepted sin and guilt: for one, that of the oppressor, for the other, that of the oppressed. Neither can escape or change his role; the burden of History weighs on both of them, as it does on all the people of the village, of whom they represent the extremes. As Priska Degras points out:

"...everyone in *Crossing the Mangrove* seems to be the hostage of the Sin or the Evil of the Fathers. ... (The novel) thus turns explicitly around a 'central' guilt, one might say, that of Sancher, descendant of the 'Discoverers', but (it) is also organized around the diffuse, implicit, obscure, unnamed guilt of the descendants of the 'Transported'". ¹³

This diffuse, obscure and implicit guilt of the oppressed is played out in the relations of the islanders with one another. When the village schoolmistress, for example, speaks of her past, she recalls her wish to improve the lot of her fellow men and women. Her idealism has met with disillusionment, however, as she found herself isolated, envied and resented for trying to improve her lot, as well as that of her people: "I didn't know there's no love lost between black folks." (Condé, 1995, 114) ¹⁴ Her words provide a window into the value system of the inhabitants of Rivière au Sel, as does the description of one young woman's marriage: "...Adèle had left home to marry a good-for-nothing who was only attracted to *her light skin*,..." (my emphasis) (Condé, 1995, 19), ¹⁵ and that of one of the village's more successful families: "Like all those who lived in Rivière au Sel, Carmélien knew and respected the Lameaulnes, because they were *almost white*." (my emphasis) (Condé, 1995, 144) ¹⁶ The years of slavery and tyranny have created an exaggerated awe of the light-skinned Other and a hatred and mistrust of the dark-skinned Self which destroys the solidarity that ideally should unite the oppressed, thus continuing the structures of the colonial experience.

Simone Schwarz-Bart speaks of this same interiorized hatred in *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle*, her novel of Guadeloupe, "...this volcanic, hurricane-swept, mosquito-ridden, nasty-minded island." (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 2) ¹⁷ It creates for her heroine, Télumée, "...a painful music ... and a cloud seemed to come between sky and earth...(when) the women whispered

venomous words." (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 29-30) 18 When hard times come for her village, and her husband, out of work, turns his feelings of impotence and rage upon her and beats and rejects her, she too succumbs to the generalized belief that: "...God is white and pink, and where there's a white man, that's where the light is. ... a Negro is a well of sins, a creature of the devil." (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 149) 19 The whites for whom she works are cruel and corrupt, yet they live lives of ease and plenty, while the Negroes struggle to earn enough to eat. It is not difficult to understand how the repetition of centuries of suffering have convinced them of the justice of the status quo. Kitzie McKinney writes of the heritage of slavery:

"...the curse of a silent death is so powerful, that its humiliated victim turns on itself and, to explain its dishonor and despair, borrows the language of its persecutor, judges itself guilty, and imprisons itself within internalized images of disintegration and alienation..."

(McKinney, 60)

The psychological phenomenon that she evokes is the "captation of the subject by the situation" that Jacques Lacan cites in his article on "The mirror stage", and which he calls "a formula for madness". It is the acceptance of self as the object of the Other's hostile gaze, rather than as the subject and master of one's own identity and world view. (Lacan, 7) Télumée comes close to falling into that madness, losing not only the power to work and care for herself, but hardly speaking for several weeks: losing the power of words as well.

It is the love of her grandmother who cares for her, and the words she has spoken - tales of the proud and courageous women who have preceded her, the folklore of her island, all embedded in the vibrant imagery of nature - that allow her to overcome the heritage of hatred and self-doubt.

Remembering those images of community (in the metaphor of a spider's web), of emotional pain (as a horse that one must master) and of her inner self (a drum with two sides, one that the world may beat on, but another that remains untouched), she emerges from her crisis with added strength.

In an article comparing the story of Télumée with that of Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Ronnie Scharfman cites the importance of the mother's (in this case, the grandmother's) gaze in establishing the identity of an individual. Citing the work of Winnicott and Chowderow, she maintains that in place of the alienating gaze of the Other, it is the confirming gaze of the mother, who reflects, rather than deflects, her child's own identity, and who thus defines the child's future. Thus Télumée's identity, firmly established early in life by a loving presence - both visual and verbal - is able to survive

the most punishing experiences. Her grandmother's stories have given her drum its second side:

"...she opened before us a world in which trees cry out, fishes fly, birds catch the fowler, and the Negro is the child of God. She was conscious of her words, her phrases, and possessed the art of arranging them in images and sounds, in pure music, in exaltation. She was good at talking, and loved to do so... 'With a word a man can be stopped from destroying himself', she would say." (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 48) 20

When Télumée returns for the weekends from her work with a white family and is asked by her neighbors to describe her life there, she follows her grandmother's example and turns the alienating experiences of working for people with "...piercing, steely, distant eyes under whose gaze I didn't exist." (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 60) 21 into humor and stories of "sauce béchamel": "...unwittingly a different Belle-Feuille would issue from my lips, so that my listeners couldn't help seeing an ocean, with waves and breakers, whereas all I was trying to show was a bit of foam." (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 66) 22

It is a similar talent that explains some of the appeal of Francis Sancher to many in the village of Rivière au Sel. Moïse, the mailman, whose lonely life is changed by the arrival of Francis, remembers the flood of words he listened to in the evenings "Chez Christian":

"...anything he (Moïse) would have said, or even invented, would have seemed pale and insipid compared to the spicy plates of fantasies that Francis, always brimming over with words, dished up day after day.

... After meeting him, he began to think that life would take on a new meaning and that leaves would bud on the tree of tomorrow." (Condé, 1995, 14) 23

It is also Francis' wisdom and kindness, his ability to rise above the envy and despair that permeates most of the relationships of the village, that attracts his neighbors. The women of Rivière au Sel are particularly oppressed: their fate is decided by their fathers and husbands, their education is truncated and they are often sacrificed in loveless marriages for the monetary needs and interests of their families. Francis understands that love does not come easily under such circumstances. "Difficult to love children born under those conditions. In order to be able to love, you have to have received a lot, a lot in return!" (Condé, 1995, 138) 24

He gives the people of Rivière au Sel another view of themselves, another approach to the world. A lost soul himself, he helps some of them to find, for the first time, the solidarity that will allow them to overcome their envy, their despair, their dependency, their heritage of the colonial

experience. He is a flawed hero but, the narrator seems to ask, is there or has there ever been any other kind?

Like the narrator, Francis is writing a book: a book which he is sure he will never finish and which represents an impossibility. He explains it to his mistress, Vilma:

"You see, I'm writing. Don't ask me what's the point of it. Besides, I'll never finish this book because before I've even written the first line and known what I'm going to put in the way of blood, laughter, tears, fears and hope, well, everything that makes a book a book and not a boring dissertation by a half-cracked individual, I've already found the title: 'Crossing the Mangrove.'"

(Vilma) shrugged.

'You don't cross a mangrove. You'd spike yourself on the roots of the mangrove trees. You'd be sucked down and suffocated by the brackish mud.'

'Yes, that's it, that's precisely it.'" (Condé, 1995, 158) 25

Francis' novel is not a novel - will never be one - because, like his life, it is an attempt to go against the grain, to make a passage through the impassable, to risk certain death. In fact, Vilma reveals that he tears up all of the pages and pages that he writes. The *mise-en-abîme* of this novel within a novel suggests that what we are reading is also an impossibility, that the project of which Francis Sancher dreamed - the solidarity that would wipe clean the slate of past history, the absolution that he attempted and was never able to realize - will elude the readers as well.

This novel, however, does successfully combine its many voices and points of view to form a whole. The work of many, rather than of a single character, like the wake at which the villagers share their thoughts and support one another with their presence, it has a power to transform, if only a little, those who participate in the experience it recounts. Francis has shown the way, but the book is the product of the community. It is an embodiment of the "real" of which Lacan speaks, the unnamed, unapproachable truth which can only be seized indirectly, through metaphor, through the dynamic or, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, "awry." (Žižek, 88-97)

In his "Reflections" on Condé's work, Patrick Chamoiseau underscores the importance of the wake in the literature and culture of the Caribbean: "The wake is for us a melting pot of Creole culture, of its speech, of its orality, and it gave the extraordinary pretext that would allow plantation slaves to gather without spreading the fear that they were plotting to revolt or to burn down a plantation." The wake is, thus, historically a legitimized space of communication and consolation for the oppressed, a space in which:

"...the story teller, our first literary figure, ... gave us his voice, and ... facing death in the night, laughed, sang, challenged, as if to teach us how to resist our collective death and night." (Chamoiseau, 391) In the face of the unthinkable, the unnamable, the "real" - death - the wake and the solidarity created by its communal experience provide the means of continuing to live. It is this function that Condé fulfills in this polyphonic chorus of voices, through the transforming power of language, that makes up the story of the village of Rivière au Sel. She has produced, as Chamoiseau says:

"...a collective adventure that implicitly interrogates the concept of the hero and the notion of heroism. ...Maryse Condé foresees that, in our countries, the "we" has taken precedence over the "I" and that the protagonist is an entire people who has managed to survive; she also sees that heroism is a collective, silent, patient, indirect resistance that will take us a long time to decipher." (Chamoiseau, 392)

Crossing the mangrove is difficult, long, a struggle, but when it is a communal effort, not impossible

Simone Schwarz-Bart has also created such an adventure in the story of Télumée who, in narrating her life, gives voice to the people of her small village of Fond-Zombi and its surroundings. One of the women who comforts her during her difficulties is a friend of her grandmother, named Adriana, "...one of the host of waifs and strays who wandered from cabin to cabin in search of a thrill." But when Adriana spoke "...she would utter strange words, words that seemed to come from elsewhere, none knew where...and then she'd recast her life..." (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 68) ²⁶ Adriana has, she tells others, a cupboard full of lovely things sent to her by her daughters in the city:

"You see me in rags, with a hole in the roof, and you may think I'm in a bad way - but don't you believe it! Just drop in one day and I'll show you my cupboard, maybe."

To which the other old women of the group, in the solidarity of belief, respond:

"Quite true, ... You see people in torn dresses, lying down and getting up in ramshackle cabins, but who knows what they may have in their cupboards? Who knows?"

'Someone speaks and an angel hears in heaven.'

'Ah words, ... what a blessing.'" (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 68) ²⁷

What Adriana has, and what Télumée learns from her and the other old women of her village, is that the Cupboard of the Imagination and the Word contains a richness that is far greater than that of material goods, and that those who possess such a Cupboard have the power to transform their world,

not just momentarily, but little by little, to transform it permanently. They carry their Other within, an affirming Other, and those who can thus reflect themselves in words, in stories, in verbal music, will see themselves reproduced as a similarly affirming Other in the gaze - the words and the actions - of those who hear and read them.

Mireille Rosello writes, in a review article on Schwarz-Bart's novel, that the story of *Télumée* has been reproached by both French critics and the Antillean elite for what they see as the resignation and fatalism of its protagonists at a time when, they say, black literature should be engaged in revolt against the colonizers. At the same time, she notes, the average Antillean has welcomed it enthusiastically. Rosello goes on to show that there is nothing resigned nor fatalistic in Schwarz-Bart's heroines. Their battle to survive and not only triumph over circumstance, but to inspire others by their acts, their poetry and their joy, is an activity of sustained energy and effort that can in no way be interpreted as passive or resigned. It is, moreover, a conscious effort, as *Télumée*'s grandmother tells her, at her moment of greatest happiness:

"We Lougandors don't fear happiness any more than we fear unhappiness, which means that *your duty* today is to rejoice without apprehension or reserve. ... All Fond-Zombi knows it is present at your first flowering. So do *as you ought*, my child: give us your fragrance." (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 92) (my emphasis) 28

Similarly, when *Télumée* overcomes the despair that nearly drives her into madness, her grandmother both rejoices and reminds her again of that duty to others: *Télumée* now carries, she says, "...the special, incomparable air that belongs to someone who's said to herself one day: 'I've helped men to suffer enough, now I must help them to live.'" (Schwarz-Bart, 1982, 116) 29

What is specifically new and different in the work of Schwarz-Bart, as well as in that of Condé, descendants and witnesses of the experience of colonization and slavery, is their point of departure in the formation of a critique of the past and a project for the future. Their treatment of the colonizers - past or present - is not kind, but they do not dwell on them or on their sins; they treat rather the current reality of their island. In speaking of Condé's novel, Leah Hewitt remarks:

"Rather than pitting White against Black, man against woman, in direct confrontation, Condé focuses more on internecine battles, the struggles of people of color within themselves, among themselves, or on the psycho-social restrictions that shape men's and women's choices for interaction." (Hewitt, 80)

The focus of both Condé and Schwarz-Bart, in fact, is on themselves, their society, their problems. As Jacques Lacan has noted, when speaking of the therapeutic relationship, the alienated self speaks "around" an empty center, "une béance", and it is the job of the analyst to continually bring the patient back to that center, to the site of the primary trauma that the patient struggles to overcome. In the place of the patient's "parole vide" (empty speech, which often evades the self and blames the other), the analyst continues to respond with and to try to elicit full speech, "la parole pleine", which relates directly both to the traumatic void and to the listener. (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 82-3) Like the good therapist, the good writer focuses on the site of the on-going trauma - not on its causes or on the elements that can no longer affect its outcome, but on the practical and creative means of living with and ameliorating its reality.

In a related vein, Priska Degras, writes of the two, equally difficult impediments with which the Caribbean conscience collides in trying to come to terms with its History:

"To try to revive memory, ... is also to be condemned to ceaselessly reopen the deep and ancient wound of slavery. In contrast, to work to erase its mark is also to condemn oneself to live in a present that is just as painful but, in addition, devoid of all substance, since no consciousness can attach it to the past and thus permit a project for the future." 30

This double bind is the block against which the collective conscience of the Caribbean and Latin America stumbles as it attempts to find an identity that is its own. But in the work of some of Schwarz-Bart, Degras finds a reason for optimism:

"Can we not consider, however, that the difficulty in writing *History* can be diverted - if not avoided - through the emergence and the accomplishment of another project: not the writing of History but of *stories*?" (her emphasis) 31

Historic truth, she feels, can be found, not just in "Histories", but also in literature, in the telling of stories which, though invented, are often more able to convey and overcome the painful truths of the past, to restore the continuous to the discontinuousness (quoting Eduard Glissant) of Antillean History.

The story of *Rivière au Sel* is most certainly not a conventional novel. It is open-ended, polyphonic, colloquial, confusing; it forces the reader to participate in the reconstruction of a story and of a History, and in the construction of an identity that assumes the past as its basis and its source, but that focuses on present problems and future solutions. The story of

Télumée contains, in its evocation of the remarkable women who raised her and launched her on her way, a similarly multivocal creation. Both novels speak of a return to the divided self that is the conscience of colonized America. There is no return without pain, but neither is there any project of restoration or of progress without this return. In each of these texts there are deaths, wakes and rebirths which, through the healing properties of the shared Word - those treasures from the cupboard of past despair and recurrent hope - make small and continuing steps toward a more flexible and integrated self.

Notes:

1) "Tout récit ne se ramène-t-il à l'Oedipe? Raconter, n'est-ce pas toujours chercher son origine...?" (Roland Barthes, 1973, 75)

2) "Pourquoi la mort a-t-elle ce pouvoir? Pourquoi impose-t-elle silence aux haines, violences, rancoeurs et nous force-t-elle à nous agenouiller à deux genoux quand elle apparaît? Bien plus! Elle se hâte de transformer les esprits. Bientôt, quelqu'un commencerait de broder une légende autour de Francis Sancher et ferait de lui un géant incompris." (Condé, 1989, 124)

3) "...un fils de haute famille, qui ayant commis un premier crime, a enjambé la mer et transplanté sa pourriture dans ces îles." (Condé, 1989, 156)

4) "On ne re-naît jamais." he says, "Une fois qu'on est debout sur ses deux pieds, on doit marcher jusqu'au bout, jusqu'à la tombe." (Condé, 1989, 155)

5) "la xénophobie et la méfiance propre à toute communauté paysanne." (Lionnet, 479)

6) "...Pourtant là où ils sont, les fils de Rivière au Sel gardent la religion du travail. Dans les tristes officines ou les chaînes de montage automobile où ils peinent, ils se rappellent qui ils sont. Que faisait Francis?

Il installa une table de bois blanc sur sa galerie, posa dessus une machine à écrire et s'assit derrière elle. Quand les gens, démangés par la curiosité, arrêtaient la camionnette de Moïse pour lui demander ce qu'il faisait là, ils s'entendirent répondre que c'était écrivain.

-Ecrivain? Qu'est-ce qu'un écrivain?" (Condé, 1989, 38)

7) "un 'everyman', le prototype de l'habitant de l'archipel avec ses origines incertaines, ses multiples attaches géographiques, sentimentales et sexuelles, son nomadisme d'aventurier rebelle, sa fragilité d'intellectuel insatisfait." (Lionnet, 481)

8) "fondée sur une violence première: l'esclavage." (Degras, 73)

9) "...un vrai jardin créole, à la manière oubliée des vieux." (Condé, 1989, 238)

10) "J'ai nommé tous les arbres de ce pays. ... Les arbres sont nos seuls amis. Depuis l'Afrique, ils soignent nos corps et nos âmes. ... C'est moi aussi qui ai nommé les lianes. ... J'ai nommé les ravines..." (241)

"Rivière au Sel, j'ai nommé ce lieu." (Condé, 1989, 244)

11) "une sorte d'esprit des lieux qui garde intacte la mémoire du 'tan lontan'" (Lionnet, 481)

12) "Je connais toute son histoire. C'est sur les racines en béquilles de ses mapous lélé que la flaque de mon sang a séché. Car un crime s'est commis ici, ici même, dans les temps très anciens. Crime horrible dont l'odeur a empuanti les narines du Bon Dieu. Je sais où

sont enterrés les corps des suppliciés. J'ai découvert leurs tombes sous la mousse et le lichen. 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." (Condé, 1989, 244-245)

13) "...tous, dans *Traversée de la Mangrove*, semblent être les otages de la Faute ou du Malheur des Pères. ... (Le roman) s'articule donc, de façon explicite, autour d'une culpabilité 'centrale', peut-on dire, celle de Sancher, descendant des 'Découvreurs' mais (il) s'organise aussi autour de la culpabilité diffuse, implicite, obscure, innommée des descendants des 'Transportés'." (Degras, 76)

14) "Je ne savais pas que le Nègre n'aime jamais le Nègre." (Condé, 1989, 142)

15) "...Adèle avait quitté la maison pour se marier avec un bon à rien, qui n'en avait qu'à sa peau claire,..." (Condé, 1989, 36),

16) "Comme tous qui habitaient Rivière au Sel, Carmélien connaissait et respectait les Lameaulnes parce qu'ils étaient *presque blancs*..." (Condé, 1989, 176)

17) "...cette île à volcans, à cyclones et moustiques, à mauvaise mentalité." (Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 11)

18) "...une musique douloureuse ... comme si un nuage s'interposait entre ciel et terre...(quand) les femmes bruissaient de paroles empoisonés". (Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 49-50)

19) "...le bon Dieu est blanc et rose et où se trouve un blanc, c'est là que se tient la lumière. ... le nègre est un réserve de péchés dans le monde, la créature même du diable." (Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 215)

20) "...elle ouvrait devant nous le monde où les arbres crient, les poissons volent, les oiseaux captivent le chasseur et le nègre est enfant de Dieu. Elle sentait ses mots, ses phrases, possédait l'art de les arranger en images et en sons, en musique pure, en exaltation. Elle savait parler, elle aimait parler... avec une parole, on empêche un homme de se briser, ainsi s'exprimait-elle." (Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 76)

21) "yeux métalliques, perçants lointains sous lesquels je n'existais pas" (Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 91)

22) "...sans le voiloir un autre Belle-Feuille sortait de ma bouche, de sort qu'ils ne pouvaient s'empêcher d'y voir un océan, avec ses vagues et ses brisants, tandis que je ne voulais montrer qu'un peu d'écume." (Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 101-102)

23) "...tout ce qu'il (Moïse) aurait pu raconter, et même inventer, aurait semblé fade et sans sel, comparé aux fantaisies épicées que Francis, moulin à paroles, servait jour après jour.

... Après cette rencontre, il avait commencé par s'imaginer que la vie allait prendre un autre goût, que les feuilles allaient verdier à l'arbre de demain." (Condé, 1989, 30)

24) "Difficile d'aimer les enfants nés dans ces conditions-là." he tells one of them, "Pour donner, pour rendre l'amour, il faut en avoir reçu beaucoup, beaucoup!" (Condé, 1989, 169)

25) "- Tu vois, j'écris. Ne me demande pas à quoi ça sert. D'ailleurs, je ne finirai jamais ce livre puisque, avant d'en avoir tracé la première ligne et de savoir ce que je vais y mettre de sang, de rires, de larmes, de peur, d'espoir, enfin de tout ce qui fait qu'un livre est un livre et non pas une dissertation de raseur, la tête à demi fêlée, j'en ai trouvé le titre: 'Traversée de la Mangrove'.

(Wilma a) haussé les épaules.

- On ne traverse pas la mangrove. On s'empale sur les racines des palétuviers. On s'enterre et on étouffe dans la boue saumâtre.
- C'est ça, c'est justement ça." (Condé, 1989, 192)
- 26) "...qui faisait partie de la cohorte d'épaves, d'errants, de perdus qui traînait de case en case, en quête d'un vertige.
...elle prononçait des paroles étranges, des mots qui semblaient venir d'ailleurs, on ne savait où... et puis elle redessinait sa vie dans l'air..." (Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 103)
- 27) "Vous me voyez en loques, avec une case au toit ouvert, vous pourriez me croire en mauvaise passe mais détrompez-vous, mes amis, et passez donc un jour chez moi, je vous ouvrirai mon armoire, peut-être..."
"- ...Vrai, ...on voit des gens en robe déchirée, ils dorment et se lèvent dans des cases branlantes mais qui sait ce que ces gens-là possèdent dans leur armoire, qui le sait...?"
- Une personne parle, et un ange l'entend au ciel.
- Ah, la parole, ... quelle bonne chose..." (Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 103-4)
- 28) "- Nous, les Lougandor, ne craignons pas davantage le bonheur que le malheur, ce qui signifie que *tu as le devoir* aujourd'hui de te réjouir sans appréhension ni retenue. ... Tout Fond-Zombi sait qu'il assiste à ta première floraison, alors *fais ce que tu dois*, c'est à dire: embaume-nous, ma fille..." (Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 137)
- 29) "...un panache tout à fait spécial, incomparable, qui suit la personne qui s'est dit un jour: j'ai assez aidé les hommes à souffrir, il faut maintenant que je les aide à vivre."(Schwarz-Bart, 1972, 170)
- 30) "Tenter de retrouver la mémoire, ... c'est être aussi condamné à rouvrir, sans cesse, l'ancienne et profonde plaie de l'esclavage. S'acharner, au contraire, à en effacer la trace, c'est également se condamner à vivre un présent tout aussi douloureux mais, de plus, dépourvu de toute substance puisqu'aucune conscience ne peut l'amarrer au passé et permettre, ainsi, un projet de l'avenir." (Degras, 79)
- 31) "Cependant, ne peut-on considérer que la difficulté à écrire "*l'Histoire* peut être détournée - sinon évacuée - par l'émergence et l'accomplissement d'un autre projet: non pas écrire l'Histoire mais *des* histoires?" (Degras, 81)

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