FPS

Volume 7, Number 2

Children and Childhood in Francophone Literature Guest editor: Myriem El Maïzi

The Child in Francophone Literature: From Inscription to Proscription PAT CORCORAN in the Beginning was Loss - Childhood and War in Francophone Lebanese Literature MYRIEM EL MAÏZI Childhood Meets the Tout-monde: Emerveilles by Patrick Chamoiseau and Maure LOUISE HARDWICK Child's Play? Storytelling and Ideology in 1920s. Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa DAVID MURPHY

Reviews

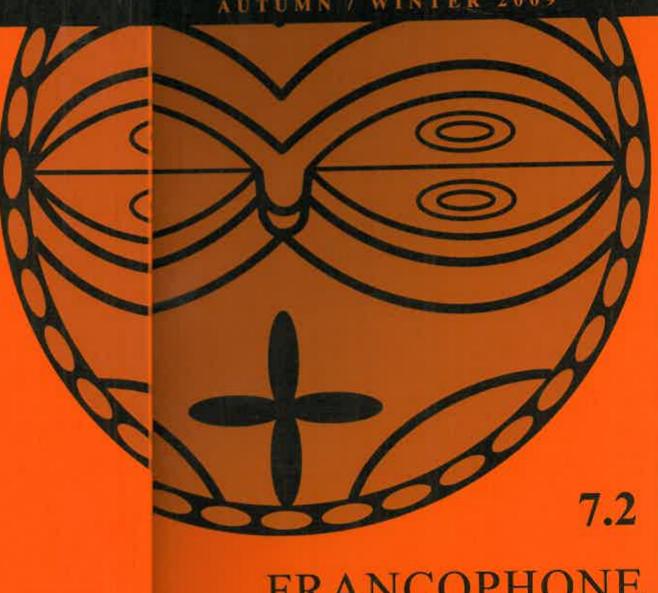


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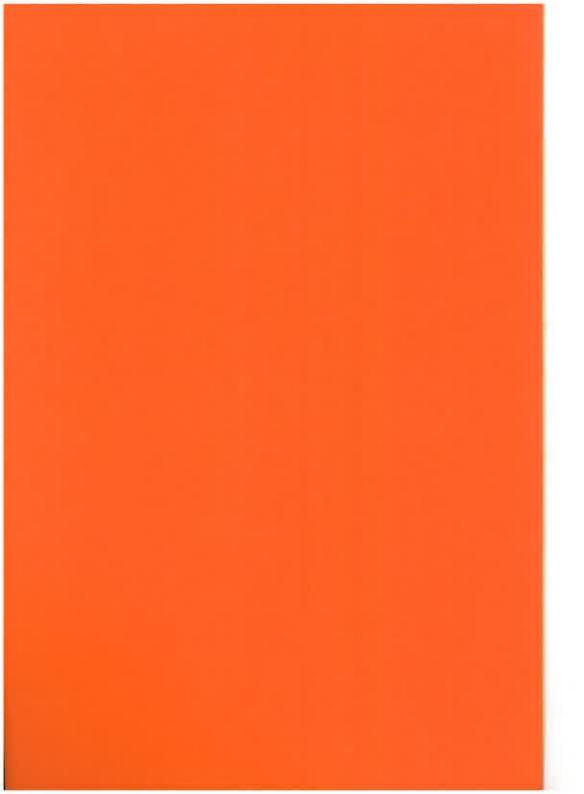
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ISSN 1741-8283



FRANCOPHONE POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES



Francophone Postcolonial Studies

Volume 7, Number 2

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Editorial

Francophone Postcolonial Studies is dead... Long Live Francophone Postcolonial Studies!

As I announced in my editorial in FPS 7.1 and confirmed in my letter to members of 14 July 2009, from 2010, the Society's journal will be published by Liverpool University Press. In its new, professional guise, the journal will become an annual, hardback, book-length volume that members will receive as part of their annual subscription package, and it will simultaneously be sold to non-members at the standard hardback price of c.£60. Our vision for the new publication is that each volume (to be edited either by someone on the editorial team, or by a special guest editor) will deal with important themes/concepts/sets of theories, and will help to set new research agendas across the field of Francophone postcolonial studies. A launch issue has already been commissioned (due to appear in late 2010), and it is provisionally entitled Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-monde (edited by Charles Forsdick, Alec G. Hargreaves and David Murphy); details of a second volume (to be published in 2011) on the theme of 'Postcolonial Poetics' are currently being finalised. A call for proposals for future volumes was issued in the autumn.

The shift to an annual publication will be accompanied by an electronic 'bulletin' that will include book reviews and short articles of c.2000-2500 words, which will in particular seek to promote the work of postgraduate students and early-career scholars. I am pleased to announce that Dr Kate Marsh (University of Liverpool) has agreed to edit this electronic bulletin, which will in the first instance be produced twice per year with the first issue due to appear in April-May 2010 (if there is sufficient demand and copy, we will look to expand to 3 issues per year in the future).

I hope that members share my excitement at these new developments, which represent the culmination of many years of

hard work by various members of the SFPS Executive, both past and present. I firmly believe that the new publication will allow our members to remain at the forefront of developments in our field, and to drive forward the research agenda in innovative and challenging ways.

> David Murphy President of SFPS

Children and Childhood in Francophone Literature

Myriem El Maïzi

Newcastle University

Childhood appears as a recurrent topos in Francophone literature, and has received ample critical attention both in terms of its representations and use in the colonial and postcolonial imaginary and discourse. One might therefore wonder: how can perspectives on childhood in Francophone literature be renewed? The four articles featured in this special issue seek to open up new dimensions and develop new approaches to this question, based on the analysis of a corpus of texts and/or areas of enquiry that have so far been neglected, but which demonstrate how children and childhood are a fruitful interpretive frame at the nexus of issues central to postcolonial studies.

In her review of *The Child in French and Francophone Literature*, Zoë Norridge points out the lack of discussion of 'the denied childhoods of residents of the former French colonies, despite a growing body of fiction on the topic', describing it as an 'extraordinary missed opportunity'. Patrick Corcoran explores such an issue through a comparison of 'early' Francophone texts which represented children as a means of articulating a discourse on cultural values, and more contemporary narratives which abandon the notion of specific cultural identity to focus on the ethical dimensions of social and cultural breakdown. Through an analysis of Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* (1953), Ferdinand Oyono's *Une Vie de boy* (1956) and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961), this article demonstrates how these

¹ Zoë Norridge, review of Buford Norman (ed.), The Child in French and Francophone Literature (2004), International Journal of Francophone Studies, 10: 3 (2004), 465-67 (p. 467).

early texts are all conceived according to a binary model of cultural conflict and are concerned with questions of authority and legitimisation, thus inscribing value systems into the child protagonists' and child narrators' experience. This representation of childhood is put in stark contrast with a portrayal of children as victims or perpetrators of lawlessness, which is seen as characteristic of more contemporary postcolonial texts. Starting with a study of Cameroonian Sévérin Cécile Abéga's 'precursor' novel La Latrine (1988), followed by the detailed textual analysis of more recent texts from across the Francophone world - namely Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma's Allah n'est pas obligé (2000), Haïtian Lyonel Trouillot's Les Enfants des héros (2002) and Mauritian Ananda Devi's Ève de ses Décombres (2006) -Corcoran explores the radical shift in the meaning of childhood and the state of proscription in which children live, moving in worlds where systems of authority and law have collapsed and violence prevails (whether in the context of war, family affairs, or adolescent delinquency). The question underpinning these texts, Corcoran argues, is no longer about cultural identity and belonging but rather an interrogation of the boundary between the human and the inhuman.

Myriem El Maïzi pursues the analysis of childhood and war in the context of Lebanese literature, an area of Francophone postcolonial literature which has received very little attention to date. This article examines the representation of Lebanon as an impossible signified caught between the idealisation of childhood and the reality of the 1975-90 Civil War. The recurrent tension between the expression of nostalgia for the time of childhood and the telling and registering of the Lebanese war experience constitutes a striking characteristic of Lebanese Francophone narratives, as exemplified by Andrée Chédid's La Maison sans racines (1985), and Alexandre Najjar's L'École de la guerre (1999). This articulation, it is argued, is not without raising certain ethical ambiguities, which are negotiated in different manners by the two writers. What is at stake is thus the creation of a collective

remembrance and the reconstruction of a national identity, where representations of childhood play a key, yet problematic role.

The following two articles focus on children's literature, which stands out as one of the least examined areas in Francophone literature. Whilst recent criticism in the field of children's literature include studies on writing for young readers by Anglophone Caribbean,² Canadian, Australian and South African authors, the Francophone postcolonial world remains largely neglected.3 Similarly, Vivian Yenika-Agbaw's monograph, Representing Africa in Children's Literature, deals solely with West African literature for children and young adults written in English.4 As Emer O'Sullivan, Kim Revnolds and Rolf Romøron underline in their 'Introduction' to Children's Literature Global and Local, '[a]s cultural artefacts consumed at an early age in the socialisation process, children's books are a particularly valuable source for studying the various ideologies of identity offered to children by their cultures'.5 Identity politics in Caribbean Francophone children's literature is thus investigated by Louise Hardwick in her study of Martinican author Patrick Chamoiseau's 1998 text, Emerveilles, created in collaboration with the artist Maure. Tracing back the central presence of the trope of childhood in Francophone Caribbean literature to the 1950s, this article discusses the renewed contemporary interest in childhood manifest

² Maeve McCusker refers only briefly to Francophone Caribbean children's literature in the final footnote of her article, 'Small Worlds: Constructions of Childhood in Contemporary

Postcolonial Autobiography in French', Romance Studies, 24: 3 (2006), 203-14 (p. 214).

See, for instance, Jacqueline Lazú, 'National Identity. Where the Wild, Strange and Exotic Things are: in Search of the Caribbean in Contemporary Children's Literature, in Karín Lesnik-Oberstein ed., Children's Literature. New Approaches (Basingstoke & New Maria Literature). York: Macmillan, 2004), pp. 189-205; Mavis Reimer and Clare Bradford, 'Home, Homelessness, and Liminal Spaces: The Uses of Postcolonial Theory for Reading (National) Children's Literatures' and Carole Carpenter, Margot Hillel and Thomas van der Walt 'The Same But Different: The Dynamics of Local and Global in Australian, Canadian and South African Children's Literature', in Emer O'Sullivan, Kim Reynolds and Rolf Romgron (eds). Children's Literature Global and Local: Social and Aesthetic And Roll Rolling and Research Rolling and Rolling and

of Seeing (New York & London: Routledge, 2008). O'Sullivan, Reynolds and Romøron, 'Introduction', in Children's Literature Global and Local, pp. 11-22 (p. 17). The colonial perspective as conveyed by children's literature in France in the interwar period is the object of Alexandra De Lassus' study, Africains et Asiatiques dans la littérature de jeunesse de l'entre-deux-guerres (Paris: L'Harmattan,

through a resurgence of the 'récit d'enfance', before moving to a detailed analysis of Chamoiseau's book. Hardwick demonstrates how the author's pedagogic aim to educate children about the history of Martinique and the traumatic legacy of slavery and colonisation is achieved through a 're-drawing' of the space of Martinique, where magical realism — which equally characterises Maure's paintings — and the text's engagement with the notion of the *Tout-monde* play a crucial role. *Émerveilles*, it is argued, not only anticipates the stipulations of the loi Taubira but would also go some way in addressing the pedagogic concerns of the *Comité pour la mémoire de l'esclavage*.

Answering Osayimwense Osa's call for more critical engagement with African children's literature, 6 David Murphy examines the pedagogical and ideological issues at stake in Francophone African literature for children through a detailed analysis of two of the earliest texts in French by sub-Saharan African writers, Les Trois Volontés de Malic (1921) by Ahmadou Mapathé Diagne and La Violation d'un pays (1926) by Lamine Senghor. The article first sets out to investigate the relationship between childhood, education and literature in Francophone Africa, interrogating the representativeness of fictionalised accounts of colonial education in some key texts of Francophone African literature and assessing the role of colonial humanism in the shaping of an education policy which saw the production of new texts specifically targeted at African schoolchildren. The extent to which Diagne's text promotes the colonial ideology of 'association' is then explored, followed by a close study of Senghor's communist-inspired attack on the French colonial enterprise. The analysis of what, it is argued, should be read as foundational texts in African children's literature, thus serves a wider reflexion on the evolution of this children's literature and the debate on education and literature in Africa.

The Child in Francophone Literature: From Inscription to Proscription

Pat Corcoran

Roehampton University

There exists an abundant literature on the multiplicity of ways theories of racial hierarchy emerged from, and were constructed as a consequence of, the contacts between Africans and the European traders (including slave traders) and subsequently colonisers. 1 By and large, such theories drew heavily on notions of a primitivism that allowed a relative ranking of races to be proposed, usually linked to notions of progress (potential or actual) that were embedded within Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinking. The teleological thrust of Kant's moral philosophy, for example, his belief that the moral improvement of the human species was one of nature's 'objectives', could sanction an 'evolutionary' view of humankind many decades before Darwin published his general theory in the mid-nineteenth century. The generally held view that mankind was on a trajectory of progress (and therefore that certain groups were more advanced along that path than others) could be used and abused as grounds for assumptions about relative degrees of primitivism or sophistication that dispensed with the need for any significant attempt to argue a case. Hence, when Hegel undertook to present world civilisations in his Philosophy of History he high-handedly dismissed Africa and Africans as being devoid of interest in a gesture that was symptomatic of the untested prejudice that continues to feed present-day racisms.²

⁶ See Osayimwense Osa, *African Children's and Youth Literature* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995).

¹ See, for example, Tzvetan Todorov, Nous et les autres (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

² G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 109-17. Consulted at http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3113/hegel/history.pdf [accessed 15 August 2009]. 'Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained — for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World — shut up; it is the [...] land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night' (p. 109, my emphasis).

What is perhaps less often considered is the fact that primitivism as an element of racial theory can itself be understood. applied and represented in socio-cultural terms, by way of a metaphor that equates the 'primitive' with all that is child-like, childish, infantile and 'as-vet-undeveloped'. As such, it is intrinsically bound up with the very notion of the mission civilisatrice of the colonial period. Education was a vital component of the French colonial structure that ostensibly sought to assimilate and acculturate the colonised Africans to a European model that was implicitly characterised as both normal and adult. Where the African was a raw material susceptible of being moulded, worked upon and brought into 'culture', the European was always, by comparison, already complete, fully formed and fully functional. Within such an epistemological system the indigenous child could never be simply a child. S/he was de facto an avatar of the colonised African subject and all that this entailed in terms of intrinsic deficiencies and unrealised potential. In the period of high colonialism, therefore, indigenous childhoods and children were consequently fraught with layers of meaning and with values, with ideological and symbolic significance that deprived them of the phenomenological innocence with which Western culture so often still seeks to endow them.

Not unsurprisingly therefore, the portrayal of childhood and children was a common *topos* for the first generation of francophone writers. As we shall see, some of the key texts written during the period immediately preceding and immediately following independence (circa 1960) can be seen as forms of inscription of the various discourses that inevitably accompanied the complex range of uses that the 'child' was called upon to fulfil. In the subsequent decades, as the passage from a colonially inflected literature to the postcolonial literatures of more recent times increasingly confirmed a shift in perspective away from predominantly metropolitan norms, more naturalistic portrayals of childhood and children have become possible. Unlike earlier texts that had inscribed loaded meanings and value-systems (often even as they challenged them) into the child's experience, more contemporary texts have sought to represent children in less

mediated ways. By and large this involves representing the harsh reality of the child's experience in the precarious, frequently violent and dangerous environments of the postcolonial world. Rather than inscribe value systems (metropolitan, pre-colonial, ethnographic, etc.) into dramas about growth, about appropriate forms of development and about the options available for the selfrealisation of the individual or the group, recent texts represent the blanket foreclosure of such possibilities. If children remain symbolically significant as indicators of the fate of the community as a whole, they do so as marginalised beings, cut off from any ethical, cultural or identitarian moorings that link them with the world of adults. Their concern is how to ensure survival from one day to the next and adults have no particular relevance in this quest. Children are not preparing, or being prepared, to enter the adult world. They have been abandoned, left to their own devices in a parallel, solipsistic universe which may bring them into contact with adults but usually in strictly utilitarian relationships. Nurturing, growth and development have ceased to be meaningful concepts for children who have been failed by dismal parenting and the breakdown of paternal/parental authority. They live as outlaws in a state of proscription since the collective failure of their parents' generation to uphold the rule of law (whether this be represented in terms of ethics, morality, politics or justice) has left them with little option but to create a 'law' of their own from the driftwood of fragmentary knowledge and experience they have gleaned in the private worlds they inhabit.

The postmodern and the postcolonial clearly converge here in this effective jettisoning of the post-Enlightenment teleology of progress. The grand narrative of progress for the human species had mirrored an equally grand narrative about the possibility of individual progress through personal development and education: essentially the same narrative then, but unfolding on a macro or a micro level. Such narratives can have no applicability to a world dominated by the short-term relationships which are alone possible in the postcolonial context. The disjunctures and cleavages of the postcolonial world, the shattering of socially, politically and economically stable relationships, the precariousness and violence

that constantly threaten any efforts to construct durable living conditions, all these factors help explain the fundamental fracturing within postcoloniality that exposes children to an experience of utter lawlessness. They are condemned to live outside the remnants of any law that still holds sway and are equally condemned to make their own law by determining the rules of a personal ethic of survival.

A number of texts exemplifying the inscriptional function of colonially inflected value systems quickly acquired canonical status within the emerging literary tradition of francophone African literature. Among these, and here in their order of publication, one might cite Camara Laye's L'Enfant noir (1953), Ferdinand Ovono's Une Vie de boy (1956) and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's L'Aventure ambiguë (1961). All three of these texts carefully position their child protagonists with regard to the culture of the colonisers. Ovono in order to critique the assumptions of superiority associated with it and the other two writers, in order to problematise in a more ethnographic and philosophical way the difficulties of reconciling the demands of competing cultures. It is perhaps surprisingly easy to lose sight of the fact that there is nothing problematic per se about bi-culturality or other versions of cultural hybridity and cultural intermingling. The reason it is portrayed as a more or less traumatic experience for these children, Camara, Toundi and Samba Diallo, is because the cultural contact is experienced by them precisely in a colonial context and therefore as a conflict, as a binary opposition that was the structuring principle of colonial contact and colonial rule.

The least dissident of these texts is undoubtedly *L'Enfant noir*. To the modern reader its interest almost certainly lies in the questions it raises about the representativity of francophone literature rather than in the ethnographic insights it provides into the pre-colonial culture of upper Guinea. The dilemma facing the young Camara is a mirror-image of the dilemma facing Samba Diallo, the child protagonist of *L'Aventure ambiguë*, namely a

choice of school/education/upbringing. In L'Enfant noir, the predicament is also an opportunity to provide information, presumably for a Western audience, about the totemic clan system, the magical rituals, the phased initiation ceremonies, and the sacred dances that punctuate the 'education' of a young Malinké. The sense of loss that pervades the novel is difficult to dissociate from a sense of cloving and sentimental nostalgia for an exotic past. The absence of any sustained critique of the alternative path that Camara has been obliged to pursue leaves the reader with his/her own dilemma: how to weigh up the significance of Camara's potential loss or gain? This is a binary novel about options that are staged as conflictual and mutually exclusive. Camara's mind, soul and body provide the location for the struggle between differing versions of the law that seek to prevail. The fact that the antagonism is between differing cultural systems and that the stakes are really various forms of cultural capital is masked by the novel's insistent location of the struggle within the social and physical person of the child protagonist.

In so far as L'Aventure ambiguë at least attempts to examine and characterise the respective worth of the two world views that colonialism has brought into conflict, it is a far more interesting and perhaps honest novel. The emphasis in this case is precisely on attempting to evaluate the philosophical stakes that are in play in the pedagogic dilemma. In Western culture, not since the Enlightenment has the link between pedagogy and politics been such a visibly important issue for debates about the social order (we only need to remember the fact that for Rousseau it was his Émile that articulated the first principles of 'his system' while Le Contrat social was little more than a sort of appendix to that novel). Cheikh Hamidou Kane entertains few illusions about the fact that the choice of schooling is linked to a naked power struggle. The version of the law that will prevail can only do so if it succeeds in controlling the education of the young. Crucial in this respect is the technological superiority of the 'invaders' which is such that it forces the respect of the colonised: 'L'école étrangère est la forme nouvelle de la guerre que nous font ceux qui sont venus, et il faut y envoyer notre élite, en attendant d'y pousser

³ Camara Laye, L'Enfant noir (Paris: Plon, 1953); Ferdinand Oyono, Une Vie de boy (Paris: Julliard, 1956), Cheikh Hamidou Kane, L'Aventure ambiguë (Paris: Julliard, 1961).

⁴ On the question of the representativity of francophone literature, see Nicholas Harrison, Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

tout le pays'. The people who must decide which path to follow (La Grande Royale, Samba's father, Le chevalier, the imam and so on), sensitive as they may be to the prospect of the loss of an entire cultural heritage, take their decision for essentially political reasons: the possibility of survival for the Diallobé people is paramount in their thinking. For Samba Diallo, however, the philosophical distinctions between Africa and the West are the key concern. By choosing to accept the decision of the tribal elders and pursue a French university education he feels he has chosen the worst possible option ('J'ai choisi l'itinéraire le plus susceptible de me perdre' and 'en venant ici, j'ai perdu un mode de connaissance privilégié'6). He compares himself to 'un balafon crevé'7 and indeed his life ends at the close of the novel in a violent attack which suggests that the irreconcilable polarities evoked in this novel could have no other outcome.

Unlike L'Enfant noir and L'Aventure ambiguë, Une Vie de boy is only marginally concerned with pedagogical issues. The main thrust of Oyono's novel is to imagine a character so thoroughly convinced of the superiority of White 'culture' that he can be transplanted into the inner sanctum of White society without his presence being considered a threat. Once ensconced as the servant of the local priest and subsequently the Commandant de Cercle, Toundi keeps a diary which functions as a critical eye, focusing mercilessly on the shortcomings of the colonial rulers. Oyono's novel works well because he limits himself to the child's view of the world. Toundi is able to record the incidents he witnesses but he is quite inept at evaluating them. This technique ensures that the reader assumes the role of the critical observer who supplements the imperfect observations of Toundi. Cleverly, the critique is not an explicit critique of the hypocrisy and immorality of colonial society it is a critique advanced by readers as they interpret Toundi's own observations of the universe he inhabits.

These three very different texts are nevertheless very similar on a number of counts. Firstly, they are all conceived according to a binary model of cultural conflict. The clash of cultures is understood and articulated as an either/or: this value system or that value system? this source of authority or that? this law or that law? The choice may be an uncomfortable one and the circumstances in which it is couched may be difficult, but the context remains one of competing systems of authority and legitimacy. Secondly, these novels are peopled with characters who represent versions of authority (colonial administrators, priests, tribal elders, parents) and whose actions are implicitly or explicitly motivated by a concern to ensure the transmission of a value system across the generations and cultures, thereby guaranteeing its durability. Thirdly, the children who occupy the heart of each narrative are the locus of a struggle whose significance transcends any naturalistic portrayal of childhood.

In La Latrine (1988) the Cameroonian novelist, Sévérin Cécile Abéga, marks a radical departure from these over-determined treatments of African childhoods. The central conceit of the novel announces the concerns of the next generation of novelists in that it has nothing to do with education or formative development and the stakes that are freighted by them. It concerns the fate of a small boy who falls into the family latrine. The child finds himself alone, six metres below ground, waist deep in excrement, choking on noxious fumes and a prey to the creeping and flying insects that inhabit the pit. This image of a small African child, quite literally 'dans la merde', provides the novel with its key metaphor and authorises an allegorical reading of the events that unfold around him. Yet the narrative does not focus on the child's predicament for long. Attention switches to the efforts of his brother to extricate him from the pit. It quickly becomes apparent that the physical difficulty of rescuing the boy - he only needs to be hauled out of the hole in the ground - is the least of the obstacles faced by his brother. The real obstacles are expressed as a catalogue of the difficulties he meets when he seeks the help of the adult characters. Significantly, these begin within the family home but eventually radiate out to encompass the local community and eventually the whole social and physical environment of the city in which the novel is set. As the novel progresses the literal

⁵ Kane, L'Aventure ambiguë, p. 47.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 125 and 162,

⁷ Ibid., p. 163.

predicament of the boy 'dans la merde' thus lends itself increasingly to figurative readings so that the boy in the latrine comes to represent not only, possibly, all African children but perhaps too, on a different level, all Africans, or all those struggling for survival in developing countries around the world.

It is the portrayal of the various obstacles standing in the way of the rescue that feeds the allegory. The father is an avaricious shopkeeper who refuses to leave the counter of his shop to go help his son. The man's selfishness, individualism and anti-social attitudes have isolated the family from their neighbours, undermining the celebrated African solidarity and community spirit that in other circumstances (pre-colonial? pre-capitalist?) should have ensured a speedy end to the drama. Part of the message here is of course an implicit critique of urbanism: city life is destructive of traditional social networks that previously ensured survival. But there is also a scarcely veiled suggestion that the father represents those individuals who enjoy a relative degree of economic success and quickly become too intent on securing their own socio-economic position to be diverted by appeals for help from the less fortunate, even when these are members of their own family (clan, tribe, nation). He refuses to provide one of the ropes he has on sale in his own shop; his attention is monopolised by his desire to maximise the profit he can make on the precious consignment of sugar he has just managed to secure; the best he can manage is to grudgingly dispense with the services of his elder son and allow him to go seek the help of the fire brigade.

The sense of urgency and suspense is ratcheted up with each obstacle and diversion that is placed in the path of the would-be rescuer. The boy has difficulty securing a taxi for the trip across town, difficulty in securing the attention of the firemen and persuading them to do their duty and attend the scene. He encounters agonising delays in snarled-up traffic on the trip back across town: these constitute so many narrative opportunities to portray the adults concerned as a chaotic, self-indulgent, self-important, opportunistic bunch, attentive to their own desires and appetites but incapable of analysis or empathy. At no stage does any of them spare a thought for the boy in the latrine, who thus

symbolically recedes into the background of the narrative. An undercurrent that surfaces time and again throughout the novel is the propensity to violence: children and women are beaten by the adult menfolk almost as a matter of principle and to little purpose other than as a way of asserting male authority. The dysfunctionality of the adult world is underscored by the way the drama is resolved. The elder brother leaves the adults and the firemen drinking beer in the family home, steals the keys to his father's shop and returns home with one of the ropes from his father's stock. When he finally descends into the latrine, alone, he finds his brother has succumbed to the asphyxiating stench. It is a corpse he brings back to the surface.

La Latrine is intended as a political critique of post-Independence Africa but it ultimately connects political failure to the various personal failings of adults and the world they inhabit (and are insistent on constructing) by focusing on their personal attributes and character traits: avarice, selfishness, self-interest and cruelty all have direct and dire social consequences. As the adults make a priority of satisfying their own desires and basic appetites, they simultaneously neglect the children they are supposed to nurture. The way children are treated thus appears as a key indicator of the more general social and political health of the nation. As Abéga comments in the opening pages of the novel:

Or, qu'est-ce qu'un enfant en Afrique?

L'objet de tous les désirs, de toutes les attentions, de tous les amours, de tous les vœux, demain, l'avenir. L'idéal d'une femme est d'être mère, l'idéal d'un homme est d'être père.

Et nous laissons croupir cet idéal, nos idéaux, notre demain, au fond d'une fosse d'aisance.⁸

In the way that it represents the peculiar fragility of childhood *La Latrine* is a precursor of a number of more contemporary postcolonial texts which portray children as victims of a breakdown in law and order or perpetrators of the chaos that

⁸ Sévérin Cécile Abéga, La Latrine (Dakar, Abidjan, Lomé: NEA, 1988), p. 4.

accompanies a state of lawlessness. The passage from the colonial to the postcolonial context is marked by a radical shift in the meaning of childhood. It is no longer a site for inscribing versions of the law or treating the problems associated with its transmission. Childhood comes to be figured as the critical period where systems of law and authority have become inoperable. where transmission across the generations has become an impossibility and where children live in a state of proscription. A broad range of texts from around the francophone world could be cited as examples to support the arguments made here: Thierno Monénembo's L'Aîné des orphelins (Guinea, 2000), Emmanuel Dongala's Johnny Chien Méchant (Congo, 2002) or Abdourahman Waberi's Transit (Djibouti, 2003), for example, all figure child protagonists who move in worlds where systems of authority and law have collapsed. They are subjected to violence, abuse and the most appalling instances of neglect and mistreatment at the hands of adults. They are abandoned, left to fend for themselves in a threatening world where they create for themselves a personal ethic and their own rules for survival outside any received structures of authority. The extreme nature of many of these texts suggests that the question underpinning them is no longer the quest for cultural identity and belonging that had preoccupied the earlier generation of writers but rather an interrogation of the boundary between the human and the inhuman.

As one of a number of texts that deals with child soldiers, Ahmadou Kourouma's Allah n'est pas obligé (2000) provides a typical case in point. For Birahima, the child protagonist and narrator of the novel, despair is the starting point. The fate of the young Malinké boy has been decided by events in his early childhood which have already ruined his life. His experiences as a boy soldier are thus accumulated in a context of hopelessness. Allah n'est pas obligé is something of the antithesis of a Bildungsroman. Birahima's experiences cannot be formative because they cannot be inserted within any recognisable

⁹ Thierno Monénembo, L'Aîné des orphelins (Paris: Seuil, 2000); Emmanuel Dongala, Johnny Chien Méchant (Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 2002); Abdourahman Waberi, Transit (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).

developmental framework. His development has been arrested by the foundational misunderstanding which triggered the failure of his relationship with his mother. Birahima presents himself from the outset as a person condemned:

[Je] suis maudit parce que j'ai fait du mal à ma mère. Chez les nègres noirs africains indigènes, quand tu as fâché ta maman et si elle est morte avec cette colère dans son cœur elle te maudit, tu as la malédiction.¹⁰

As so often with Kourouma, the motivation for decisive events in the narrative is only readable from within a logical framework which is highly culturally specific. In this instance the Malinké/Bambara beliefs concerning witchcraft are invoked as Birahima's mother is accused of being the leader of a group of witches and involved in ritual killings ('le chef de tous les sorciers et mangeurs d'âmes du village'. Birahima's repulsion and rejection of his mother cause an estrangement that lasts until her death. Only then does the child realise that the accusations were false but the damage has already been done:

[...] j'avais fait du mal à ma maman, beaucoup de mal. Du mal à une handicapée. Ma maman ne m'a rien dit mais elle est morte avec la mauvaiseté dans le cœur. J'avais ses malédictions, la damnation. Je ne ferais rien de bon sur terre. Je ne vaudrais jamais quelque chose sur cette terre. 12

J'ai blessé maman, elle est morte avec la blessure au cœur. Donc je suis maudit, je traîne la malédiction partout où je vais.¹³

Birahima has an operative system of beliefs but it is a system which has foreclosed on any potential for influencing future actions. For Birahima the worst has already happened and his wish to become a boy soldier can be seen as a way of embracing the

¹⁰ Ahmadou Kourouma, Allah n'est pas obligé (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 12.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹² Ibid., p. 29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

destiny of damnation he knows to be his. The moral climate of the novel is thus one of perfect stasis. As a moral being Birahima evolves no further than the state he has already reached when he sketches his own portrait at the beginning of the novel: the subsequent atrocities perpetrated by him, his fellow child soldiers and other characters, merely accumulate additional examples of horror without significantly modifying the atmosphere of ethical degradation which pervades the novel. His belief system merely provides a mechanism for confirming and providing a rationale for the fact that he is irrecuperable.

Birahima is not given to interrogating events in an effort to understand his experiences, partly because his belief system has already provided the answers to all the major questions. The portrait he offers of himself at the opening of the novel includes, for example, an acknowledgement that he is pursued by evil spirits because he has killed innocent people:

Suis pas chic et mignon parce que suis poursuivi par les gnamas de plusieurs personnes. (Gnama est un gros mot nègre noir africain indigène qu'il faut expliquer aux Français blancs. Il signifie [...] l'ombre qui reste après le décès d'un individu. L'ombre qui devient une force immanente mauvaise qui suit l'auteur de celui qui a tué une personne innocente.) Et moi j'ai tué beaucoup d'innocents au Libéria et en Sierra Leone où j'ai fait la guerre tribale, où j'ai été enfant-soldat, où je me suis bien drogué aux drogues dures. Je suis poursuivi par les gnamas, donc tout se gâte chez moi et avec moi. 14

The way this information is conveyed establishes a pattern for the rest of the novel. Whatever appalling circumstances of murder, rape or brutalisation Birahima is called upon to narrate he will give the facts of the case without seeking to provide mitigating or justificatory motives or to evaluate the consequences. There is a phenomenological simplicity *about Birahima which is encapsulated in the phrase which recurs throughout the novel: 'C'est la guerre tribale qui voulait ça'. 15

Perhaps unsurprisingly, perhaps most chillingly, Birahima is not fighting for a cause. But nevertheless *Allah n'est pas obligé* is saturated with detail about the various factions and personalities locked in combat. These in no way purport to relate to ideological differences, they merely provide an accumulation of examples of antagonism motivated by the common principle of self-interest, backed up by power:

Quand on dit qu'il y a guerre tribale dans un pays, ça signifie que des bandits de grand chemin se sont partagé le pays. Ils se sont partagé la richesse; ils se sont partagé le territoire; ils se sont partagé les hommes. Ils se sont partagé tout et tout le monde entier les laisse faire. Tout le monde les laisse tuer librement les innocents, les enfants et les femmes. ¹⁶

The region has descended into a state of lawlessness and, in his description of what ensues, Birahima's use of pronouns ('on'/'ils') allows him to distance himself from the various parties involved, thus identifying with the innocent victims of this state of affairs. Indeed he is all the more a victim because he has little option but to join in the process and become a bandit himself. If readers come to the text seeking an explanation as to how children can become entangled in such atrocities, they need look no further than this. When lawlessness and authority break down, appetites and apathy conjointly work to ensure that responsibility as well as riches are shared by a wide circle of people.

Given the number of factions involved, it is all the more surprising that Birahima manages to switch sides so often that, at various stages in the novel, he ends up fighting on behalf of all four of the 'quatre bandits de grand chemin: Doe, Taylor, Johnson, El Hadj Koroma'¹⁷ whom he identifies as the main players in Liberia's tribal war. If he does so, it is because Kourouma constructs his picaresque narrative around the vague notion of a quest. Birahima is ostensibly seeking to renew contact with the aunt responsible for his upbringing (pedagogy yet again!)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

following the death of his mother. Thus, Birahima's peregrinations through war-torn Liberia and Sierra Leone are periodically linked to the notion of finding refuge in family ties. Throughout the novel the link is portrayed as extremely tenuous however, and the problem of surviving the moment dominates the greater part of the narrative. The link with the family finally dissolves, however, when Birahima learns that his aunt has died in the very refugee camp where he is serving as a boy soldier. Symbolically, the end of the quest is the point at which Birahima inherits the dictionaries from the dead griot, Varrassouba, and these will serve to help him give voice to the terrible experiences he has witnessed.

Birahima's inheritance of the dictionaries, the event which leads him to the decision to narrate his adventures, focuses attention on a second major feature of *Allah n'est pas obligé*, namely its preoccupation with language as a medium. The novel's first person narrator possesses restricted linguistic competence in the language he uses to construct his narrative. This clearly has consequences for the style of the narrative itself and accounts for many of its distinctive features. But over and above the question of style (the 'rotten French' of Birahima) it is noticeable that language is treated as a material to be consciously fashioned and which is continuously subjected to commentary.

Birahima's decision to narrate his experiences is not a result of any moral or ethical imperative: it is a direct result of his inheriting the dictionaries (the Larousse, the Petit Robert, the 'Inventaire des particularités lexicales du français en Afrique noire' and Harrap's) that will allow him to communicate them. It is tempting to take at face value his constant recourse to these dictionaries as a mechanism which will allow him to translate relevant words for the benefit of the different audiences for which his narrative is intended: 'Il faut expliquer parce que mon blablabla est à lire par toute sorte de gens: des toubabs (toubab signifie blanc) colons, des noirs indigènes sauvages d'Afrique et des francophones de tout gabarit (gabarit signifie genre)'. 18

But through other narrative devices Birahima successfully 'translates' an enormous amount of material that is culturally alien to many Western readers, and which it is necessary for them to understand, but without drawing attention to the fact that he is doing so. Moreover, the vast majority of the glosses simply provide synonymous expressions and there is no reason to suppose that an African whose French is so limited that he does not understand, for example, the word 'insolent' will cope any better with understanding Birahima's gloss: 'qui, par son caractère extraordinaire, apparaît comme un défi à la condition commune'. 19 Similarly, the translation of African terms, for example: 'partir gnona-gnona. (ce qui signifie, d'après Inventaire, dare-dare.)²⁰ is self-defeating since the French expression is thus inscribed in the text anyway. It may, of course, be argued that such a procedure at least ensures an African quality to the narrative but the cost is so high and the process so blatantly self-referential, that such an explanation is unconvincing. It would be patronising to see them as an attempt to assist a clumsy narrator in doing his job. They have to be evaluated in terms of the actual effects they generate within the narrative as given.

The phenomenon of Birahima's glosses merits a study of its own. Suffice it to say here that the doubling of words by a synonym (that is, the internal translation of French into French) is as pointless as the translation of African words into French, since the process involved is far clumsier and introduces far greater obstacles to the narrative flow than if some other device had been adopted. Nor do the glosses serve very well in convincing us that Birahima is linguistically naïve. On the contrary, I would argue that they can be usefully viewed as real events in the narrative, of a different order but of equal significance to the 'physical' events that are conventionally seen as constitutive of the narrative chain. As such they have manifold purposes and significances and, when readers interrogate them (just as they interrogate any other aspect of the novel's textuality), they are generating manifold readings and interpretations of them. One example may serve to illustrate

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 180.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 99.

the point. Birahima explains at one point how thieves are dealt with in Sanniquellié. If a thief is caught he is put to the question: 'S'il répond oui, il est condamné à mort. S'il répond non, il est confondu par les témoins et il est également condamné à mort. (Confondre signifie réduire quelqu'un au silence en prouvant qu'il a commis la faute.)'.²¹

The shocking denial of due judicial process and the insignificant value placed on human life that this way of treating alleged thieves implies, appears to merit no comment from Birahima. His immediate concern is to gloss the potentially problematic verb 'confondre'. What better way of underscoring the nature of the topsy-turvy universe he inhabits, the extent to which he has been obliged to become inured to such brutality, the fact that he too is a victim, a castaway in a world where dictionaries alone can provide him with some residual faith in the notion of authority – a world where lexical commentary, by entirely evacuating the moral dimension from lived events and thereby possibly making experience bearable, allows him to continue to function? The patently superficial way that Birahima deals with language as a material to be manipulated is highly significant. The surface semantics of so many of the glosses suggests that language is being used, at the very least, as a screen which can be interposed between himself and the unacceptable nature of the reality it is supposed to express.

What Kourouma's novel describes is an extreme situation in which the brutalising effects of violence and general lawlessness threaten to dehumanise those caught up within its logic. The situation is so extreme that the real question to emerge is whether Birahima and his ilk manage to remain within the fold of 'the human'? None of Birahima's efforts to explain the various words and concepts he uses shed any light on this question. Indeed, their arbitrary, random nature (why gloss this word and not that?) demonstrates that their purpose lies elsewhere. However much they may betray Birahima *qua* character they are intended, as he makes clear, for the benefit of the reader. The dictionary

references ensure that the reader's need to understand Birahima is figured in the novel as a visible trope. Ultimately, perhaps, it is the drama of the reader's difficulty in reducing such recalcitrant difference to some form of sameness, signifying common humanity, that is connoted by the recourse to dictionaries.

There is no corresponding drama involving a putative need on the part of Birahima to be understood. Birahima has no such need and his indifference to the opinion of others is vividly expressed on a number of occasions. He dismissively refers to his own narrative as a 'blablabla' and '[s]es salades'. Thereafter, he frequently addresses his readers in a way that makes it clear that his indifference to them borders on outright contempt, as the following example illustrates:

Allah n'est pas obligé, n'a pas besoin d'être juste dans toutes ses choses, dans toutes ses créations, dans tous ses actes ici-bas.

Moi non plus, je ne suis pas obligé de parler, de raconter ma chienne de vie, de fouiller dictionnaire sur dictionnaire. J'en ai marre; je m'arrête ici pour aujourd'hui. Qu'on aille se faire foutre!²³

Many of the numerous additional examples of Birahima's displaying a disrespectful, not to say contemptuous, attitude towards his readers occur in close proximity to reminders that 'Allah is not obliged' either (see, for example, pp. 152, 154, 157, 192, 194 and 198). Kourouma seems to be drawing a parallel between Birahima's insistence on total narrative freedom (the right to behave as he likes *qua* narrator) and the notion that Allah does as he pleases too, even to the extent of allowing such horrific injustice and suffering to be visited upon his creatures. So, what goes for Allah also goes for the narrator: if Allah has so little respect for his creatures why should the narrator be expected to have any more for his readers? This tendency is not unconnected with Birahima's predilection for punctuating his narrative with obscenities: 'Gnamokodé (bâtardise!)' and 'A faforo (cul de mon père!)', particularly since they, too, are frequently collocated with

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

²² Ibid., p. 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

'Walahé (au nom d'Allah!)'. While it is true that such language is not out of place in the narrative of a child murderer, inured to killings and the use of hard drugs (and indeed the use of a higher register would be anomalous and frankly ludicrous).

The language of Birahima's narrative is remarkable stylistically. because it is designed to be appropriate for Birahama the character, just as in earlier novels Kourouma has expended great effort to match character and modes of discourse. But it is also remarkable because the dictionary references which litter the novel confirm that even if Birahima does not interrogate his experiences he at least interrogates language. In this respect he is comparable to Djigui, the protagonist of Monnè, outrages et défis, whose life is turned upside down in similarly traumatic ways on the arrival of French colonial troops in his kingdom. Faced with a trauma of such incomprehensible proportions his reaction is to question language itself and, in doing so, to re-assess the appropriateness of his own language as a tool for expressing the new realities he is experiencing: 'Chaque fois que les mots changent de sens et les choses de symboles, je retourne à la terre qui m'a vu naître pour tout recommencer: réapprendre l'histoire et les nouveaux noms des hommes, des animaux et des choses'. 24 In the midst of a more modern trauma, Birahima does much the same.

Les Enfants des héros (2002) by the Haïtian novelist, Lyonel Trouillot, also focuses very precisely on the themes of proscription and the overturning of authority. The novel recounts the fugue of the child narrator, Colin, and his sister, Mariéla, after the murder of their father, Corazón. The parricide occurs when the children attack their father to prevent him meting out yet another beating to their mother, Joséphine, so although their intervention is a spontaneous act of defence it also has a symbolic value, marking a refusal on the part of the children to continue to live under the paternal régime of repeated acts of alcohol-induced violence. The symbolic nature of the killing is underscored by the fact that it immediately follows a moment of realisation when Mariéla finally recognises that her father has none of the attributes of the heroic

figure he habitually seeks to project himself as possessing. Shortly before the murder, the children have witnessed a scene at the garage where Corazón supposedly works as a mechanic but is, in fact, a mere factorum at the beck and call of the owner and the other workers. The authority he wields within the home and the powerful persona he has constructed for himself (ex-boxer, star mechanic, physical giant) collapse as they witness the humiliating treatment he receives from the garage owner. Indeed, as Colin recalls the crucial moment when he and Mariéla rise to the defence of their mother, this dismantling of Corazón's authority is specifically referred to in terms of a first iteration of the 'death' they are about to perpetrate: 'Il ne se préoccupe pas de notre présence. Il ne sait pas que nous l'avons vu mourir une heure auparavant. Il la frappe. Pour recréer l'image qu'il a perdue. Mais il n'est plus notre champion. Rien qu'un pauvre type et notre père' and 'il est mort depuis l'incident au garage'.25

The time-frame of the narrative is constructed partially through 'flashbacks' which provide readers with insights into the true nature of Corazón's personality. He is, in fact, a self-centred, mythomanic, drunken bully who cultivates an image of himself as an heroic fighter. His regular theft of letters containing the cheques from Colin's grandmother that were intended to pay the boy's school fees, allows him to indulge his drinking habit (which in turn fuels his propensity to violence) while simultaneously depriving the boy of any possibility of the education which could offer some form of escape from the misery and poverty into which the family has sunk. Joséphine's passivity and Corazón's self-deluding, self-indulgent posturing combine to ensure that there can be no possibility of growth, no potential for nurturing, no ethical basis for relationships capable of building any meaningful community.

In Les Enfants des héros the crisis is portrayed as being very much a family affair yet the novel also invites a more generalised reading of the drama as one affecting wider Haïtian society. The confusion of the heroic father-figure with that of the political

²⁴ Ahmadou Kourouma, *Monnè*, outrages et défis (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 41.

²⁵ Lyonel Trouillot, Les Enfants des héros (Arles: Actes Sud, 2002), pp. 36 and 37.

leader is a commonplace of political rhetoric throughout the developing world but it is particularly prevalent where dictatorial regimes hold sway. In this instance, the metaphoric linking of family and nation appears to be authorised by a clever use of metonymy. Immediately after the murder, the children flee to the strangely public space of the Champ-de-Mars which is adorned with the statues of the nation's military heroes. They spend several hours on a bench there, in the shadow of the statues, alongside an elderly, middle-class gentleman who barely notices their existence. This non-meeting (across class and across the generations) in this highly symbolic space speaks volumes about the breakdown in transmission of values, authority and legitimacy. While sitting on the bench Colin reflects again on the garage scene in language that assimilates it to a scene of death; he concludes: 'C'est comme si l'une des grandes statues de la place des Héros s'effondrait sur son socle'.26 Throughout his life, Corazón's projection of himself as hero has been ironically inappropriate and the crime committed by Colin and Mariéla can perhaps be read as a punishment for the betrayal of truth and justice that his behaviour embodies. Therefore the deflation of Corazón-the-hero inevitably invites an interrogation of all forms of hero-worship and calls into question the self-serving systems of authority and legitimacy that all the nation's 'heroes' come to sanction and perpetuate. Thus the death of the hero also signals the end of any possible foundation for legality and legitimacy.

In a very different context, the Mauritian setting of Ananda Devi's Ève de ses Décombres (2006) also represents a social order in crisis. Gender, class, ethnicity and the gap between generations are all sites for the conflictual relations between adolescents and adults that are omnipresent in the novel. Yet they are are strangely muted, almost ineffectual, as explanatory devices for the malaise that permeates the 'quartier' of Troumaron where the drama affecting the youngsters unfolds. Perhaps these are yesterday's explanations for the very immediate problems affecting this generation of postcolonial adolescents. Their behaviour suggests

that they prefer to embrace the phenomenological purity of pointless violence rather than engage with the legacy of ideological, political, cultural and social explanations for the impoverished world they inhabit.

The central character, Ève, pursues a peculiarly self-damaging sexual ethos that is superficially inscribed as a contempt for men but which nevertheless closely resembles an age-old, inner journey in search of herself. Ève uses her body as a privileged site for recording the psychological suffering that poverty, precariousness and failed relationships bring in their train. Wounds, scars and burns are a way of conveying to herself the message that life goes on. In the person of another of Troumaron's troubled adolescents, Clélio, the self-harm is not sexual in nature but inflicted by a knife as he cuts the name of his brother into his thigh. This spelling out in his own blood of the name of the brother he feels has betrayed him is a way of re-appropriating physically both the absent brother and the pain his departure has caused.

C'est quelqu'un de faux, qui essaie de prononcer les 'r' alors que chez nous on ne les prononce pas. C'est quelqu'un de faux, qui fait semblant d'être français, alors que tout en toi dit que tu es mauricien. C'est quelqu'un de faux [...]

Je prends un canif et j'entaille dans la peau de ma cuisse ton nom, Carlo. Maintenant que mon sang a épelé ton nom, tu es en moi et tu es moi.²⁷

Other adolescents in the gang spend their time carrying out minor acts of delinquency, defying established rules of law and order, seeking refuge in a self-defining status as outlaws, law-breakers, wreakers of havoc. In effect, the delinquent behaviour has affinities with Eve's peculiarly self-harming sexual ethos in so far as it constitutes a revolt against the sovereignty of dominant value-systems characterised as adult, male, privileged and affluent. The economic and social disparities of modern-day Saint-Louis are clearly evidenced here.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁷ Ananda Devi, Ève de ses Décombres (Paris: Seuil, 2006), p. 55.

As though to reinforce the message that the dividing line separating the adolescents from the wider world is one marked by a particular conception of order, authority, and legitimacy, the central act of violence in the novel is performed by the white teacher, himself a representative therefore of the various components embodying the notion of sovereignty (white, middle-class, affluent, educated, with a career that suggests a future and prospects) which is denied to the inhabitants of Troumaron. Having made Ève a target for his own sexual gratification he goes on to commit the most heinous act of violence in the novel by murdering Ève's class-mate (and lover) Savita, who has inadvertently witnessed their coupling at the back of the biology classroom.

In Ève de ses Décombres violence is omnipresent yet provides a solution to none of the problems sketched out by the novel. It is a self-perpetuating statement of the way the battle lines have been drawn up: between the sexes, between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', between the generations, between classes and sections of the community. The violence itself is in evidence (whether it be Ève's self-destructive sexual behaviour, Clélio and the other gang members' lust for blood and/or sexual gratification, or the teacher's murder of Savita) along all these fault lines. Ève's murderous act of revenge at the close of the novel simply reiterates the stasis in which all the characters are trapped. As Sadiq comments:

Le monde est clos. Nous ne pouvons plus sortir des cercles tracés par nos propres soins. Ces cercles qui disaient au reste du monde, nous ne sommes pas comme vous, notre monde n'est pas pareil au vôtre, aujourd'hui, ils nous emprisonnent plus sûrement que les prisons de l'Etat.²⁸

To the extent that all the children in these narratives nevertheless forge links among themselves, with siblings, in gangs or as loose military units, they generally do so temporarily, on an *ad hoc*

basis, for a specific purpose and for as long as it suits them. No overarching objective motivates them that cannot be reduced to practicality and functionality, including the urgency of the need to conform to the expectations of peers. This bizarre form of solidarity can be characterised as a form of 'sociable unsociability', a coming together into a loosely knit group so as to more easily and more safely wreak havoc, create chaos and render social life and moral purpose impossible. 'Sociable unsociability' is, of course, the exact reversal of the Kantian concept of 'unsociable sociability' (Ungesellige Geselligkeit) through which Kant sought to explain how the aggressiveness and combativity of individual human beings could be seen as compatible with, indeed serve as a means of accomplishing, the greater good of the human species as a whole.²⁹ Kantian teleology (and its implicit link with the Enlightenment myth of progress) would seem to have been replaced here by a form of postcolonial entropy.

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981).

²⁸ Ibid., p. 142.

In the Beginning was Loss — Childhood and War in Francophone Lebanese Literature

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Since the nineteenth century, Lebanon has been the subject of a strong orientalist literary tradition, and has inspired major texts in French Romantic literature by poets such as Alphonse de Lamartine and Gérard de Nerval. The first literary text to be written in French by a Lebanese writer dates back to 1910, followed, in the period between the wars, by a generation of writers who celebrated the union of France and the Christian East. However, one had to wait until after the Second World War for francophone Lebanese literature truly to emerge on the literary scene with the works of poet and playwright Georges Schéhadé and novelist and poet Andrée Chédid.¹ Since the start of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, the majority of these writers have emigrated to Paris, which has become the intellectual centre of a community in exile.

War constitutes a recurrent topos in francophone Lebanese narratives, with a variety of writings ranging from personal diaries and memoirs, to fiction and even science fiction. This study will, however, focus solely on fiction. A common feature shared by francophone Lebanese novels dealing with the subject of the Civil War is their distancing from the communitarian positioning that characterised the 1975-90 Lebanese war: such divisions found their roots in the nineteenth century with the bloody confrontations that opposed religious communities in 1840-60 in the context of

Born in Egypt, Andrée Chédid is of Lebanese origin and is considered by literary critics to be a Lebanese writer. She is listed in Ramy Zein, ed., Dictionnaire de la littérature libanaise de langue française (Paris: L'Harmattan 1998), pp. 113-22.

colonial rivalries between the French and British powers.² Communitarianism was to be further institutionalised by the French during their Mandate (1920-43), a fact highlighted by economist and historian Georges Corm who denounces 'la malheureuse institutionnalisation du confessionnalisme politique que le règlement de 1961 a imposé au pays et que le mandat français a perpétué et amplifié'. 3 He also points out:

Le communautarisme libanais est un produit de la modernité et non point une constante historique, une réalité permanente et essentielle, comme on a trop tendance à le voir. L'institution des communautés dans l'ordre public et leur politisation sont le résultat de l'histoire contemporaine du Liban, du jeu des rivalités des puissances européennes et de l'Empire Ottoman.4

The 1943 'Pacte National' between Christians and Muslims constituted an attempt to assert a transcommunitarian ideology which was intended to serve as a foundation for the construction of a new Lebanese independent State. But this Pact was short-lived as it was unable to resist the manipulations to which the Lebanese communities were subjected in the context of regional geopolitics. Corm comments: 'le Pacte National [est resté] prisonnier de l'héritage colonial dont le Liban a été victime'. 5 The lack of positioning of Lebanese writers could thus be interpreted both as a denunciation of the Civil War and a condemnation of communitarianism as a colonial heritage.

Literary writings about the Lebanese Civil War have often been emphasised – by the few critics who addressed this issue, mainly

in relation to Lebanese literature in English and Arabic - as forming a response to 'the prevalence of a collective amnesia plaguing Lebanese society vis-à-vis all civil war referents'.6 Addressing the tragedy of the war, be it in narratives written after or during the war, thus constitutes an effort to create a collective remembrance that might ultimately participate in the formation of a national identity. This particular dimension of Lebanese war narratives was analysed by Elise Salem Manganaro - in relation to Lebanese texts in Arabic - who refers to Ernest Renan's study of the concept of nationalism. Renan emphasizes the need for a common legacy of memories, amongst which memories of suffering are of 'more value' for the construction of a national identity: 'where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort'.7

However, a striking, recurrent feature of Lebanese writings dealing with the war is the tension between the telling and registering of the Lebanese war experience and the expression of nostalgia for the time of childhood - the time of childhood either preceding the war or coinciding with it. In the latter case, similarly to Holocaust literature where many texts have been written about a child's Holocaust experience, or from a child's perspective, childhood is used as a prism through which to apprehend the representations of the Civil War.8 How then is the articulation between writing the war and writing a nostalgic childhood negotiated and what are the ethical implications of this negotiation? Such issues are raised by La Maison sans racines by Andrée Chédid (1985), written during the Civil War, and L'École

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

² Georges Corm comments on this point: 'les raisons de la portée de ce clivage [entre chrétiens et musulmans] sont à rechercher dans l'idéologie qui, trop souvent, a accompagné la présence coloniale au Liban. La France, en effet, ne s'est pas présentée au Liban sous ses habit laïcs, mais comme fille aînée de l'Église et, à ce titre, protectrice des chrétiens contre le "fanatisme" des musulmans. L'Angleterre, elle, s'est présentée comme cherchant à faire l'unité des provinces arabes de l'Empire Ottoman'. Georges Corm, Le Liban contemporain. Histoire et société (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2003), p. 27. See also Chapter 3 of Corm's study.

Georges Corm, Liban: les guerres de l'Europe et de l'Orient 1840-1992 (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 64. See also Corm, Le Liban contemporain. Histoire et société, pp.

Corm, Le Liban contemporain. Histoire et société, p. 30.

Carol Fadda-Conrey, 'Exilic Memories of War: Lebanese Women Writers Looking Back', Studies in the Humanities - Indiana, 30 (2003), 7-20 (p. 7).

Back', Studies in the rrumantites—Indiana, 30 (2003), 1-20 (B. 1).

Ternest Renan, 'What is a nation?', trans. Martin Thon, in Homi K. Bhabha, ed., Nation and Narration (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 8-22 (p. 19). Quoted in Elise Salem Manganoro, 'Lebanon mythologized or Lebanon Deconstructed', in Rustum Shehadeh, ed., Women and War in Lebanon (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1990), pp. 112-

^{28 (}p. 114).

8 Although these texts do not form a 'literary genre' of their own — as Sue Vice claims about Holocaust literature — Holocaust studies provide a useful framework for the analysis about Holocaust literature — Holocaust studies provide a useful framework for the analysis about Holocaust literature — Holocaust studies provide a useful framework for the analysis of childhood in Lebanese texts, and shall be referred to in the course of this study. See Sue Vice, Children Writing the Holocaust (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 11.

de la guerre by Alexandre Najjar (1999), written after the end of the war, which shall now be analysed in turn.⁹

'L'eau s'en va, l'eau s'en vient': Andrée Chédid's La Maison sans racines

La Maison sans racines is organised in three series of chapters which are intercalated throughout the novel, each type of chapter corresponding to a different temporality – as outlined on the opening page of the novel. Chapters with Roman numbering are set in July-August 1932¹⁰ whilst those with Arab numbering are set in July-August 1975. Finally, chapters written in italics (with no numbering) focus on one particular August morning in 1975. This diffracted narrative structure is further complicated by the use of different enunciative modes. The two series of chapters with Arab numbering and in italics are characterised by a third person narration, whereas the chapters with Roman numbering are narrated in the first person in what can be described as a semi-autobiographical narrative.

The three series of chapters share one common point: the central character of Kalya. In the chapters set in 1932, Kalya is a twelve-year-old girl spending her holidays in Lebanon at her grandmother's, Nouza, her parents having taken a boat for France from the port of Alexandria in Egypt. These chapters alternate between a first-person narrative from a child's perspective and a retrospective adult's perspective. In the chapters set in July-August 1975, Kalya is a middle-aged woman and a grandmother herself, now living in Paris. The story takes place in Beirut where she meets her granddaughter, Sybil, who has just flown from New York to spend her first holidays in the land of her ancestors. The reader also comes to understand that Kalya has never been back to Lebanon since she was a child. The last series of chapters, in

italics, relate a tragic event which occurs during Kalya's and her granddaughter's holidays in Beirut, marking the irruption of the war in the lives of the two protagonists. The structure of the novel is thus characterised by a narrative and temporal discontinuity. However, the chapters dealing with the two summers of 1932 and 1975 are in fact thematically linked, based on what will be later analysed as a mirror structure. Furthermore, the discontinuity between the chapters set in August-July 1975 and those focusing on a particular morning in August of the same year is resolved, with the temporality of the two narrative series meeting in the last pages of the novel.

The narrative structure in Chédid's novel can be compared to Georges Perec's W ou le souvenir d'enfance, where the writer juxtaposes two series of chapters: chapters with odd numbers, written in italics, relate a fiction - which starts as a first-person narration before evolving into a third-person narration - whilst chapters with even numbers, written in Roman characters, correspond to an autobiography. Dominique Rabaté underlines, in relation to Perec's text, 'l'insuffisance d'un seul des deux régimes d'écriture. La coexistence des deux énonciations indique que c'est entre ces deux modes que se loge problématiquement ce qui est à exprimer, à signifier'. 11 This comment raises issues which are just as relevant to Chédid's novel, the parallel progression of the two 'régimes d'écriture' in the 'Roman' and 'Arab' chapters creating a tension between the two narrative flows, a tension which holds within it what the writer is attempting to signify: Lebanon, an impossible signified caught between the myth of an idealised childhood and the reality of the war.

'Roman' chapters, which tell the story of Kalya's edenic childhood in a first person narrative, reveal a feeling of nostalgia which corresponds more precisely to what Svetlana Boym describes, in *The Future of Nostalgia*, as 'restorative' nostalgia: 'Restoration (from re-staure – re-establishment) signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment. The past for the

Although there is mention in the text of the year 1928: 'Nous étions en 1928' (Chédid, p. 157).

⁹ Andrée Chédid, La Maison sans racines (Paris: Flammarion, 1985); Alexandre Najjar, L'École de la guerre (Paris: Éditions Balland, 1999).

¹¹ Dominique Rabaté, Le Chaudron fêlé. Écarts de l'écriture (Paris: José Corti, 2006), p. 188.

restorative nostalgic [...] is not a duration but a perfect snapshot'.12 The narration takes place in pre-war Lebanon, in a country that is explicitly compared to the garden of Eden, a place where death can only result from natural causes, far from any violence:

Aucune menace ne pèse. La saison sera longue, aucun conflit, aucune guerre ne viendra l'interrompre. La folie des hommes a lieu ailleurs, très loin.

- Une oasis! répétait Farid. Nous sommes nés dans un Eden! Au moins, dans nos pays, nous pouvons être certains de mourir de mort naturelle. 13

This is a mythical space set in a mythical time, a time that historical events cannot reach and disturb. Kalya's grandmother, Nouza, is significantly described as keeping no newspaper in her apartment: 'aucun journal ne traînait dans l'appartement. Nouza ne se préoccupait guère des événements du monde'. 14 Without turning to ethnography, Chédid's text also evokes elements of the narrator's childhood culture, the village dances, the food, and so on.

The narrative of idyllic childhood in pre-war Lebanon thus contributes to the creation of what Salem Manganaro describes as a 'mythology of national consciousness, a collective memory of a past, idealized Lebanon',15 which characterises several Lebanese literary texts across languages. One could wonder about the choice of the time frame in which the 'Roman' chapters are set, which corresponds roughly to 1928-32. Although there is no indication in the text about the political climate of these particular years, it seems likely that Chédid chose this period because it was characterised, in Corm's words, by 'une grande atmosphère de liberté, favorable à un nouveau développement de la symbiose communautaire' under French rule, thanks to the actions of the

pluralist and democratic Lebanese political elite.16 What is presented in Chédid's text as individual memories therefore serves a larger purpose, which is the creation of a collective remembrance and the reconstruction of a national identity - in a way which is forcibly different from that outlined earlier where suffering constituted the basis of the construction of a national consciousness. Boym comments on this point: 'unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memories'. 17 This is where the ethics of nostalgia lies, in its capacity of response to a specific cultural, political and ultimately national identity crisis, where loss is confronted with a view to reconstruct a future, as John Su argues in Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel: 'the nostalgic image of nation provides the basis for establishing some shared goals for the future'.18

This is all the more apparent in Chédid's novel since elements from the nostalgic childhood described in the 1932 'Roman' chapters are seen to invade the narrative of the 1975 'Arab' chapters, in an attempt to re-enact the idealised past. As mentioned earlier, these two series of chapters follow a mirrored structure, the most obvious common thematic feature being the encounter and story of a relationship between a little girl and her grandmother. The attempt to re-enact an idealised past through the return to Lebanon of the now middle-aged character of Kalya with her grand-daughter, Sybil, is expressed by the third-person narrator in these terms, as an answer to Kalya's great-aunt's question, 'Pourquoi ici? Justement ici?': '[...] par tendresse. Tendresse pour cette terre exiguë que l'on peut traverser en une seule journée;

¹² Svetlana Boym, The Future of Nostalgia (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 49. ¹³ Chédid, p. 171. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁵ Salem Manganoro, 'Lebanon mythologized or Lebanon Deconstructed', p. 118.

¹⁶ Corm, Le Liban contemporain. Histoire et société, p. 88. Corm describes the evolution of the Lebanese institutional system and political life under the French Mandate as being 'schizophrenic' as it was characterised by 'une émancipation remarquable dans le sens d'une modernisation et d'une libéralisation de plus en plus grande, d'un côté, mais, en même temps, une institutionnalisation de plus en plus forte des communautés religieuses' (*Ibid.*, p. 90).

Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, p. xvi. 18 John Su, Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 19.

cette terre tenace et fragile. Pour le souvenir d'élans, d'accueils, d'un concert de voix'; and then by Kalya herself: '- Pour Nouza. Pour mieux connaître, aimer ce pays. Pour Sybil'. 19 Another recurrent element worth noting, as it contributes to the depiction of childhood as a mythical time, is the motif of the dance. Dance is analysed by Mircéa Eliade in Le Mythe de l'éternel retour as the manifestation of mythical time in the anthropological sphere.²⁰ In the 'Roman' chapters set in 1932, young Kalya is characterised above all by her love of dancing: 'je me suis élancée sur la piste. [...] Emportée par la mélodie, je me suis faufilée parmi les danseurs. Toutes les joies de la terre et du ciel me possédaient. Je virevoltais, tourbillonnais'. 21 In a re-enactment of her grandmother's dancing, Sybil is similarly described as turning and whirling at the sound of music, the leitmotiv of the dance thus establishing a temporal bridge between the two narratives, but more importantly resuscitating the past of a happy childhood and transposing it onto the character of Sybil, as if to preserve her from historical time.

However, thematic threads go both ways, and history and violence are seen to infiltrate the 1932 narrative of idealised childhood in passages which are clearly written from the perspective of the adult first-person narrator. For instance, following the passage where Kalya's grandmother, Nouza, is described as having no newspapers in her apartment, major international events occurring at the time are listed in a rather critical tone: 'Mussolini martelait ses déclarations hostiles [...]. Hitler se profilait derrière Hindenbourg, s'organisant dans les ténèbres'. 22 Violence is introduced in the 1932 narrative via the mention of a murder having occurred in the neighbourhood, prefiguring the countless deaths of the Civil War. After this event, Kalya's grandmother refuses the revolver her brother gives her for protection, the mention of the revolver sending us back to the opening lines of the first 'Roman' chapter: chapter I comes after a

chapter in italics (set on an August morning in 1975), where the reader has just witnessed the adult Kalya carrying a revolver, ready to use it. This very same adult Kalya then takes on a firstperson narration in the first 'Roman' chapter to reflect on her situation in the present time before moving to the evocation of her childhood, thus creating both a contrast and a narrative link between the two series of chapters and sets of times: 'que penserait ma grand-mère Nouza si elle me voyait? Si seulement elle pouvait me voir, ici, en cet instant, avec ce revolver au point?'23

These elements suggest an ambiguous vision of nostalgia on the part of the writer. On the one hand, the nostalgic memories of childhood depicted can be seen to serve the reconstruction of a national identity. But at the same time, the incursion of elements from the present reality into the idealised past of childhood underlines the impossibility of dissociating past and present in the national consciousness, thus blurring the ethical dimension of the text. This idea is highlighted directly in the 'Arab' chapters set in 1975, where nostalgia is criticised for encouraging Lebanese people, particularly emigrants, to hold on to a fictitious image of their country:

[Ils] prolongent la nostalgie d'une petite patrie de plus en plus fictive, de plus en plus édulcorée. Par à-coups - tendre, odorante, radieuse sous sa pèlerine de soleil -, celle-ci ressurgit au cours d'un repas composé de plats du terroir [...] ou encore parmi les clichés jaunis que l'on déverse sur la table après le repas.24

Furthermore, the attempted transposition of a mythical time onto the chapters set in 1975 is doomed, emphasising a prevalence of the present reality, in all its horror. This is figured in the text firstly through the motif of the photograph. Kalya grows up to be a professional photographer; in the chapters in italics set on a particular August morning, her intention is to immortalise the symbolic embrace of two young women and childhood friends,

¹⁹ Chédid, p. 81. 20 Mircéa Eliade, Le Mythe de l'éternel retour (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 42. ²¹ Chédid, p. 71.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 31. ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

one Muslim, one Christian, on a public square in Beirut which her great-aunt's apartment overlooks, by taking a photograph of the encounter. But this embrace never occurs as a franc-tireur shoots one of the two girls, and the photograph, which would have transported Lebanon back to a mythical, peaceful time, is never taken. Similarly, and perhaps even more poignantly, the little girl, Sybil, whom the narrative had attempted to shroud in the mythical time of childhood and dance, is not only confronted with the death of a neighbouring shop-keeper, but is also killed in the very last pages of the novel, by the same franc-tireur who shot one of the two young women.

A final narrative thread, this time between the 1975 'Arab' chapters and the chapters in italics, is to be noted here, based on a dialectic between fiction and reality, which also recalls that between myth and reality as analysed so far. References to cinema as the antithesis of reality are frequent in the novel and are often linked to the character of Sybil. Indeed, in the 'Arab' chapters, the little girl is said to talk about the reality of the war as if it were fictional, a film, images without reality: '- C'est la guerre? demanda Sybil. Elle en parlait comme d'un film, des images sans réalité'.25 When a shop-keeper with whom she had become friendly dies when a shell lands on his shop, she is described as being caught in a horror film, refusing to believe in the images of the scene that she has just witnessed: 'Sybil avançait dans un cauchemar, un film de terreur [...] refus[ant] de croire à ces images'.26 The world of childhood is thus not only a world of myth, but also a world where fiction prevails, set against the reality of the war. But, more interestingly, it is this childhood vision to which the narration seems desperately to cling in the chapters in italics - in the same way that nostalgic memories of childhood are desperately re-enacted in the present time - when war erupts into the daily life of the protagonists with the shooting of one of the young women:

Rien qu'un espace imaginaire? Une séquence de cinéma, où la scène cruciale, plusieurs fois reproduite, obsède comme une rengaine? Son ralenti décomposant les images, les gestes, pour que ceux-ci impressionnent et se gravent dans l'esprit du spectateur. Terrible, ce lieu [...], qui pourrait n'être qu'imaginé! 27

But reality wins again: 'pourtant il [ce lieu] est là. Il existe. [...] Tout cela est vrai'.

'D'ordinaire, à cet âge-là, on rêve!': Alexandre Najjar's L'École de la guerre

Alexandre Najjar's L'École de la guerre is a semiautobiographical text where the narrator, having left Beirut just after the end of the Civil War, returns to Lebanon seven years later. The narrative structure shares many characteristics with what Sue Vice describes, in Children Writing the Holocaust, as the 'split narration' of many texts written from the viewpoint of child survivors of the Holocaust.²⁸ The same temporal split is apparent in Najjar's text, with passages dealing with the past time of a childhood in wartime, alternating with a narrative set in and focusing on the present of the post-Civil War era. The narration is therefore divided between a child's and adult's perspective: while the present is described from the adult narrator's perspective, the past is narrated retrospectively, with some passages clearly written from the perspective of the adult narrator looking back on past events, while others offer the point of view of the narrator as a child. The discontinuity of the narration is further emphasised by the use of tenses. Passages focusing on the present of post-war Beirut are written in the present tense, whilst passages dealing with the past are written not only in the past historic or imperfect (when presenting the adult narrator's perspective), but also in the present tense (when written from a child's point of view).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175, ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

 ²⁷ Ibid., pp. 77-78.
 ²⁸ See Vice, Children Writing the Holocaust, pp. 12-28.

Naijar's text is marked by a feeling of nostalgia for the time of childhood, which strikingly differs from that in Chédid's novel. Nostalgia in L'École de la guerre corresponds to what Boym defines in her typology as 'reflective nostalgia': 'reflective nostalgia thrives in algia, the longing itself. 29 As opposed to 'restorative nostalgia', which constitutes an 'attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space'. 30 Indeed, Chédid's text, as we have just seen, displays an attempt to reconstruct a lost, mythical time, thus recreating an original image where the passage of time is defied. Najjar's text, on the contrary, is concerned with historical time and does not attempt to recover any 'absolute truth'.31 As Boym underlines, reflective nostalgia can present an 'ethical challenge', all the more so in the case of Najiar's narrative since the object of nostalgia is simultaneously the time of childhood and the time of war.

The adult narrator's nostalgia is clearly apparent in the passages written in the imperfect tense, this tense having both a descriptive and iterative value, thus emphasising habits which characterised the time of childhood and, significantly, war. In Chapter XII, for instance, the narrator's recollection of the past is triggered one morning at the church of Notre-Dame des Dons by the candles burning on the altar. He thus remembers how, as a child, candles were the only source of light in Beirut's homes: 'au moment où les canons pilonnaient Beyrouth, cette bougie à la flamme fragile était le seul moyen de vaincre l'obscurité'. 32 His longing for the time of childhood, which is inseparable from that of war, is then expressed in the following lines: 'nos leçons, c'est à la lueur de la bougie que nous les avons apprises; les parties de cartes, c'est à côté d'une bougie que nous les avons jouées; nos premiers baisers, c'est en éteignant une bougie que nous les avons échangés'. This episode also illustrates one of the most distinctive features of accounts of war times by or about children, that is the confusion or blurring of

personal, developmental events with historical events,³³ as there is no indication in the text that the children in the narrator's family understood the historical events occurring.

Another feature shared by Najjar's text and Holocaust accounts by or about children, is the errors or distortion of fact or perception, which both highlight the naivety of the children represented and feed into the nostalgic dimension of the narrative. One example can be found in Chapter XIX, where the past is also evoked in the imperfect tense. Whilst sitting at a café in one of the old districts of Beirut, the narrator watches old men playing cards or games of 'trictrac'. This vision triggers the narrator's recollection of his childhood, when his family had to seek refuge in the country in the region of Kesrouan. School times were therefore replaced by idle times spent playing various games: 'avant la guerre, je ne connaissais rien aux cartes: je les tenais en éventail d'une facon si désordonnée que je me découvrais à tous les coups. À la fin de la guerre, aucun jeu n'avait plus de secret pour moi!'34 This evocation of a happy childhood continues for a few pages, highlighting both the naivety of the child, unaware of the seriousness of the events which caused these unexpected 'grandes vacances que [...] concédait la guerre' - the use of the term 'grandes vacances' emphasising the child's vision in his likening of this period to summer holidays - and the adult narrator's longing for this time of childhood, which is expressed in an ethically challenging remark at the end of this chapter:

En voyant les habitués du café souffler dans leur poing et lancer les dés d'une main experte, je n'ai pu m'empêcher de penser à ce que la guerre avait de meilleur - si tant est que la guerre puisse avoir du bon: ces moments de désœuvrement qu'elle nous accordait et qui nous réconciliaient avec la nature et le temps.35

The naivety of the child's vision is explained in the text through the narration of a particular event, where one night, when shells

Boym, The Future of Nostalgia, p. xviii.
 Ibid., p. 49.
 Ibid., p. 49.
 Najjar, pp. 59-60.

³³ Vice, Children Writing the Holocaust, p. 2. ³⁴ Najjar, p. 87. ³⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

were exploding outside their home, the narrator's mother reassured her child by disguising the reality of the war: 'ce n'est rien, mon bébé. Juste des feux d'artifice'. Later on, the mother was to justify her action in the following terms: 'c'est un "mensonge blanc". J'ai travesti la réalité pour berner votre peur. [...] Je ne regrette pas une seule seconde de vous avoir menti'. 36 The impact of the mother's words and the child's subsequent naivety are thus underlined by the narrator: 'nous autres, enfants, étions à mille lieux de réaliser l'ampleur du danger [...]: nous étions assez naïfs pour croire les boniments des grands'. The narration of this event, which highlights the child's view of the war as a 'carnaval' is echoed by episodes written in the present tense similarly presenting a vision of the war as a 'spectacle', 38 though this time giving the reader direct access to the child's experience. It is this childhood naivety and lack of awareness which the narrator confesses to have desperately hung on to while growing up, and which he was only able to experience again through drinking: 'l'alcool nie le danger. Je n'étais même pas conscient des risques que je courais en m'exposant aux bombes. [...] j'étais trop absorbé par le spectacle! [...] Les fusées qui sillonnaient le ciel!'39 Similarly to what was highlighted earlier about Chédid's text, the world of childhood as a world of fiction is desperately re-enacted in adulthood, in an ambivalent representation of war where its reality is both denied and asserted at the same time.

Naivety, which feeds into the adult narrator's nostalgia, conveys an absence of trauma in the child's experience of the war. This raises the issue of the ambiguous ethics of Najjar's text, which lies neither in the account of common suffering nor in the reconstruction of a national identity through a nostalgic image of a past, idealised Lebanon. It is negotiated instead in the notion of a 'school of war'/'school of life', as emphasised in the title, L'École de la guerre, and in the prologue where the voice of the narrator clearly identifies with the voice of the author, with a direct

reference to the act of writing in the text and the mention of the time and place when the writing took place, 'Beyrouth, juin 1999': 'la guerre a été pour moi un insoutenable cauchemar, mais aussi comment le nier - une école de vie. Hemingway disait que "toute expérience de la guerre est sans prix pour un écrivain". Je veux le croire. Sans la guerre, j'aurais été un autre homme'. 40

However, somewhat similarly to Chédid's La Maison sans racines where the ethical dimension of the text is blurred 'from the inside' by the intrusion of elements from the present reality into the idealised past of childhood, the difficulty of Najjar's negotiation of the ethical position of his text is highlighted by the narration of two particular events taking place in the present time of the post-war era, in which the experience of the 'unsustainable nightmare' of the war comes to the fore, rather than the 'school of life' perspective. The first event is related in Chapter VI: the adult narrator is enjoying a sunny day on the beach ('assis au bord de la mer, je respire à pleins poumons. Le soleil, le sable, les palmiers, les filles en bikini, l'odeur de sel et d'huile solaire...') when a violent explosion suddenly disrupts his quiet moment of peace, triggering his panic: 'une déflagration me ramène brusquement à moi-même. Panique. – Que se passe-t-il? Un obus?⁴¹ The reason for the explosion is then provided by the beach attendant: a film on the Lebanese Civil War is being shot nearby, with the help of military pyrotechnics. What is revealed through this incident is the traumatic effect war had on the narrator; this isolated incident as an expression of trauma undermines to some extent the rest of the narrative which focuses on the evocation of a trauma-free happy childhood inflected by the narrator's nostalgia and the naïve child's perspective to which he clings. Besides, this episode is all the more significant since it further emphasises the ambivalence in the representation of war, based on the confusion between reality and fiction. Indeed, in quite an ironic, chiasmus structure, reality perceived as fiction in childhood turns here into fiction perceived as reality in adulthood. The second episode to be noted appears in

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Emphasis in the original. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21. ³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 21 and 67. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

the final chapter of Najjar's text. The adult narrator is invited for a drink at the Paris home of his former schoolteacher from Beirut. The schoolteacher takes this opportunity to show the narrator some old essays written by pupils during the Lebanese Civil War, some excerpts of which are reproduced in the text. In answer to simple questions such as 'décrivez votre maison', one child wrote:

Ma maison était jolie. Elle donnait sur la Méditerranée. Un jour, les miliciens des deux camps sont venus et ils ont occupé ma maison. Pas en même temps: à tour de rôle. Dans ma chambre, les uns ont écrit des slogans à la gloire de leur chef. Dans le salon, les autres ont dechiré son portrait et ils lui ont craché dessus. 42

The chapter ends with the schoolteacher's exclamation – 'ils avaient douze ou treize ans, a dit mon maître. D'ordinaire, à cet âge-là, on rêve'43 - which places Najjar's whole text and its evocation of childhood and war in a new perspective.

Conclusion

In the beginning was loss – loss of childhood, loss of innocence, loss of a nation. Andrée Chédid and Alexandre Najjar both attempt, each in their own way, to make up for this loss by reenacting a happy, idealised childhood whilst at the same time accounting for the tragedy of the Lebanese Civil War, in narratives which display a difficult negotiation of ethics on the part of these two writers. The ambiguity of the ethical dimension of these texts is also accentuated by the poetics of war developed, a poetics inflected by the world of childhood in its blurring of reality and fiction, where war is represented as a spectacle, a film sequence or an oniric vision. This poetics is eventually undermined by the eruption of the naked reality of the war, which is inseparable from

the loss of childhood for, to borrow Chédid's words, '[a]vant n'est déjà plus. [...] il ne reste plus que l'après'. 44

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 105-06. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴⁴ Chédid, p. 216.

Childhood Meets the *Tout-monde*: Émerveilles by Patrick Chamoiseau and Maure

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The trope of childhood has assumed increasing urgency in recent Francophone postcolonial literature as a mode with which writers actively explore and question the complexities of postcolonial situations. In the Francophone Caribbean, this concern has been particularly evident since the inauguration in France of the Comité pour la mémoire de l'esclavage (CPME) on 5 January 2004 (in application of what has popularly come to be known as la loi Taubira). The CPME's first publication, Mémoires de la traite négrière, de l'esclavage et de leurs abolitions,2 underscores the keen pedagogic concerns of the committee, which is composed of several prominent academic figures and presided over initially by Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé. After an initial discussion of the need to find methods to commemorate sensitively and appropriately the memory of slavery in the public domain, the second and most lengthy part of the publication is dedicated to 'Enseignement et recherche', focusing attention on 'Les programmes scolaires'; 'Les manuels scolaires'; 'Les actions pédagogiques' to cite but the first three categories. The publication thus places children at the centre of its proposed reforms (as does article two of the loi Taubira), urging for new academic syllabi reflecting the developments in law and public policy since 2001. This first CPME publication also includes the findings of its survey of how the issues of slavery and colonialism are currently

¹ A law passed on 10 May 2001, proposed by Guyanese *députée* Christiane Taubira, decreeing slavery and the slave trade a 'crime contre l'humanité'.

² Comité pour la mémoire de l'esclavage, Mémoires de la traite négrière, de l'esclavage et de leurs abolitions (Paris: La Découverte, 2005).

addressed in school textbooks. Whilst acknowledging the difficulties inherent in the task of constructing a more diverse educational programme, the committee nonetheless argues that 'ces arguments ne peuvent justifier en aucun cas la place mineure de la traite et de l'esclavage dans l'enseignement', calling on the 'Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche' to effect change at every level, from the école primaire through to the teacher training qualification the CAPES and the agrégation.

Such appeals to update educational policy (in order to ensure that the transmission of the memory of slavery and colonialism begin at as early an age as possible) resonate strongly with a number of works of children's literature produced by Francophone authors since the 1990s, particularly those from the Caribbean. Maryse Condé, Raphaël Confiant, Gisèle Pineau and Dany Laferrière have all written children's literature which is increasingly attracting academic attention. Condé has produced a number of texts for children with striking pedagogic aims, notably exploring the plight of Haitian boat people in Haïti Chérie; Confiant has translated two texts by Jamaican authors from English into French; Pineau explores questions of immigration, social deprivation and racism in metropolitan France in Un Papillon dans la cité; and Laferrière explores a childhood crush in Je suis fou de Vava.

The Martinican author Patrick Chamoiseau has also produced a considerable volume of children's literature, and this article will present his output for children, commencing with a discussion of renewed contemporary interest in childhood (particularly through the récit d'enfance) in the Francophone Caribbean, before moving to a more detailed consideration of his 1998 text, Emerveilles, coproduced with the artist Maure. It will be argued that Chamoiseau's approach in Émerveilles is a 're-drawing' of the space of Martinique, in order to teach the child about the traumatic legacy of slavery and colonialism, and how to co-exist with this memory, thus anticipating the stipulations of the loi Taubira and the policy changes urgently requested by the CPME. The use of monsters in the text, Creole and otherwise, as a means of conveying the colonial past, is also considered, and in this respect Émerveilles is read with reference to a seminal work of Antillean folklore by Thérèse Georgel, Contes et légendes des Antilles.9 Moreover, Émerveilles is one of the first of Chamoiseau's texts openly to engage with the notion of the Tout-monde and represents a remarkable attempt to introduce young readers (and their parents) to the most recent developments by Francophone Caribbean theorists.

Since the very beginning of his literary career, Patrick Chamoiseau has also published literature for children. Au Temps de l'antan: contes du pays Martinique was published in 1988¹⁰ (the same year the novel Chronique des sept misères appeared), and was awarded the Grand prix de la littérature de jeunesse. It was also, significantly, the first of Chamoiseau's works to be translated into English, appearing as Creole Folktales in 1994, 11 by Linda Coverdale (who has subsequently translated Chemin-d'école and Chronique des sept misères). Moreover, the author's very earliest published works have clear pedagogic aims to educate an Antillean public about the history of the islands. 12 The play Manman

³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 42-43. These domains are controlled by two separate Ministères: Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale and Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche. It would seem the report makes an appeal here to the 'Ministre de l'éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche', a post held by François Fillon at the time of its publication.

Maryse Condé, Haïti chérie. Illustrations de Marcelino Truong (Paris: Bayard, 1987); republished as Rêves amers (Paris: Bayard Jeunesse, 2001).

⁶ Evan Jones, Aventures sur la planète Knos, trans. Raphaël Confiant (Paris: Dapper, 1998); and James Berry, Un Voleur dans le village, récits, trans. Raphaël Confiant (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), which won the Prize for International Books for Young People in 1993.

Gisèle Pineau, Un Papillon dans la cité (Saint-Maur-des-Fosses: Sepia, 1997).

⁸ Dany Laferrière, Je suis fou de Vava (Québec: Éditions de la bagnole, 2005).

⁹ Thérèse Georgel, Contes et légendes des Antilles (Paris: Pocket Jeunesse, 1994). This is the edition consulted in this article, the text was originally published by Éditions Nathan, 1957

<sup>1931.

10</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau, Au Temps de l'antan: contes du pays Martinique. Fées et Gestes (Paris: Hatier, 1988).

Patrick Chamoiseau, Creole Folktales, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: New Press, 1994). Published in the UK as Strange Words (London: Granta 1998).

¹² We are reminded that Chamoiseau is a trained youth worker, as emphasised in his recent novel *Un Dimanche au cachot* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

Dlo contre la Fée Carabosse¹³ pits the 'baddie' of Antillean fairy tales against that of European folklore, and the bande dessinée entitled Les Antilles sous Bonaparte: Delgrès¹⁴ recounts the rebellion and refusal to return to slavery led by Delgrès in Guadeloupe. The choice of genres (theatre and BD) is unusual in contemporary Antillean literature, and marks them out as publications destined to attract the interest of adults and children alike. Such aims are neatly summed up by Lorna Milne, who finds that:

C'est sans doute le fait d'avoir subi cette stigmatisation infligée aux plus jeunes enfants qui inspire les premiers écrits de Chamoiseau que l'on pourrait classer comme rectificatifs et alternatives historiques et culturels.¹⁵

In 1998, Émerveilles appeared; to date it has not been translated into English and has received scant critical attention. More recently, Chamoiseau published Le Commandeur d'une pluie (suivi de L'Accra de la richesse) in 2002, illustrated by William Wilson.¹⁶

Childhood has been increasingly manifest in Antillean literature since the 1990s, and this is evident in the literary (re)turn towards the *récit d'enfance* heralded by the publication of *Antan d'enfance* by Chamoiseau in 1990. This reinvestment in the genre evokes a Francophone Caribbean tradition of *récits d'enfance* dating back to texts such as Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (1950) and Saint-John Perse's *Éloges* (1911). *Antan* was rapidly followed by *Chemin-d'école* in 1994, and the texts were finally established as a

trilogy with the publication of *A bout d'enfance* some eleven years later in 2005. This fifteen-year period from 1990-2005 witnessed a remarkable return to the *récit d'enfance* by authors such as Maryse Condé, Raphaël Confiant, Ernest Pepin, Gisèle Pineau, Daniel Maximin and Dany Laferrière, whose works display a number of contrasting approaches.

In their récits d'enfance, Creolist authors Chamoiseau and Confiant frame childhood as a fundamental moment of cultural impregnation which illustrates the cultural schizophrenia of postcolonial Martinique and Guadeloupe: in early infancy, the child is often depicted as immersed in the world of Creole language and folklore, although this is systematically eradicated upon entry into the French school system around the age of five or six. In Antillean literature, the discomfort caused by the dominant French language in school is already evident in the archetypal récit d'enfance by Zobel, and has been returned to most violently by post-1990 authors Chamoiseau (who vehemently denounces the pedagogic methods of the mission civilisatrice in Chemind'école)17 and Confiant (whose chabin child counterpart must endure racist expectations that he should be more educated meaning less 'créole' - than his nègre playmates in Ravines du devant-jour). 18 The potency of childhood in Francophone Caribbean literature, or more specifically Creolist literature, is theorised as early as 1989 in the co-authored manifesto Éloge de la Créolité. 19 The manifesto focuses on those creations inherent in, and particular to, the islands themselves, in a conscious rejection of European ideology and the African diaspora movement of Négritude (which promoted the recognition of Africa as a homeland). Éloge de la Créolité directly attacks the processes of alienation perpetuated under colonial schooling which denigrate the Creole language:

¹³ Patrick Chamoiseau, Manman Dlo contre la Fée Carabosse, théâtre conté (Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1982).

¹⁴ Patrick Chamoiseau and Georges Puisy, Les Antilles sous Bonaparte: Delgrès (Fort-de-France: Éditions Désormeaux, 1981). For further details of Chamoiseau's involvement with bande dessinée see the article 'La BD dans les Caraïbes' by Christophe Cassiau-Haurie Rose Hill, available online at: http://www.montraykreyol.org/spip.php?article1464 [accessed 9 July 2009].

¹⁵ Lorna Milne, Patrick Chamoiseau: Espaces d'une écriture antillaise (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 62.

¹⁶ Patrick Chamoiseau, Le Commandeur d'une pluie (suivi de L'Accra de la richesse), illustrated by William Wilson (Paris: Gallimard; Giboulées, 2002).

Patrick Chamoiseau, Chemin-d'école (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).
 Raphaël Confiant. Rayines du devant-jour (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

¹⁹ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Éloge de la Créolité / In Praise of Creoleness, trans. Mohammed B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

Chaque fois qu'une mère, croyant favoriser l'acquisition de la langue française, a refoulé le créole dans la gorge d'un enfant, cela n'a été en fait qu'un coup porté à l'imagination de ce dernier, qu'un envoi en déportation de sa créativité. Les instituteurs de la grande époque de la francisation ont été les négriers de notre élan artistique.²⁰

Their choice of metaphor is obviously extremely emotive in the Antillean context and clearly identifies mothers and school-teachers, pictured here as adherents of the *mission civilisatrice*, as culpable of perpetuating cycles of alienation. The continued repression of Creole identity has led to Antilleans being 'fondamentalement frappés d'extériorité' according to the Creolists.²¹ Crucially, what is required to overcome this *extériorité*, or alienation, is a 'vision intérieure' which the Creolists equate to childhood itself, calling for Caribbean artists to adopt an approach which captures 'un peu de ce regard d'enfance, questionneur de tout, qui n'a pas encore ses postulats et qui interroge même les évidences'.²³ Recapturing the gaze of childhood is presented as a means of rediscovering the essence of Creole identity, so that childhood is a privileged site in the Creolist project.

It is in this context of a renewed engagement with childhood that Émerveilles appears, published six years after Texaco received the Prix Goncourt. Yet the text is actually positioned at a crossroads in Chamoiseau's literary career, as since the appearance of Éloge and the success of his early novels, the Antillean literary scene has undergone another transformation with repercussions for aesthetics and theory, with the publication of Edouard Glissant's novel Tout-monde.²⁴ This sprawling novel generated new debates on identity, developing the theory of 'relation' (discussed at length from Le Discours antillais onwards) into the notion of the Tout-monde. Thus Émerveilles emerges as an important transitional text at a moment in Chamoiseau's career when we see the author

engaging with his own conceptions of the *Tout-monde*.²⁵ This slippage between his adult and children's literature is already evident in *Au Temps de l'antan*, which includes a fourteen-item bibliography of sources, including works by Georgel, Lafcadio Hearn, Aimé Césaire and Edouard Glissant, an indication that both the child and adult reader are being addressed.

Émerveilles

published in 1998 Gallimard Émerveilles was Jeunesse/Giboulées. It continues Chamoiseau's pattern of publishing works composed of texts and images (paintings or photographs).26 At first glance, Emerveilles, an A4-sized book, its twenty tales each introduced by a title and accompanying image which occupies one whole page of A4 paper, might seem firmly inscribed within the genre of illustrated children's literature.27 However, the book's genesis reveals a different production methodology. Maure, the pseudonym of Marie-Laure Elmin, is a Martinican artist. Born in Fort-de-France in 1954, she has regularly displayed work in Martinique and France since 1996, including exhibitions at the Bibliothèque Schœlcher ('Exposition sur le jazz', December 1997) and at the island's leading conference and entertainment centres Madiana (in Schoelcher) and the Atrium (in Fort-de-France). In April 1998, Maure also produced the poster accompanying Edouard Glissant's text for the Comité Devoir de Mémoire to commemorate the 150th anniversary

²⁵ Similarly, around the same time in the extended essay Écrire en pays dominé (Paris:

Gallimard, 1997) Chamoiseau develops his theory of the pierre-monde, which is heavily indebted to Glissant's Tout-monde.

26 Including: Chamoiseau with Rodolphe Hammadi, Traces-mémoires du bagne (Paris:

²⁶ Including: Chamoiseau with Rodolphe Hammadi, Traces-mémoires du bagne (Paris: Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques et des Sites, 1994); with Jean-Luc de Laguarigue, Elmire des sept bonheurs (Paris, Gallimard-Habitation Saint-Etienne, 1998) and Tracées de Mélancolies (Habitation Saint-Etienne: Éditions Traces HSE, 1999).

²⁷ The layout (each tale is composed of three or more A4 pages of continuous prose) and the challenging and at times invented language Chamoiseau uses, suggest that the book would be read aloud to children until they had become very confident readers themselves, thus preserving the orality so valued by the author. This reading pattern is also suggested in the final *conte* in a kind of *mise en abyme* where the child protagonist overhears his parents reading an unidentified book (which is recognisably *Le Petit Prince* by Saint-Exupéry) and is delighted to be allowed to sit with them as they read it.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁴ Edouard Glissant, *Tout-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

of the abolition of slavery, which was displayed in Martinique and at the entrance to the Panthéon in Paris. The image was additionally used for a postcard campaign calling for the recognition of slavery as a crime against humanity (prior to, and paving the way for, the 2001 *loi Taubira*). Her work has been regularly profiled in *France-Antilles* and she was identified as one of '[c]eux qui font bouger la Martinique' in a special issue of *Le Nouvel Observateur* (December 2002). She describes her own artistic approach as follows:

Maure aime l'art brut et l'art africain, les couleurs sombres dans lesquelles elle se sent mieux. D'ailleurs, ses couleurs sont toujours plus ou moins éteintes car elle y trouve plus d'intensité, de mystère.²⁹

Rather than Maure providing paintings for Chamoiseau's texts, the collection's origins actually lie in a series of her paintings, exhibited as 'Émerveilles', and divided into two sections. 'Monstres et Merveilles' includes the paintings which would form the starting point for Chamoiseau's tales in *Émerveilles*, and 'Irascibles' reflects upon Maure's artistic production more generally.³⁰ Maure explains the creation of the book *Émerveilles* as follows:

[...] il ne s'agit pas d'illustrations. J'ai utilisé de la colle et de l'acrylique sur papier pour réaliser des tableaux qui m'ont moi-même surpris puisque au départ je n'avais aucune idée de ce que j'allais faire [...] inexorablement c'est cela qui a surgi. Après chaque réalisation je donnais un titre et ensuite, à partir du titre et du tableau, j'écrivais immédiatement une petite trame de l'histoire. Patrick avec son talent, sa générosité et son style a travaillé au développement des histoires. C'est là la magie du livre. Il ne s'agit pas d'illustrations, c'est l'auteur qui s'est adapté aux tableaux.³¹

The twenty images at the beginning of each tale are mostly rendered in subdued tones, with blocks of background colour onto which the main images are painted, creating a sense of texture. Abstract and surreal contours, and a repeated play with scales of size, convey a sense of mystery akin to Alice in Wonderland. The dazzling brilliance of certain images (such as the golden 'Fil d'or') ensures that the book is visually intriguing, and is designed to appeal to the child's imagination. Émerveilles represents a fusion of Martinican literature and art, and remains unique amongst Antillean cultural output in this respect. The title, too, deserves further comment. Émerveilles is not a standard French word, but is coined by Maure and Chamoiseau, and is related to the verb 'émerveiller' which means to amaze or astonish. To the French reader, the term is also connected to the word 'merveilles' and thus purposely forges a link with Alice in Wonderland, translated in French as Alice au pays des merveilles (Alice in Wonderland is a text which reappears throughout Chamoiseau's literature and is one of the texts Marie-Sophie saves from her shack during the fire in Texaco). Indeed, a child might easily mistakenly hear Carroll's title as Alice au pays d'émerveilles. Chamoiseau and Maure are suggesting Martinique as a wonderland, preparing us for the magical realism, and surrealism, of the stories which follow.

In the collection, Martinique is both a place of fantastical mystery and a place of former misery under slavery. Chamoiseau transmits the memory of slavery in tales which concentrate upon the re-accommodation of this traumatic memory in the contemporary post-slavery era, as references to slavery are transformed through allegory into stories suitable for infants. Thus even the most painful fragments of history are sensitively woven into the fabric of the marvels, or *émerveilles*, of Martinique. The narrative voice itself is elusive yet all pervasive. Lewis Carl Seifert finds that in *Au Temps de l'antan*:

unlike many Anglo-American writers who deliberately eschew a single, coherent, and omniscient narrator in favor of multiple, sometimes dissonant voices, Chamoiseau casts his narrator as a Creole

²⁸ Information gathered from *Press Book: Maure, artiste peintre* kindly provided by Maure in March 2009, p. 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

France-Antilles Magazine, 12 December 1998, pp. 46-47.
 E-mail from Maure to Louise Hardwick, 22 March 2009.

storyteller from the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century French Antilles.³²

In Émerveilles, the narrator is mainly intradiegetic, contained within the story itself as an observer or relaying a story in the model of the conteur, although in contrast to Au Temps de l'antan. the collection is marked by a temporal fluidity, setting tales just after abolition in 1848, as well as firmly in the present day (discussing car crashes, bétonisation and computer games). This manipulation of time is also vital to the aesthetics of cohabitation integral to Chamoiseau's understanding of the Tout-monde: the cohabitation of past and present (and future), of slavery and freedom, and indeed of the characters within the tales, amongst whom there is a noticeable predilection for pairs: Bouboule and crapaud, Angèle and Chagarou, Siamese twins Fifine and Félé, chien and chat, Fidémone and Ticho as well as Mabou l'âne-chien (a dog which transforms into a donkey), Fil d'or (a golden thread which turns into a snake) and Man Loli and her stick. Such narrative devices enable Chamoiseau to elaborate on the themes of sharing, exchange and (loving) interdependence he promotes throughout the collection.

Martinique opening onto the *Tout-monde*: 'on voit le monde à partir de n'importe quel pays'

The foregrounding of place and space is emphasised on the very first pages of *Émerveilles*, which contain a map of the island with a key. Rather than being a map intended to illustrate a journey through a fantastical land, such as the maps found in Tolkien and British children's literature of the 1920s and 1930s, the map shows exactly where each story in the volume takes place on the island. Each story is a separate entity. Characters do not journey across the island as the narrative develops (although we glimpse one or

two of them in more than one location), 33 but rather through the individual tales we become acquainted with specific towns or places. The map is also presented as a link to a former time: it is given the quaint, archaic title: En isle de la Martinique / Carte des émerveilles. As the archaic French spelling subtly suggests, the map is from early colonial times, and the capital city is referred to as Fort-Royal, not Fort-de-France (the name was changed after the French Revolution of 1789). We are presented with twenty numbered locations, each referring to a story, and anchoring it in a specific place in Martinique, or rather, the reworked map of colonial Martinique. This idea of re-drawing space is a leitmotif throughout the text. The explicit exploration of the link between place, history and identity formation recalls the work of French historian Pierre Nora, whose Les Lieux de mémoire (1992) famously neglects to explore the role of colonial space in the construction of the French national identity: 'Nora's concept of Frenchness is nation-centred, tied closely to the geography of the Hexagon; there is only fleeting recognition of the role played by colonial expansion in the formation of national and republican identity'.34 Émerveilles makes a strong case for the interconnectedness of important generators of Martinican identity folklore and subaltern oral memory - with specific places, as the child is encouraged to actively locate tales on the opening map of Martinique as part of the reading (or listening) experience.

The first story in the collection is entitled 'La Marmaille qui pêchait sans hameçon'. A young girl who has been rejected by her family saves a fishing village plagued by famine. The fishing village is identified on the map as Sainte Anne, which is a popular beach on the island and, in modern times, is also where Martinique's 'Club Med' Hotel resort is located. The tale considers Sainte Anne further back in time, in a period well before

³² Lewis Carl Seifert, 'Orality, History, and "Creoleness" in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Creole Folktales*', *Marvels & Tales*, 16.2 (2002), 214-30 (p. 214).

³³ For example, Man Loli, who originally appears in her own tale set in Lamentin, is later found in Macouba, visiting her grandchildren in 'Fifine et Félé'. The reappearance of characters occurs from tale to tale, and by referring to previous characters without directly naming them, the child experiences the pleasure of 'working out' who the *conteur* is talking about, without being directly told.

³⁴ Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, 'Introduction: The Case for Francophone Postcolonial Studies', in Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (eds.), Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction (London: Amold, 2003), pp. 1-14 (p. 2).

modernisation and 'Club Med-isation', in a reclaiming of the space for Martinicans. Chamoiseau is at pains to precisely situate the action of his opening tale, geographically and temporally:

Cela se produisit dans une petite commune. Bien au Sud pays. Entre le Cap Chevalier et la vieille Anse Michel, tout au ras de la mer. En ces époques (d'avant baptême du diable) les pêcheurs étaient encore nombreux. Les nègres d'ici-là venaient d'abandonner l'esclavage des champs-de-cannes. Beaucoup d'entre eux s'étaient convertis en compagnons de la mer. C'était le beau moyen de s'éloigner de la terre, de la boue et des chiques, et des sueurs et des fouets qui s'en venaient avec. Devenir un pêcheur c'était hmmmh fréquenter l'horizon, siéger avec l'écume réfléchissante des vagues [...]. Ces gens, venus des cannes, se transformaient très vite. La terre des champs leur avait abîmé le regard. Et recourbé l'échine. [...] Et, comme ils devaient chaque jour surveiller l'horizon (et empoigner la vie sans attendre une écuelle), cela leur redressait le dos d'un trait d'autorité.

Fishing is described in a post-slavery context as an admirable and covetable occupation. Moreover, it presents a method of escaping the insularity of Martinique and becoming aware of the neighbouring islands and the rest of the Caribbean archipelago: '[Les pêcheurs de cette région] étaient réputés au travers du pays (et même sur les rives si proches et si lointaines des îles de Sainte-Luce et de la Dominique)'. 36 'Si proches et si lointaines': these islands are visible from Martinique when the weather is clear, yet colonial history has cleaved up the region, imposing formidable cultural and linguistic barriers. Significantly for the Creolist project, (French-based) Creole is a shared attribute of these neighbouring isles, as demonstrated in the work of St Lucian Derek Walcott and Dominican-born Jean Rhys, although this is left unexplored in the text. The narrative ends with a moral, which is a message of tolerance and respect (all twenty tales conclude in a similar style and tone):

 35 Patrick Chamoiseau and Maure, Émerveilles (Paris: Gallimard Jeunesse/Giboulées, 1998), p. 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

... pêcher sans hameçon c'était d'abord être libre de toutes les formes d'hameçons: rien vouloir prendre conquérir dominer, mais vouloir tout donner; et, en finale de compte, tout recevoir à force d'offrande totale.³⁷

The author advocates generosity, which will be richly rewarded, and his language specifically evokes the colonial project, characterised by pillage and plunder. The collection thus opens by warning against domination of any kind.

Moreover, this first tale, through its setting and its conclusion, insists upon the importance of fluidity which is central to the Glissantian concept of the *Tout-monde*, in which 'toutes ces langues [...] fracassent l'une dans l'autre comme des crêtes de vagues en furie'. Glissant posits the *Tout-monde* as a shift in global culture in which language and identity have become mobile, plural constructs, rendering notions of isolation or dislocation (particularly those which might arise due to geography) redundant: 'on voit le monde à partir de n'importe quel pays'. This notion of a different, yet shared, common experience of humanity which opens up new vistas on the world is found in the conclusions to several of Chamoiseau's tales, notably at the close of 'Fifine et Félé' about Siamese twins who share a hand. Rather than fighting, their single hand gives them:

le grand amour inévitable. [...] Cet amour ne s'élevait pas d'un manque, d'un désir, d'un besoin ou d'une frustration, il s'épanouissait au mitan de cette main, dans le don souverain et le partage indéfaisable. Offert au monde entier, il leur restituait le monde tout entier. [...] cet autre amour sur lequel nous devrons entreprendre (en quelque temps du passé ou boucle de l'avenir) une autre manière de vivre ensemble. 40

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁸ Glissant, Tout-monde, p. 20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁰ Chamoiseau and Maure, Émerveilles, p. 85.

As the storyteller works to his triumphant climax, it is Fifine and Félé's apparent handicap which is transformed into their greatest asset. This notion of experiencing the world even from one particular, apparently restricted perspective or geographical location, is reassessed and revalorised throughout the collection.

Reading Creole Monsters

The second tale, 'Bleu et l'oreiller plein de sommeil' interrogates linguistic and cultural domination arising as a result of colonialism. Colonialism itself is personified as a strange monster who invades the house of a family in Fort-de-France. ⁴¹ After travelling all over the world, the monster arrives in Martinique and immediately subjugates the family:

Le monstre connaissait des manières innombrables qui avaient fini par le rendre fou car il n'acceptait qu'une vérité unique: la sienne. Qu'une certitude: la sienne. Or depuis qu'il voyageait, il allait de vérités en vérités, de certitudes en certitudes, dans les aléas de la diversité des peuples et du désordre des hommes. Il avait d'abord cru pouvoir supprimer ces étrangetés en les éliminant, puis en les modelant selon les lois de son Universel, puis en les collectionnant dans de petites malles qui servaient de musées. Mais il s'aperçut qu'ils étaient inépuisables. [...] Il devina enfin que ce monde ne pouvait se réduire à son unique vouloir, à l'image standardisée de son seul visage. 42

Through the monster, the tale presents an allegory for colonisation and domination. Indeed, the 'Universel' (a fragment of the French Republican ideal) is a despised term throughout Chamoiseau's literature, which he strives to counter with 'le divers'. The monster will finally meet his match in the family's youngest child, Joli-Gentil who has spent the entire tale asleep thus far. However, he

has been sleeping on a magic blue pillow, and his dreams have equipped him with a supply of imagined happenings which enable him to overcome the monster: 'Joli-Gentil, par ses rêves, avait voyagé lui aussi dans le total du monde, mais en errance et disponibilité en face des vérités'. 43 Again, the terms 'errance' and 'disponibilité' convey the fluidity fundamental to Chamoiseau's conception of the *Tout-monde*. It is suggested that just undertaking an imaginary journey through time and space, into the 'divers', will mean you are able to cope with, and embrace, the world's diversity in real life. This is an important message for children who grow up in increasingly straitened economic circumstances in the Antilles, and who come to regard the island space as restrictive and insular in every sense (as portrayed in the recent film Nèg maron, whose teenage protagonists feel literally trapped in Guadeloupe, a debate rendered all the more urgent since the general strikes of early 2009 in the Caribbean DOMs).⁴⁴ The potential irony of this message coming from a successful author who frequently has the opportunity to travel all over the world may perhaps not be lost on adult readers, although Chamoiseau is doubtlessly encouraging an actual passion for travelling and experiencing the other in his readership, firstly through the power of imagination, and secondly in real life. Again, Chamoiseau rewrites space, so the island's openness to the outside world becomes apparent through Joli-Gentil's dreams. Martinique becomes an interactive hub rather than a dead end, reminding us of Glissant's insistence that the Antilles are 'une multi-relation [...] Dans un tel contexte, l'insularité prend un autre sens. On prononce ordinairement l'insularité comme un monde de l'isolement, comme une névrose d'espace. Dans la Caraïbe, pourtant, chaque île est une ouverture'. 45 Chamoiseau's tale ends by explaining the significance of the pillow's colour: blue stands for another, uncolonisable space, the sky: 'Le ciel: seul espace (tout vide et tout rempli) qui lie et qui relie les pays et les peuples', 46

⁴¹ For a discussion of the notion of hospitality in this tale and the collection more generally, see: Dominique Bertrand, 'Ré-inventer l'hospitalité? Lecture traversière d'*Émerveilles*', in Alain Montandon (ed.), *L'Hospitalité dans les contes* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2001), pp. 53-68.

⁴² Chamoiseau and Maure, Emerveilles, p. 20.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Nèg maron, directed by Jean-Claude Flamand, 2005.

⁴⁵ Edouard Glissant, Le Discours antillais (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 427.

⁴⁶ Chamoiseau and Maure, Émerveilles, p. 22.

The strange monster, who is described through his actions and not through his physical appearance, is just one of several monsters in the collection. The term monster is etymologically descended from the Latin monstro, to show or demonstrate, and thus monsters take their name from that which 'shows' or 'demonstrates', something portentous requiring decoding, from Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel to the 'errors of nature' considered by Montaigne in the Renaissance. In Creole folklore, monsters occupy a particular role in the construction of the imaginary, functioning as indicators of the colonial legacy of slavery and domination, a point underscored by Chamoiseau in the introduction to Au Temps de l'antan:

> Si leur fonction ludique est indéniable (quel meilleur terreau d'espoir que le rire quand on doit vivre dans une manière d'enfer?), ils constituent globalement une dynamique éducative, un mode d'apprentissage de la vie, ou plus exactement de la survie en pays colonisé: le conte créole dit que la peur est là, que chaque brin du monde est terrifiant, et qu'il faut savoir vivre avec [...].

This account of Creole folklore immediately homes in on the pedagogic function of the tales, and can instructively be read alongside the introduction Thérèse Georgel provides in Contes et légendes des Antilles. Georgel is the reference for Antillean folklore, and is affectionately remembered by the narrator of Pineau's L'Exil selon Julia: 'Les récits de Man Ya ourlent d'autres versions tirées des Contes et Légendes des Antilles de Thérèse Georgel'.48 Pineau then includes a page-long extract from Georgel's first tale, 'Légende du vieux Malvan: d'après une poésie de Daniel Thaly' about a slave master who buried his slaves alive and is haunted and tormented to death by them, to become the mythical Antillean horseman condemned to ride endlessly through the countryside at night. The introduction to Georgel's publication reflects the assimilationist culture of her time:

Les Antilles françaises sont devenues actuellement département [sic] français. C'est une consécration qui n'a rien ajouté à l'amour des Antillais pour la France. Lorsqu'elles n'étaient strictement que colonies françaises. l'Antillais disait en parlant de la France: 'la Mère Patrie!'49

Nonetheless, we find in Georgel an insistence upon the mystery and hybridity of Creole folklore which anticipates Chamoiseau's Créolité and Maure's emphasis on mystery:

[...] les contes demeurent, car on y retrouve le mystère et le merveilleux des isles, et aussi leur douceur que l'on sent venir à soi avant même que d'y arriver. [...] Toutes les Antilles sont là, avec leur poésie, leur goût du merveilleux, dans l'exubérance, la gaieté, l'insouciance, la bonté et le courage. Croisements étranges et inattendus de races, sorties du même creuset et marquées du sceau antillais.50

In marked contrast to Chamoiseau, Georgel provides a 'doudouist' account of the Antilles, yet, similarly to him, she is keen to emphasise the cultural diversity, pan-Caribbean origins and dissemination of this folklore. Both Georgel's collection and Émerveilles introduce readers/listeners to a host of monsters specific to Creole folklore:

Dans les jardins de nos merveilles règnent les Soucougnans, les Bêtesàman-ibè, les treize façons de nos zombis, les femmes-diablesses à chevelure dans la dentelle des jours de pluies. Nous avons les Engagés dont la peau délaissée se cramponne à l'arrière des portes. Nous avons (c'est sérieux) les Personnes-Mofwazé qui prennent à volonté l'allure de grands oiseaux; le Piti-Sapotille qui vous écrase si vous le transportez; la Manman-dlo qui rêvasse aux rivières et vous fait disparaître au moindre dérespect [...]. Si bien qu'en ce pays, si nous sommes quatre cent mille à marcher au soleil, nous parvenons (lors des nuits de pleine lune) au chiffre sous-estimé d'un million et demi

⁴⁷ Chamoiseau, Au Temps de l'antan, p. 10. Original emphasis.

⁴⁸ Gisèle Pineau, L'Exil selon Julia (Paris: Stock, 1996), p. 116.

⁴⁹ Georgel, Contes et légendes des Antilles, p. 6. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

d'âmes, tant il est vrai que les peuplades de notre merveille n'apparaissent au regard qu'en ces circonstances-là. 51

The list of characters includes the main types of quimbois-related monsters, all malevolent: soucougnans are diabolical creatures who shed their skin at night and fly like birds to drink the blood of their victims. The word is said to come from the Peul 'sukunyadio'. Bêtes-àman-ibè (Bêtes-à-man-Hubert) refers to 'a sorceress who wanders at night with one human foot and one horse or donkey hoof, shrieking and dragging a long iron chain around her waist'. 52 The zombie is a pan-Caribbean character, and the femmediablesse or guiablesse is 'a beautiful woman with long silky hair',53 recognisable by her feet - one is shaped like a donkey's hoof. She is a notorious seducer of men, leading them off into the woods, never to be seen again. In Émerveilles, however, it becomes evident that these 'indigenous' cultural folkloric aspects are under threat from imported European models. Thus in 'Le lutin au château-corossol' the narrator wonders how a hobgoblin has arrived in Martinique, an occurrence ingeniously explained as follows:

Mal nul n'imaginait que dans chaque avion, chaque bateau, chaque chambre d'hôtel, emplis au rythme des saisons du soleil, se serraient d'invisibles visiteurs venus des autres merveilles: des Elfes d'Islande, des Gnomes de Hollande, Gobelins de montagnes, Farfadets de tavernes, [...] des Fées de Grande-Bretagne, cendrillons-sans-souliers et des Chaperons Rouges [...] et autres créatures sans carte d'identité qu'aucun douanier n'aurait laissées entrer.⁵⁴

There is an important break here with Chamoiseau's literature 'for adults'. In his 'adult' works, Chamoiseau makes it clear that these

cultural elements arrived in Martinique well before the modern era, during colonialism. His children's literature in this instance avoids explicitly linking them with the French colonial civilising mission, and identifies a new, modern form of economic neocolonialism, tourism, as the reason for their arrival. On the question of colonial influences, Georgel is more forthright as she explains her collection includes 'l'histoire du compère Lapin et de Léphant venue d'Angola [...] l'histoire du petit Poucet, amenée jadis par quelque cadet venu chercher fortune aux isles du Vent'.55 Yet in Émerveilles, in contrast to texts such as Chemin-d'école, the discussion of the co-existence of Creole and French folklore does not serve to criticise the cultural intolerance of the mission civilisatrice, but is humorously framed in the contemporary period as connected with tourism. Indeed, ecologically irresponsible tourism and bétonisation more generally are maligned throughout the collection (we are reminded of Chamoiseau's involvement with ASSAUPAMAR, L'Association pour la Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Martiniquais).

Conclusions

Émerveilles reflects a shift in Chamoiseau's literary output and the notion of the *Tout-monde* firmly informs the project. In another idiosyncratic flourish, there is an 'opening' or 'ouverture' by way of a preface, and then a 're-opening' as an afterword, which as Lorna Milne suggests, reinforces the rejection of finality and closed endings which we find throughout Chamoiseau's literature. Moreover, the final text, the 're-opening', confirms the relationship to place and space that the author has been attempting to create throughout the collection. The book's presentation and structure, through the inclusion of the map at its opening, embeds stories in the space of Martinique, traversing colonial history *and* the Martinican landscape and pointing out how the two are inseparable, acting out the 'regard d'enfance' called for in *Éloge*.

⁵¹ Chamoiseau and Maure, Émerveilles, p. 73.

⁵² Ivette Romero-Cesareo, 'Sorcerers, She-Devils, and Shipwrecked Women: Writing Religion in French-Caribbean Literature', in Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (eds), Sacred Possessions: Voudou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean (Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 248-66 (p. 254).

Ibid., p. 254.
 Chamoiseau and Maure, Émerveilles, p. 74.

⁵⁵ Georgel, Contes et légendes des Antilles, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁶ Milne, Patrick Chamoiseau: Espaces d'une écriture antillaise, p. 198.

This 'regard' is stimulated by Maure's surreal and fantastical paintings, which lend themselves to multiple interpretations and deserve further attention than space has allowed here.

The incorporation of texts such as *Émerveilles* into school syllabi would begin to address the concerns of the CPME, as the collection presents an allegorical treatment of slavery through a discussion of monsters and testifies to a desire to present the taboo slave heritage as a contingent, if painful, part of the marvel of Martinique. Moreover, it is suggested that Martinique need not be an enclosed, insular space, but can emerge as a wonderland from which the marvels of the outside world may also be apprehended, as in the story of Joli-Gentil and his magical blue pillow. In the conclusion, or 'ré-ouverture', to *Émerveilles*, Chamoiseau homes in on this very project:

Le défi contemporain de la littérature sera peut-être de deviner l'émoi d'une conscience du Tout-monde. Les peuples, les cultures, les races, les dieux, les traditions, les langues, les explications de l'univers, sont aujourd'hui connectées entre elles, s'influencent, se relativisent, et se changent mutuellement. L'écrivain [...] n'est pas enfermé dans l'absolu de son village, de sa culture, de sa langue. Il est projeté dans le flux ouvert des langues et des possibles. 57

Émerveilles attempts to both ground itself in the specificities of Martinican geography and to literally and metaphorically re-draw the country, whilst also remaining unwaveringly determined to open the child's imaginary to different periods of time and to a manner of seeing Martinique as firmly connected to the world beyond its island perimeters. As such, it casts light upon the significant role of childhood in Francophone postcolonial debates, as well as introducing Maure's captivating artistry to a wider audience. The collection thus emerges as a book which is of significant interest for any discussion of childhood and/or Antillean art, as well as proving an obligatory reference for analysis of subsequent engagement with the Tout-monde in Chamoiseau's work.

Child's Play? Storytelling and Ideology in 1920s Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

Representations of childhood have been central to Francophone African literature since its emergence in the first half of the twentieth century. These representations have taken various forms and have been produced by authors as diverse as the Negritude poet Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Marxist writer-filmmaker Ousmane Sembene. In the decades following the Second World War, writing from Francophone sub-Saharan Africa increasingly sought to promote a pan-African cultural nationalism, which asserted the beauty and authenticity of indigenous cultural practices. A central aspect of this process was the idealisation of African childhood in texts such as Camara Lave's L'Enfant noir in which the author-narrator looks back nostalgically from his current location as an adult immigrant in Paris on his upbringing in rural Guinea.¹ Similarly, in Senghor's poetry there is a nostalgic longing for the continent, which becomes associated for him with romanticised memories of his childhood in the Senegalese region of Sine. In the poem 'Que m'accompagnent kora et balafong'.2 he writes of 'paradis, mon enfance africaine', while in 'Joal', the insistent repetition of 'Je me rappelle' underlines his love for the site of his childhood, a theme that he would develop all through his career: in a later collection, Éthiopiques (1956), he refers to his

⁵⁷ Chamoiseau and Maure, Émerveilles, p. 126. Original emphasis.

Camara Laye, L'Enfant noir (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1957 [1953]).

Léopold Sédar Senghor, Œuvre poétique (Paris: Seuil, 2006), p. 28.

childhood as 'Royaume d'enfance',³ and he declares that 'je confonds toujours l'enfance et l'Éden'.⁴

If these texts present an adult nostalgia for a pristine, Edenic childhood, then others were directly addressed to children themselves: for example, in well-known texts such as Birago Diop's Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba (1947) or Senghor and Abdoulaye Sadji's La Belle Histoire de Leuk-le-lièvre (1953), the stories (often illustrated) were directed towards adult and child alike, and they promoted forms of imagination and wisdom that were deemed central to an authentic African childhood.5 Indeed, in Birago Diop's dedication of the collection to his two daughters, he claims that it was written 'pour qu'elles apprennent et n'oublient pas que l'arbre ne s'élève qu'en enfonçant ses racines dans la Terre nourricière':6 as with so much African cultural production of the time, the impetus behind the book comes from a desire on the part of a member of the educated African elite to preserve a certain sense of his roots, that is, of the authentic African culture that he fears he and his children are leaving behind.

A more radical vein of representation of childhood in Africa is encapsulated in the work of Ousmane Sembene, perhaps most notably through the character of Ad'jibid'ji, the young girl wise beyond her years, in his epic novel *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960). Rather than looking to a nostalgic childhood of the past, Sembene has this precocious young girl represent the possibility, indeed the desirability, of change. On a continent where respect for the authority and wisdom of one's elders remains a central aspect of social life, Sembene uses characters such as Ad'jibid'ji (and equally the unborn child in *Véhi-Ciosane* or the radical

student, Rama, in Xala⁸) to symbolise the need to adapt to new circumstances. Although this might at first appear to express a wholly 'modernist/modernising' viewpoint, the figure of the precocious child who brings into question certain aspects of 'traditional' values was in fact a staple of the oral tradition (and this will be examined further below in relation to Les Trois Volontés de Malic): in effect, Sembene marries 'radical' tendencies both from West Africa and a Marxist version of modernity.

In his entry on 'Children's Literature' in the Encyclopedia of African Literature (2003), Osayimwense Osa writes that during the colonial period: 'In its themes and functions, literature written for African children had a didactic thrust, very much like the one found in traditional African narratives, but its essentially foreign content did not seek to locate Africans in their sociocultural environment'.9 There are several complex issues to untangle in this statement: firstly, didacticism is posited as a central component of African children's literature but the origins of this didacticism are unclear: although it bears similarities to the didactic aspects of the oral narrative tradition (as we saw above in relation to Birago Diop's work), it also reflects the colonialist-modernist project of educating Africans and raising them to a higher level of civilisation. Storytelling and didacticism are thus inextricably linked together but the meaning and value attached to this fact varies widely from one critical interpretation to another: in this paradoxical critical landscape, didacticism is either inherently 'African' or inherently 'colonial'.

The main aim of this article is to explore this fundamental ambiguity and to begin to tease out the pedagogical-ideological issues at stake in Francophone African literature both in terms of the representation of childhood and of the development of a literature for children. In particular, I will examine two of the earliest texts in French by sub-Saharan African writers – Les Trois

Ibid., p. 109.

Ibid., p. 148.

Birago Diop, Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1947); Léopold Sédar Senghor and Abdoulaye Sadji, La Belle Histoire de Leuk-le-lièvre (Dakar: Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 2001 [1953]).

Diop, Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba, p. 7.

Ousmane Sembene, Les Bouts de bois de Dieu (Paris: Le Livre contemporain, 1960).

Ousmane Sembene, Véhi-Ciosane/Le Mandat (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1966); Xala (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973).

Osayimwense Osa, 'Children's Literature', in *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, ed. by Simon Gikandi (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 102-04 (p. 103).

Volontés de Malic (1920) by Ahmadou Mapathé Diagne and La Violation d'un pays by Lamine Senghor (1926), both from Senegal. These short tales (both are less than thirty pages long) have important ideological messages — Diagne promotes the new colonial ideology of association, while Senghor launches a communist-inspired attack on the French colonial enterprise — but they also take the form of fables, which they explicitly seek to make intelligible to children, and both use copious illustration. What then are the conceptions of childhood and education that emerge from these stories and how might a sustained engagement with these neglected texts provide a more complex understanding of the relationship between childhood, education and literature in Africa?

Colonial Education

Before examining these two texts in more detail, it is necessary to return briefly to the general relationship between childhood, education and literature in Francophone Africa. As is noted by the eminent critic Simon Gikandi, education has been central to the development of literature in Africa:

[I]t is hard to contemplate the institution of written literature on the continent outside the processes of education and the school. It was in colonial schools that many of the material and cultural conditions that made African literature possible, including the printing press and the bookshop, first evolved. In addition, the process of education and literacy triggered massive transformations in African culture and society, and these were to impact the nature of literary expression on the continent. Through the education of a select number of Africans, the centers of African literary culture shifted from the oral tradition to a literary one, and apart from leading to the growth of African literature in European languages, this process changed the terms of cultural discourse on the continent. Whereas before, literature, either

oral or written in African languages, had concerned itself with sustaining conventions of writing that were primarily African in orientation, the colonial school shifted the focus toward the encounter between Africa and Europe. ¹¹

To my mind Gikandi somewhat overstates the opposition between an inward-looking pre-colonial literature and an outwardlooking colonial (and postcolonial) literature, for the pre-colonial was not as introverted nor the postcolonial as extroverted as his comments here allow them to appear. However, I agree entirely with his assessment of the centrality of the school and education not only in the development of African literature but in the thematic and stylistic preoccupations of African authors. To return to some of the key texts of Francophone African literature that were mentioned above, we can see that their narratives are clearly shaped by the effects of a colonial education, often following the timeworn path from village school to the colonial city and onwards to the metropolitan centre. Senghor's poetry and more widely his concept of Negritude emerged from the desire on the part of an educated African, the first to pass the prestigious agrégation exams, to restore links with the culture of his homeland, which is associated with the pre-school world of early childhood. The same pattern is followed in Laye's L'Enfant noir, in which the portrait of an African childhood is so idyllic that Mongo Beti famously dismissed it as a 'roman noir, littérature rose'. 12 Perhaps the best-known and most troubling representation of the potentially traumatic effects of a colonial education is Cheikh Hamidou Kane's masterpiece, L'Aventure ambiguë (1961).¹³ The young Samba Diallo is taken from the harsh rigours of the Koranic school and enrolled in the French school where he excels. However, he is unable to reconcile the two bodies of thought, the two ways of perceiving and interpreting the world

Ahmadou Mapathé Diagne, Les Trois Volontés de Malic (Paris: Larousse, 1920); Lamine Senghor, La Violation d'un pays (Paris: Bureau d'éditions, de diffusion et de publicité, 1926).

Simon Gikandi, 'Education and Schools', in *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, ed. by Simon Gikandi (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 164-68 (p. 164).

¹⁴ Mongo Beti, 'Afrique Noire, littérature rose', *Présence Africaine*, 1-2 (April-July 1955), pp. 133-45.

Cheikh Hamidou Kane, L'Aventure ambiguë (Paris: 10/18, 1979 [1961]).

with which his schooling has provided him, and this leads to a split identity and a profound sense of alienation (and, ultimately, to death at the hands of *le fou*).

But, just how 'representative' are these fictionalised accounts of a colonial education? The archetypal image of French colonial schooling in sub-Saharan Africa is that of African schoolchildren in remote villages, learning the history of 'nos ancêtres, les Gaulois'. This powerful image is based on the premise that France's colonial policy was one of assimilation, turning the 'primitive natives' into 'civilised, assimilated' Frenchmen (for women were largely excluded from the colonial education process). Indeed, French colonial propaganda consistently stressed that France was engaged in a mission civilisatrice in its colonies, as opposed to the 'brute mercantilism' of the British. However, much important historical work has been carried out in recent decades, underlining the distance between the rhetoric of assimilation and colonial reality: throughout most of the colonial period, only 1-2% of children attended French schools, and even for those who did attend, their education was not always as centred on France as has been claimed.

The historian Gary Wilder has shown in *The French Imperial Nation-State*, his groundbreaking study of French colonialism in the interwar period, that Negritude, which first emerged in the 1930s, may have seen itself as a response to the French policy of assimilation but, in fact, it emerged at a moment when a form of colonial humanism had begun to modify the nature of French rule in Africa. A new wave of reforming colonial administrators such as Maurice Delafosse, Georges Hardy and Robert Delavignette began to move away from the rhetoric of Africa as a blank canvas on to which France would project its civilisation through a process of assimilation. These administrators were also (amateur) ethnographers who knew and valued the cultures of the countries that they governed, and, in their writings, they began to elaborate a colonial policy that would move away from the stated (if largely

illusory) goal of assimilation in order to create a specially adapted education system that would respect the values, and address the needs, of local cultures, a policy that became known as association. Colonial reformers promoted a more positive view of Africa – a view on which Negritude was able to build – but this conception of blackness could not escape the 'double bind' of what Wilder terms the 'French imperial nation-state', which was simultaneously 'universalising' in its elaboration of notions of citizenship and rights, and 'particularising' in the way in which these rights were selectively applied in its colonies.

Essentially, colonial humanism developed an education policy that sought to 'respect' Africans' cultural difference but the equality towards which France was allegedly working was postponed indefinitely, for it would take a long (and unspecified) time to bring the 'natives' up to the standards of French 'civilisation'. This new form of education was to be primarily vocational, giving Africans the skills that they would need within the colonial system: as vets or agricultural engineers. The new texts that were designed for African schoolchildren - such as the Mamadou et Bineta series or the Moussa et Gigla stories - aimed to Africanise the curriculum but also to reinforce colonial hierarchies. The French authors of Moussa et Gigla argue in the preface to their volume that the stories are intended to teach African children a range of valuable lessons: 'Aider à son éducation morale, sociale et pratique [...] en lui découvrant les ressources du pays où il vit'; while also: 'Lui faire connaître et aimer la France, lui montrer notre pays comme le plus glorieux, le plus avancé en civilisation'. 15 The two young male protagonists are given a form of vocational education via their travels throughout West Africa with a French trader, and the story concludes with Moussa joining the colonial army while Gigla becomes an 'agriculteur', which allows them both to serve the colonial system. Essentially, their adult selves serve as illustrations of the value of association as a policy.

Gary Wilder, The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Louis Sonolet and A. Pérès, Moussa et Gigla, histoire de deux petits noirs: livre de lecture courante (Paris: A. Colin, 1916), p. v.

Les Trois Volontés de Malic

Les Trois Volontés de Malic, written by Ahmadou Mapathé Diagne, can be situated in the same vein as the Moussa et Gigla stories, although in this instance, the fact that this pro-French narrative was written by a young black African schoolteacher served as proof in itself of the success of association. The book is dedicated to the colonial official Georges Hardy, who is dubbed by Diagne the 'Architecte de l'Enseignement de l'Afrique occidentale', for it was Hardy who had effected the shift towards a non-assimilationist education policy. Schooling would now increaseingly be carried out by Africans themselves who were valued both for their knowledge of the local culture and their loyalty to France, and Diagne himself was one of the first African teachers trained under the guidance of Hardy's teachings.

Diagne's story centres on the construction of a French school in the village of Diamagueune in rural Senegal. In the general excitement amongst the children at this development, one child, the eponymous Malic, is particularly anxious to enrol. Although formally too young to begin his schooling, his persistence pays off and he is eventually admitted despite the protests of his mother who wants him to pursue an Islamic education and become a marabout (or holy man). Once admitted to school, Malic excels and is showered with both praise and prizes. His father had died fighting for the French in colonial wars in West Africa but Malic now gains a new father in the person of the local schoolteacher. The young boy, in turn, becomes something of a paternal figure to his own grandfathers, visiting them every day after school to answer their questions about his lessons. Eventually, he goes off to the city to further his education, and returns to the village having trained as a blacksmith, and uses his skills in a way that is helpful both to the village and to the colonial regime. More importantly, he has been imbued with the 'modern, progressive' values of the French Republic and he uses these to overcome indigenous prejudices and 'backward' ideas (and these issues will be discussed in more detail below).

From this basic outline of the story, it should be clear that it is written in part as a piece of colonial propaganda, designed to illustrate the benevolence of the French colonial enterprise and (more specifically) to sell the new policy of association to the colonised. However, on closer inspection, the manner in which this is achieved appears somewhat more complex than one might have at first imagined. It is not a straightforwardly didacticmodernising text such as we see, for example, in Moussa et Gigla, where the two young African boys are inculcated with the values of the French colonial project through contact with 'superior' and 'paternal' French figures. In Les Trois Volontés de Malic, the school is clearly a site of 'modern' French values but the narrative itself depicts a world in which these values are increasingly internalised by African characters. This is not just the case for a young, educated African such as Malic but also for older generations. Right at the beginning of the story, his two grandfathers discuss with the village griot (or storyteller) the history of France's presence in the region, which they support unreservedly. The narrator tells us of Manoté, the paternal grandfather and village chief that:

Lui aussi avez [sic] fait le coup de feu auprès du bon commandant Faidherbe [the Governor most closely associated with the conquest of Senegal]. Il avait préféré l'amitié de ce grand Français à celle d'un Damel [i.e. a local ruler] injuste et sanguinaire. Il avait pris le parti des Français parce qu'il était sûr de leurs bonnes intentions. 16

In this context, the school appears quite simply as the latest and logical step in making the village a safer and more civilised place.

Perhaps, more importantly, the story is also clearly framed within an oral narrative tradition; indeed, the modernising story and the traditional story are interwoven in strange and complex ways. The very title refers to Malic's desire firstly, for schooling, secondly, to go to the city to further his education, and finally to become a blacksmith (these are his three wishes) but it also clearly positions the story within a tradition of fables, as the potentially

Diagne, Les Trois Volontés de Malic, p. 3.

prosaic longing for vocational education and a life spent hammering metal is equated with tales of riches, power and glory. As a character, Malic can also readily be seen as the precocious young child who populates so many stories within the West African oral tradition, but here the challenge to authority and received wisdom is aligned with the values of the coloniser: the precocious feats that he performs all relate to colonial history and French values (he impresses his grandfathers by reading from a book tales of General Faidherbe's conquest of Senegal, and the school inspector decides to let him further his education in the city when he overhears Malic relating a pro-French account of the history of the region).

The process by which modern and traditional forms are intertwined is most clearly illustrated early in the narrative when Malic is initially refused entry to the school. He sits with the griot and tells him a tale, which is obviously a parable of his own situation: in this tale, a child kills himself because his mother refuses to let him go to hear the tam-tam, and in the pages that follow, this is precisely how Malic finally convinces his mother to allow him to go to school, threatening suicide if he does not get his own way. For a young boy to wrap up a piece of wisdom inside a parable when speaking to a griot is to turn the world upside down, and this inversion reaches its climax in the final pages of the book when the village elders discover that he wants to become a 'blacksmith', for, in the hierarchical structures of traditional Wolof society, it is people of lower-caste status who are designated to occupy this 'menial' role. The dénouement of the story sees Malic return to the village and win over the elders by telling them: 'Nous sommes gouvernés par la France, nous appartenons à ce pays où tous les hommes naissent égaux'. 17 The elders acquiesce and the story concludes with a vision of French-inspired progress as the newly built railway passes through the village, which has now been transformed into a town. The wish-fulfilment involved in Malic's third 'volonté' sees the realisation of a childlike fable of France's desire for a pliant and peaceful empire. The resolution of the fable,

normally the site of received traditional wisdom, becomes the site of a form of knowledge learned in the colonial education system.

La Violation d'un pays

Lamine Senghor's La Violation d'un pays (1926) stands at the opposite end of the political spectrum to Diagne's text. Senghor was a former tirailleur sénégalais (or colonial infantryman) who had remained in France after the First World War. He soon became immersed in radical left-wing politics and sought to marry communism, anti-colonialism and the development of a black consciousness (and this a decade before Negritude) at first in a series of short-lived newspapers (such as La Voix des Nègres) and then finally, just before his early death, in the polemical anticolonial fable La Violation d'un pays. Espousing a communistinspired anti-colonial line in the mid-1920s guaranteed a hostile reception for the book, which subsequently disappeared from critical accounts of the period, and was only rediscovered and brought to a wide critical audience in the late 1990s by the leading US critic Christopher Miller in his seminal volume Nationalists and Nomads.18

Although ideologically opposed to Diagne's text, it is intriguing to say the least that La Violation d'un pays adopts so many of the same narrative and stylistic strategies as its pro-colonial counterpart. It is explicitly cast as a fable (it even begins with the 'Once upon a time' formula, although rendered here as 'Il y avait une fois' rather than 'Il était une fois...', perhaps a sign of Senghor's relatively uneducated background) and it contains a series of simple line drawings that illustrate the main focus of the story, namely the rape and pillage of Africa through slavery and colonisation, which are condensed into four very brief chapters. Equally, there is a clear attempt, in the first chapter at least, to situate this 'modern' story within an oral narrative tradition, for

Ibid., p. 27.

Christopher L. Miller, Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

the development of slavery is cast in terms of the tale of an individual, Dégou Diagne, betraying his own brothers to the treacherous white trader: the devious trickster character is a staple figure of West African oral tales, and both Dégou Diagne and the trader are clearly associated with this tradition. However, the remainder of the story is related in the form of a thinly veiled political allegory of key events in the colonisation of Africa, as viewed from a mid-1920s communist perspective. The slave trader, referred to as l'homme pâle is at first called 'Bourgeois', and then when he returns with his troops to colonise the land he becomes le roi colonialisme; the advent of La République leads to l'homme pâle being replaced by la reine colonialisme. Senghor makes no attempt at character development, as the political and polemical dimension of the story is prioritised, although this is not to claim that the status of La Violation d'un pays as a communist fable in itself makes it less embedded within local narrative traditions or inherently alien to a West African audience (a later piece of fiction such as Sembene's magnificent Les Bouts de bois de Dieu clearly demonstrates the possibility of combining West African culture and Marxism).

The preface to Senghor's story is written by a fascinating figure, the journalist and author Paul Vaillant-Couturier, who was in the 1920s-30s a leading member of the French communist party and the editor for several years of its newspaper, *L'Humanité*. I will quote at length from this preface because of the intriguing claims that it makes about the 'universal' nature of Senghor's narrative:

Je l'ai lu d'un trait, comme une légende merveilleuse, aussi cruelle que les contes d'enfants qui forment le fond du folklore de tous les peuples. [...]

Il faut qu'il aille trouver dans la brousse, au fond des forêts, dans les villages, ceux que la guerre, le portage, les corvées déciment impitoyablement.

Il faut que le récit vole de bouche en bouche et que les vieillards, au seuil des cases, le racontent le soir aux femmes et aux jeunes gens...

Ainsi fraterniseront, par-dessus les énormes déserts d'eau ou de sables qui les séparent, les ouvriers de la métropole et leurs frères noirs d'Afrique à la lecture ou à l'audition du simple récit de Senghor, car leur ennemi est le même: l'impérialisme. 19

Vaillant-Couturier stresses here the ability of the story to speak across cultures and across generations. However, in his desire to espouse the party line on colonialism, Senghor adopts a vocabulary and a rhetoric that effectively undermine his aim of writing a tale that is universal in its appeal; its language and form are quite simply too opaque to those who are unfamiliar with the emerging language of communism. For instance, the four chapter headings of La Violation d'un pays - 'L'Homme pâle'; 'La Domination'; 'La Reine pâle'; 'La Révolution' - make clear the political progression from slavery and colonisation to the story's dénouement with the wish fulfilment of global revolution. Diagne's Les Trois Volontés de Malic has an equally explicit political impulse (and also concludes with a form of ideological wish fulfilment) but its five sections are given quite simple and transparent titles - 'Un événement au village'; 'Malic veut aller à l'école'; 'Le livre vert'; 'Malic veut apprendre à la ville'; 'Malic veut être forgeron' - that are designed to relate a human as well as an ideological tale. Whereas Diagne wraps his ideological message around the simple human tale of Malic's life, Senghor opts for direct political/ideological conclusions to his story. The first chapter in which slavery is developed concludes thus: 'C'était le début du commerce d'exportation et d'importation, sous toutes ses formes, entre les pays et les races différentes';20 while the final chapter concludes with the following: 'Les esclaves devinrent libres! Les citoyens de chaque pays dirigèrent le Gouvernement de leur état. Ils formèrent l'alliance fraternelle des pays libres. Vive la Révolution!!!'.21 It is hard to imagine groups of African children sitting round the fire at night being regaled with a story of this

Senghor, La Violation d'un pays, p. 4.

Ibid., p. 18.

Ibid., p. 31.

kind. Indeed, in many ways, Senghor's tale captures the failures of communism to speak the language or find a form capable of speaking to a wide audience in Africa. However, where Senghor's text joins with Diagne's is in its vision of Africa as a site of backwardness in need of guidance from its more 'advanced' European counterparts. A colonial education allows Malic to teach his elders about the value of progress while *La Violation d'un pays* offers progress and emancipation through learning the values of communism.

Conclusion

What conclusions might be tentatively drawn, then, from this brief examination of two of the earliest works in French by West African authors? Did their emphasis on the pedagogical dimension of literature lay down a template that later generations of writers followed? If didacticism still dominates in the field of literature produced for children, is it possible, as Osayimwense Osa suggests, to distinguish between an older, 'colonial' mode of didactic literature, and a postcolonial form of such writing: 'African writers for children, who derive inspiration from traditional African values in their desire to educate children and young people along an acceptable African way of life, produce works that are subtly or overtly didactic'.22 Alternatively, is it possible that colonial notions of didacticism have been transformed and modified for the purposes of postcolonial African societies? In the conclusion to his encyclopedia entry on 'Education and Schools', which was discussed above, Simon Gikandi addresses the legacy of the colonial school in postcolonial Africa:

With the end of colonialism in Africa, educational institutions have continued to occupy a central role in society. Indeed, it could be said that independence ensured the triumph of the colonial school in two senses. For one, while there was a massive expansion of institutions of education in postcolonial Africa, the older colonial schools tended to have a disproportionate influence in the government since they had produced the new elite that had come to power. [...] Quite often the products of the old schools continued to champion the values they had learnt at school and to be attached to European high culture, which they sought to replicate in the postcolonial nation and its institutions. From another perspective, independence led to an attempt to rethink the nature of education itself, and in particular to marginalize the Eurocentrism of the curriculum through processes of Africanization. In literature, for example, there was an attempt, beginning in the late 1960s, to place African literature at the center of literary education. [...] But this project was also premised on the centrality of literature in the cultural life of the nation, even when the significance of literary culture seemed marginal compared to the professional and vocational interests of many citizens. In this sense, too, it could be said that the idiom and ideology of the colonial school had triumphed in postcoloniality.23

In their very different ways, Les Trois Volontés de Malic and La Violation d'un pays might be deemed to represent these two sides of the debate on education and literature in Africa: does the school continue to convey the values of the former coloniser? Or even when the former coloniser's ideology is officially challenged, does an investment in literature as central to the education of the nation's children in fact continue the work of the colonial school? To widen the critical perspective, might it be possible that Western universities' investment in what has variously been termed 'postcolonial' or 'Francophone' literature continues to privilege modes of culture, representation and thought that valorise 'elite' European cultural forms at the expense of more popular forms? As Nicholas Harrison has demonstrated, postcolonial texts are often subjected to severe and contradictory 'representational' pressures: the literary production of a Western-educated elite is seen as representative of postcolonial societies as a whole, and the literary

Osayimwense Osa, 'Children's Literature', in *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, ed. by Simon Gikandi, p. 104.

Simon Gikandi, 'Education and Schools', in *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, ed. by Simon Gikandi, p. 168.

text itself is deemed capable of direct and transparent representation of postcolonial realities.²⁴ Within such potentially reductive readings the complexity of both postcolonial societies and postcolonial literary texts can often be obfuscated.

In many postcolonial novels, there continues to be an investment in the figure of the child shaped for good or ill by the former colonial school: education is either denounced as an alienating force or the author bemoans the failure to make schooling available to all. For instance, in Aminata Sow Fall's L'Appel des arènes (1993), the modern school is the site of the child's alienation from traditional culture, whereas in Emmanuel Dongala's Johnny, chien méchant (2002) or Léonora Miano's L'Intérieur de la nuit (2005), it is the figure of the educated teenage girl who offers hope for the future.25 As one of the privileged sites of African engagement with 'Western modernity', the school and the values/knowledge transmitted by it promise to remain central to the imagination of African writers. More than eighty years on from the work of Diagne and Senghor, it is clear that the relationship between literature, education and childhood in Africa continues to be far more than child's play.

Nicholas Harrison, Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), pp. 92-111.

On or About 1991

JENNIFER YEE

Exotic Subversions in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction
London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney
Publishing [Research Monographs in French Studies 25], 2008. ix +
124 pp. £40.

ISBN 978-1-905981-51-9

From its opening pages, the reader can be in no doubt as regards the theoretical approach adopted by the author of *Exotic Subversions* in her study of four 'near-canonical' nineteenth-century French novels by Chateaubriand, Hugo, Flaubert, and Segalen. She is invested in 'exceptional texts that resist the pattern' (in)famously established in Edward Said's 'monumental vision of Orientalism as an all-consuming discursive machine' (p. 1, p. 3) — a vision that, at least on 'a hard-line reading' of *Orientalism* (p. 3), 'appears to leave no space, no margin of manoeuvre for individual subjects to construct a different version or tell a different story' (p. 1).

Genealogically speaking, Yee's post-Orientalist quest for 'subversive voices' (p. 25) that would complicate Said's late '70s reading of colonial discourse can be more or less precisely attached to the date 1991. In relation to exoticist discourse, her insistence on exceptions to the Saidian rule, her enthusiastic recourse to the rhetoric of 'nuances' and 'fissures' loyally follows the pattern established in Lisa Lowe's 1991 Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms; more broadly, her general emphasis on 'hairline cracks of oppositionality within the West's own discourse to itself' (p. 6) embraces the well travelled distinction of Ross Chambers between 'oppositional' and 'revolutionary' texts, made in his Room for Manœuver, which again dates from 1991. And, in exemplary late '80s/early '90s fashion, overseeing virtually every page of this book is a certain version of Bakhtin (specifically, the one invoked by James C. Scott in his 1990 Domination and the Arts of Resistance):

²⁵ Aminata Sow Fall, L'Appel des arènes (Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1993); Emmanuel Dongala, Johnny, chien méchant (Paris: Le Serpent à plumes, 2002); Léonora Miano, L'Intérieur de la nuit (Paris: Plon, 2005).

each of the authors under study is repeatedly praised for his counter-hegemonic sensitivity to 'exotic heteroglossia' (p. 14), to 'language with a sideways glance' (p. 93), which is said to imbue these novels with a truly 'oppositional' character absent from, say, Lamartine's *Toussaint Louverture*, a nineteenth-century work that might well, Yee admits, contain 'radical content' but that is of no interest to her because it lacks any 'dialogical preoccupation with language' (p. 23 n.99).

The four novels under consideration range across the (long) nineteenth century, and are subdivided into two groups, according to their lesser or greater degree of self-conscious oppositionality. The 'sometimes ill-mastered or uneven' novels of the Romantic writers, Chateaubriand and Hugo, are shaped by 'involuntary internal polemic' (p. 11), or what Bakhtin called 'hidden internal polemic' (quot. 88); whereas the post-Romantic Flaubert and Segalen offer 'relatively 'mastered' examples of deliberate polemic' with Western assumptions (p. 11). All four authors, however, are praised for the dialogical complexities of their exotic novels: Chateaubriand's 'loser's epic,' Les Natchez, is of interest because it contains more 'doubt, hesitation, and ideological uncertainties' (p. 41) than the rewritten extracts from it that were published to great acclaim as René and Atala; Hugo's portrayal of the Haitian Revolution in Bug-Jargal 'is more complex and ambiguous than it might seem at a cursory glance' (p. 52), especially in its unsettling use of doubles; Flaubert's 'erudite display of meaninglessness' (p. 67) in Salammbô offers a 'parody of the very concept of the knowability and classifiability of the Other' (79); while Segalen's Les Immémoriaux takes 'the possibilities of such oppositional writing as far as they could go' (p. 83) by 'giv[ing] flesh to linguistic and cultural mixity' through the invention of a 'polyphonic' form of narration whose originality 'lies precisely in [its] shifting focalization and mixing of voices' (p. 94).

Yee's desire to provide a more 'nuanced' account of (nineteenth-century) exoticism occasionally leads her into a troubling complicity

with some of its more highly problematic assumptions, as is nowhere more obviously the case than in her focus on the 'complex play of doubles that dominates <code>Bug-Jargal</code>' (p. 49), a novel she praises for its carnivalesque 'splitting of the Self to include the dark Other' (p. 105). In an admittedly 'ill-mastered' and 'subterranean' way, Hugo's novel signals its 'own covert attraction to its inner dark side' (p. 110) by setting up the noble black protagonist Bug and the villainous mulatto dwarf Habibrah not just as 'simple opposites' but as 'each other's inverted reflection in the mirror,' thereby inscribing 'the grotesque and the sublime [as] each other's necessary flip side' (p. 58): 'Victor Hugo's Africans represent darkness, certainly,' Yee blithely asserts, 'but they are the dark side of the self' (p. 59) — a statement that can only give pause to any reader familiar with Chinua Achebe's acerbic response to Conrad's <code>Heart of Darkness</code>.

This conflation of 'dark Others' with 'the dark side of the self' provides one particularly clear instance of the risks involved in arguing for the 'subversive' qualities of nineteenth-century exoticism. However, a less obvious, and far more interesting, critique can be offered, which bears on what I pointed to at the outset of this review article, namely, the precisely dated nature of the author's theoretical approach. We can tease out this point by drawing attention to the way in which Yee's account of her four novels symptomatically vacillates between treating them as literary failures or successes. At times, Yee insists on a strong distinction between the literary canon and the 'near-canonical' works of interest to her: her four novels are, she insists, 'relative literary failures' from 'an aesthetic point of view' (p. 109), and this failure, she goes on to argue, is the price paid 'for attempts at exotic dialogism' (p. 110). And yet this 'price' ultimately proves negligible, since the 'exotic dialogism' for which she praises Chateaubriand, Hugo, Flaubert, and Segalen can in no way be differentiated from the straightforward dialogism that was the hallmark, for Bakhtin, of such literary giants as Dostoevsky, Joyce, and Kafka. In other words, Yee's 'argument from dialogic subversion' has no way of distinguishing between

(failed) near-canonical exotic texts and the masterpieces of world literature — or, for that matter, the emerging canon of postcolonial literature, given that the 'contradictory and mixed linguistic situation of postcolonial literatures had a direct precursor in some of the more complex exotic literature of the nineteenth century' (p. 107). All of these manifestations of textual 'subversion' - from Hugo, to Joyce, to Rushdie — are to be valorised according to the same logic: on account of their (linguistic) complexity, their commitment to (textual) hybridity. In other words, Yee's argument on behalf of certain examples of exotic literature as texts that 'refuse decoding' (p. 72) cannot be distinguished from arguments on behalf of (a particular, hegemonic and aestheticising, definition of) literature per se. This is the tautological reasoning that underlay so much of the '1991' school of 'oppositional' literary-cultural criticism, and that continues to infuse a book like Exotic Subversions. The post-Orientalist advocates of 'subversion' and 'oppositionality' were, that is to say, guided by an aestheticising, literary logic to which they could not openly admit; the 'heteroglossic' complexities that so attracted them were nothing more, or less, than the complexities of 'literature' itself.

As is signalled by the most recent theoretical point of reference in her book, Deepika Bahri's Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics and Postcolonial Literature (2003), Yee is vaguely aware of what, in '1991', quite simply could not be voiced but that is now surfacing as an explicit prise de position in postcolonial studies, francophone or otherwise, as its practitioners grapple with the choice of whether to pursue a more openly aestheticising or politicising direction in response to the collapse of the middle, and muddled, ground upon which the theoretical approach that flourished circa '1991' was constructed. Ought we to take an 'aesthetic turn,' and openly embrace literary values — of the sort that were self-consciously marginalised in Orientalism, as well as, if only ostensibly, in the work of his more 'nuanced' inheritors; or ought we take the 'political turn,' and have the nerve to acknowledge the basic irrelevance of those values to the properly political project of undoing (and not

simply daintily 'unpicking,' as Yee would say) the neo-colonial, neo-liberal world order that, quite probably, feeds mightily upon the sort of literary subversions on offer in Segalen's *Les Immémoriaux* no less than on those in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*?

For those invested in the aesthetic, as well as the counter-manding political, turn of postcolonial studies, Yee's inability to distinguish between the 'subversions' of exotic and postcolonial literature is exemplary. As she points out, (good, 'dialogic') exoticism is 'a precedent, in some ways a model, and certainly a rich precursor of the future subversions of postcolonial literature' (p. 6). Hugo's 'dark Others.' Rushdie's Booker (of Booker) Prizes: they are the very (complex) stuff of which 'literature' is made. That is all well and good for those who accept 'literature' as their chosen and delimited field of study, those who are content to know it as that which 'make[s] a leap of sympathy to occupy an imagined Other position from which to disturb the calm of hegemony' (p. 107), and are fully aware that, to cite Yee's description of her nineteenth-century (near-)canon in the final sentence of Exotic Subversions, it is a form of 'oppositionality' that 'always fail[s] short of true resistance to the system' (p. 111). For those still living in the year '1991', such falling short hardly poses a problem, because they thought (they think) they were talking about something more than 'literature'; they thought (they think) there truly was something 'revolutionary' about registering, and trumpeting, the unquestionable fact that, notwithstanding the lack of 'true resistance to the system,' 'the nineteenth-century novel does... include space for the seeds of opposition, and even in the great power-blocks of hegemonic thought there appear unexpected fissures' (p. 111).

For those, by contrast, in search of such resistance, for those inclined to 'revolutionary' solutions that cannot be simply reduced to, or resolved by, the self-evident argument that 'true' literature is always-already offering 'unexpected fissures,' the dated emphasis on 'oppositional' rather than 'revolutionary' solutions must ultimately be seen as a salve to the self-interested (literary-cultural) critic's

biases: 'This 'oppositionality' is what 'literature' performs, and therefore this performance is what I will praise in each and every one of my critical interventions, whenever and wherever I come across it, only without admitting that this is what I am doing.' Yee's text, stranded between the dogmatic (un)certainties of '1991' and the questions that have opened up in its ongoing aftermath, provides a salutary, if unintended, reminder of what it is that we, as postcolonial critics, have been invested in, and of what is at stake in our ongoing attempts at justifying this investment (the 'aesthetic turn') or contesting it (the 'political turn'). Were the praise-songs of 'oppositionality,' which once (à la Lowe, Chambers, Scott) dominated our field, simply the epiphenomena of a strategy of containment through which postcolonial studies was bound to a certain vision of 'complexity' at odds with the anti-colonial, and unrepentantly non-literary, dynamics of a work like Orientalism, so that its truly radical (and, first and foremost, anti-Zionist) politics could be rendered palatable to an Anglo-American academic audience ever in search of a specious newness but intent on preserving the old, bourgeois order upon which literary studies, and the affect that so intimately attaches to it, has always, for better and for worse, depended? Was nineteenth-century exotic literature nothing more (or less) than a trial balloon for postcolonial literature, each equally committed to the 'subversive' value of inscribing 'fissures' that, as Segalen no less than Rushdie demonstrates, ultimately promote the suturing of any and all political divisions while resolving none of them? These are the important, and perhaps unanswerable, questions that can be teased out of Yee's revealingly belated account of nineteenth-century exoticism and its 'strategies of displacement that point towards postcolonial fiction's "marronage de la langue" (p. 18).

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The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. xvi + 572 pp. Hb £60. Pb £14.99.

ISBN 978-0822341512

This magisterial study of the French Atlantic slave trade offers a wealth of analysis on representations and afterlives in literature and film from France. Africa and the Caribbean. Part One, 'The French Atlantic' provides a thorough synthesis and evaluation of the history and historiography of the French slave trade. The role of gender is highlighted through Miller's analysis of responses to abolition and slavery among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French women and male writers in Parts Two and Three. Perspicacious readings of Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant and Maryse Condé in Part Four, 'The Triangle From "Below", reinterpret visions of the French Atlantic from the Caribbean point of the triangle. There is strong analysis here of Césaire's Cahier: some commonly held assumptions about this poem are lambasted, and Miller argues for a separation between the literary work and the politics of its author in order to examine the textual complexity of Césaire's rewriting of the French Atlantic from a Caribbean and Négritude-inspired point of view. Film is the focus of the final chapter which expands on the literary analysis of all the previous chapters of the book, thus enabling new comparisons and contrasts to be drawn between African, Caribbean and French metropolitan films as well as literature; a welcome move as such comparative perspectives on film have remained quite rare until now. African 'silence' on the slave trade is explored through the prism of films by Ousmane Sembene, Roger Gnoan M'Bala, Guy Deslauriers and Patrick Chamoiseau. Making a number of astute observations about issues of representing the unrepresentable—the slave trade and the Middle Passage-Miller pays particular attention to the use in these films of silence as a tool.

In terms of balance, two parts of the book are dedicated to a single metropolitan point on the triangle, whereas only one part is shared between the African and Caribbean points. As this study mirrors the triangular shape of the French Atlantic, a more equilateral triangle could have been achieved by having one part each devoted to metropolitan French, Caribbean and African literature and film. While Glissant, Chamoiseau and Césaire's twentieth- and twentyfirst-century writing about history is obviously a key point of reference for issues of representing the Middle Passage and slavery, it might be interesting to read the writings of nineteenth-century metropolitan French writers alongside those of Haitian intellectuals from the same period. The French Atlantic Triangle is, however, more balanced in this respect than might first appear to be the case. By focusing on both literature and film in the final part of the book, study of the contribution of these two types of media broaden and deepen Miller's approach. Furthermore, Miller's analyses, consistently sophisticated throughout this study, are at their finest here.

Also impressive throughout is Miller's careful etymological analysis of key words related to the slave trade and its literary representations, such as the word *traite* itself and Césaire's famous neologism *verrition*. Overall, the sheer breadth and depth of historical and cultural reference will make this book an invaluable tool and an important point of reference for a wide range of scholars. It will reorient future readings related to the slave trade in African, European and Caribbean literature.

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