

ISSN 0791-4938

ASCALF BULLETIN

**ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF
CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN LITERATURE IN
FRENCH**



**Bulletin 8
Spring/Summer 1994**

CONTENTS

Histoire et littérature caraïbes (P.Degras)	3
The Thiaroye Massacre in word and image (R.Little & N.Macdonald)	18
ASCALF Conference 1993 (J.P.Little)	38
Book reviews	42
Notices	49

**ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF CARIBBEAN AND
AFRICAN LITERATURE IN FRENCH**

The ASCALF logo is based on a Téké mask from the Upper Sanga region (Congo-Brazzaville).

The *ASCALF Bulletin*

The *ASCALF Bulletin* appears twice a year and contains information on recent developments and on forthcoming meetings, talks, conferences, etc., likely to be of interest to members. It also presents reviews of books, films, conferences etc, as well as short scholarly articles. Contributions are most warmly invited from members.

Items of information or more extensive pieces which members may wish to submit for inclusion in the Bulletin should be sent to the Editor not later than March 1st for inclusion in the Spring/Summer issue and not later than September 30th for inclusion in the Autumn/Winter issue.

Mary Gallagher
Editor, *ASCALF Bulletin*
Department of French
University College Dublin
Belfield
Dublin 4, Ireland

Tel. (353-1) 7068108
Fax. (353-1) 7061175

The *ASCALF Bulletin* is typeset at University College Dublin and copied at the University of Southampton. The publication is generously grant-aided by the Faculty of Arts at University College Dublin.

Membership

Membership of ASCALF includes:

- subscription to the *ASCALF Bulletin*
- invitations to informal workshops on various aspects of African and Caribbean literature held at various venues throughout the year.

Annual membership fees for the 1994-5 academic year are £15 for salaried members and £7 for students/unwaged members. The financial year for renewal of subscriptions begins 1st October. To join ASCALF, please write to:

Nicki Hitchcott, Dept of French, University of Nottingham,
Nottingham NG7 2RD

ASCALF Committee (Elected at AGM of November 1993)

President: Peter Hawkins
Vice-President: Annette Lavers
Secretary: Anna Ridehalgh
Treasurer: Pat Corcoran
Minutes Secretary: Dorothy Blair
Membership Secretary: Nicki Hitchcott
Publicity Officers: Fírinne Ní Chréacháin, Jill Taylor
Bulletin Editor: Mary Gallagher
Assistant Editor: Pat Little
Committee Members: Denise Ganderton, Laïla Iblnfassi,
Bridget Jones, James Leahy, Sigfred Okai

Histoire et littérature caraïbes: l'écriture des passés incertains

L'obsession taraudante de l'Histoire - de sa connaissance, de son écriture et de sa réécriture - semble, depuis un certain temps déjà, avoir investi une part importante de la production littéraire caraïbe francophone et semble même être devenue l'un des axes majeurs de l'imaginaire romanesque antillais. Cette obsession de l'Histoire ne se confond plus avec une improbable quête des origines, quête impossible et peut-être dénuée de sens, maintenant, pour nombre d'écrivains caraïbes. La quête de l'Histoire n'est plus celle de la filiation, de la source, encore que la mémoire de l'Afrique continue d'une certaine façon d'irriguer cette quête de la mémoire. Le non-dit douloureux de l'Histoire - l'esclavage, la domination coloniale et leurs innombrables conséquences - est un lacinement persistant que la création romanesque révèle sans en épuiser la force ni l'opacité, ainsi que l'exprime Edouard Glissant dans *Le Discours antillais*:

Le passé, notre passé subi, qui n'est pas encore histoire pour nous, est pourtant là (ici) qui nous lancine. La tâche de l'écrivain est d'explorer ce lacinement, de le "révéler" de manière continue dans le présent et dans l'actuel.¹

Cette quête de l'Histoire est une préoccupation qu'Edouard Glissant partage avec de nombreux écrivains des Amériques (et j'entends ici les Amériques au sens large, géographique mais aussi culturel et historique). De nombreuses régions du Nouveau Monde ont connu le même type de formation sociale et économique: tout d'abord, la violence initiale que fut la conquête des Amériques puis cette violence continuée que fut le développement des sociétés coloniales au moyen de l'esclavage et du Système des Plantations. Cette Histoire commune a déterminé, pour une large part, ce que Glissant appelle une "obsession essentielle", c'est-à-dire la "crispation du temps":

¹ Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, Paris, Seuil, 1981, p.132.

Je crois que la hantise du passé [...] est un des référents essentiels de la production littéraire dans les Amériques [...]. Le romancier américain, quelle que soit la zone culturelle à laquelle il appartient, n'est pas du tout à la recherche d'un temps perdu mais se trouve, se débat, dans un temps éperdu. Et, de Faulkner à Carpentier, on est en présence de sortes de fragments de durée qui sont engloutis dans des amoncellements ou des vertiges.²

En 1983, Glissant déclarait à la revue *CARE*:

Il me semble que notre projet littéraire se noue au ventre même de la bête: dans l'antre du bateau négrier. C'est de si loin qu'il faut venir.³

Dans ce même numéro de la revue *CARE* (numéro spécial consacré à Glissant), René Ménil analysait, dans un article intitulé "Une quête de courants souterrains" l'élément premier de l'unité caraïbe:

Une grande image, mais une image voilée hante activement la Caraïbe. On peut lentement la déchiffrer en découvrant son vocabulaire dans les Archives. Et elle prend plus de consistance quand, par exemple, nous pensons à "tant d'Africains lestés de boulets et jetés par-dessus bord chaque fois qu'un navire négrier se trouvait poursuivi par ses ennemis et s'estimait trop faible pour soutenir le combat". Car ces fantômes au fond des mers font un même chemin unissant les îles.⁴

Ces mêmes fantômes hantent toujours la conscience historique caraïbe et dessinent un chemin - non pas mystérieux mais de plus en plus évident - unissant de nombreux romans caraïbes francophones. Edouard Glissant est l'écrivain antillais dont l'oeuvre manifeste le plus clairement le désir d'Histoire mais aussi la volonté de créer de nouvelles modalités romanesques susceptibles de pouvoir énoncer l'innommable de cette Histoire et y trouver du sens, malgré le désordre affolant, malgré l'opacité vertigineuse des passés incertains, incertains car enfouis, occultés, travestis, ou encore refusés. Le projet ancien

de Glissant - projet, à mon sens, déjà magnifiquement accompli - est d'aller au-delà de cette opacité vertigineuse, au-delà de ce qu'il appelle le "raturage de la mémoire collective" provoqué par ce qu'il analyse comme une "non-histoire":

Les Antilles sont le lieu d'une histoire faite de ruptures et dont le commencement est un arrachement brutal, la Traite. Notre conscience historique ne pouvait "sédimerter", si on peut ainsi dire, de manière progressive et continue, comme chez les peuples qui ont engendré une philosophie souvent totalitaire de l'histoire, les peuples européens, mais s'agrégait sous les auspices du choc, de la contraction, de la négation douloureuse et de l'explosion. Ce discontinu dans le continu, et l'impossibilité pour la conscience collective d'en faire le tour, caractérisent ce que j'appelle une non-histoire. Le facteur négatif de cette non-histoire est donc le raturage de la mémoire collective.⁵

Ce "raturage de la mémoire collective" a donc pour conséquence une sorte d'impossibilité du souvenir. La mémoire bute sur l'opacité de l'Histoire et le travail romanesque de Glissant s'inscrit donc dans un double mouvement: le déchiffrage du passé mais aussi sa recréation littéraire, son imagination, son "invention". La fouille minutieuse, attentive, patiente et acharnée, du passé est une volonté de mise en ordre. Cette mise en ordre du passé - par la réflexion intellectuelle et le déploiement de l'imaginaire - est aussi une exploration et une analyse du présent dans lequel s'inscrivent tant de signes du désordre ancien et continué. "Mettre de l'ordre là où il y a du désordre", ainsi que le déclarait récemment l'écrivain afro-américain Toni Morrison, est l'un des grands pouvoirs, l'un des immenses priviléges de la littérature. Les moyens de cette mise en ordre, les tentatives de trouver le ou les sens d'un passé obscur, apparemment absurde sont, évidemment, divers et en ce qui concerne Glissant, relèvent aussi parfois d'une certaine opacité, ainsi qu'on lui en a fait, souvent, le reproche. Cet écrivain a été, en effet, souvent taxé d'hermétisme. Mais cet hermétisme apparent, cette apparente opacité de son écriture sont à la mesure de l'opacité de l'Histoire antillaise, à la mesure de son enfouissement, de son obscurité douloureuse. Dans

2 Ibid, pp. 254-255.

3 CARE, Editions Caribéennes, avril 1983, N° 10, pp. 17-25, p.17.

4 CARE, pp.27-31, p.28.

5 *Le Discours antillais*, pp.130-131.

l'entretien accordé à la revue *CARE*, Glissant, parlant de cette obsession et de cette opacité de l'Histoire et des rapports possibles entre son écriture et ce que l'on appelle le "délire verbal", tel qu'il peut se manifester aux Antilles, déclarait:

C'est le même effort pour débrouiller la mémoire collective, ses manques et sa permanence; pour arracher du temps la durée (le continu d'une histoire) que nous méritons de vivre; pour ensoucher notre parole dans une poétique partagée. Le délire verbal est une projection désespérée vers une syntaxe, un ordre de raisons, une relation au monde, dont on cherche sinon à maîtriser du moins à vivre continûment le déroulement.
N'est-ce pas là, au désespoir près, le statut de l'écrivain dans nos pays?⁶

Celui qui, dans les romans de Glissant, est nommé le "déparleur" est cette figure qui, rassemblant en elle auteur et narrateur, assume l'effort de cette mise en ordre, de l'élaboration de cette syntaxe nécessaire qui va naître de l'opacité des histoires et des paroles elliptiques, contradictoires d'une mémoire collective encore inconnue à elle-même. De la même façon, le roman de Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnifique*, met en scène un autre déparleur, un conteur qui rassemble en lui la diversité des paroles collectives ainsi que l'exprime Chamoiseau qui, en tant que dépositaire de ces paroles, est aussi un personnage du roman:

Cette énergie verbale me séduisit là-même, d'autant que Solibo Magnifique utilisait les quatre facettes de notre diglossie: le basilecte et l'acrolecte créoles, le basilecte et l'acrolecte français, vibronnant enracinement dans un espace interlectal que je pensais être notre plus exacte réalité socio-linguistique.⁷

Dépositaire de la parole de Solibo (qui succombe à une mystérieuse "égorgette de parole" et dont le corps autopsié, mis en pièces, ne révèle rien à la police), l'auteur-personnage Chamoiseau, suivant en cela les traces de Glissant, s'efforce de résister à la "dépossession de la langue":

6 *CARE*, p.17.

7 Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnifique*, Paris, Seuil, 1989, pp.43-44.

Qui a tué Solibo? L'écrivain au curieux nom d'oiseau fut le premier interrogé. Il parla longtemps, longtemps ... [...] Non pas écrivain, *marqueur* de paroles, ça change tout, inspecteur, l'écrivain est d'un autre monde, il rumine, élabore ou prospecte, le marqueur refuse une agonie: celle de l'oraliture, il recueille et transmet. C'est presque symbolique que je fusse là pour la dernière parole de Magnifique.⁸

Cette agonie de l'oraliture, symbolisée par la mort du conteur Solibo, cette dépossession de la langue est amplement analysée par Glissant dans *Le Discours antillais*. Parlant de la cohabitation toujours difficile du créole et du français, Glissant écrit:

Il y a poétique forcée là où une nécessité d'expression confronte un impossible à exprimer. Il arrive que cette confrontation se noue dans une opposition entre le contenu exprimable et la langue suggérée ou imposée. C'est le cas des petites Antilles francophones où la langue maternelle, le créole, et la langue officielle, le français, entretiennent chez l'Antillais un même insoupçonné tourment.⁹

Dans ce même ouvrage, Glissant déclare, à propos de la dépossession de la langue:

Scruter cette dépossession, c'est contribuer à lutter contre la déperdition collective. L'entreprise est d'autant nécessaire qu'en Martinique [pays où l'apparence a pris constamment le pas sur le réel] nous naviguons sur les illusions renouvelées du progrès social et économique. Il semblerait que le discours du discours (le retour sur soi) vienne trop tard et que nous ayons, en tant que communauté, perdu le sens de notre voix.
Aussi qu'il paraît dérisoire de d'écrire en livres, d'approcher par écrits, ce qui ainsi s'évapore tout alentour.¹⁰

Le roman de Chamoiseau s'inscrit très précisément dans le refus de la dépossession de la langue, ainsi qu'il est signifié très

8 Ibid, p.159

9 *Le Discours antillais*, pp. 236-237.

10 Ibid, p.22.

clairement dès le début de *Solibo Magnifique* puisque ce roman s'ouvre sur une citation de Glissant qui résume sa démarche romanesque mais aussi celle de Chamoiseau et d'autres écrivains caraïbes francophones et montre également l'importance de cette démarche pour la communauté tout entière:

Je suis d'un pays où se fait le passage d'une littérature orale traditionnelle, contrainte, à une littérature écrite, non traditionnelle, tout aussi contrainte. Mon langage tente de se construire à la limite de l'écrire et du parler, de signaler un tel passage - ce qui est bien entendu ardu dans toute approche littéraire [...]

J'évoque une synthèse, synthèse de la syntaxe écrite et de la rythmique parlée, de l'"acquis" d'écriture et du "réflexe" oral, de la solitude d'écriture et de la participation au chanter commun ...¹¹

Malgré la difficulté du rapport entre le créole et le français, malgré l'empêchement que cette relation conflictuelle peut provoquer - notamment pour la création littéraire - c'est cependant de cette contrainte et de cet empêchement que va surgir la nécessité de l'élaboration d'une langue neuve, d'une langue métisse, en quelque sorte, de cette langue singulière à laquelle les romans de Glissant nous avaient habitués et dont nous retrouvons parfois l'écho dans les romans de Chamoiseau (bien que l'écriture de Glissant et celle de Chamoiseau mettent en œuvre des stratégies différentes, elle sont l'une et l'autre tendues vers cet effort de résistance à la dépossession de la langue). Cette langue métisse a d'ailleurs, également, sa part d'opacité, sa part d'heureuse étrangeté. Elle témoigne du conflit ancien entre le créole et le français mais elle dépasse ce conflit, elle l'englobe dans un mouvement plus large, dans ce geste plus fécond qu'enclôt et projette la dynamique de la créolité.

La parution de l'ouvrage collectif de Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant et Patrick Chamoiseau, *Eloge de la créolité*, a marqué, en 1989, un moment important de la réflexion sur l'identité caraïbe et, de façon plus générale, sur les processus de syncrétisme culturel. Cet ouvrage est d'abord un hommage à la

pensée et au travail d'Edouard Glissant puisque l'influence profonde de cet auteur y est clairement reconnue - ainsi qu'en témoignent les très nombreuses notes de référence. *Eloge de la créolité* nous donne ainsi la preuve que le discours prétendument hermétique de Glissant - discours théorique et romanesque, poétique également - a, au cours des années, non seulement élargi le domaine de l'imaginaire romanesque mais encore considérablement infléchi le cours du débat théorique antillais et que les multiples pistes de recherche indiquées et explorées par Glissant - notamment dans *Le Discours antillais* - sont maintenant un vaste champ d'étude dans lequel s'investit un nombre de plus en plus important d'intellectuels des Caraïbes mais aussi des Amériques et d'ailleurs. Outre un hommage aux aînés, aux précurseurs - tels Césaire et Glissant -, *Eloge de la créolité* est aussi un plaidoyer vibrant sur la nécessité de dépasser l'identité unique (imposée ou revendiquée), de dépasser l'obsession d'une authenticité toujours problématique afin de plonger au cœur de ce bouillonnement fécond: la créolité.

Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons créoles. Cela sera pour nous une attitude intérieure, mieux: une vigilance, ou mieux encore, une sorte d'enveloppe mentale au mitan de laquelle se bâtira notre monde en pleine conscience du monde. Ces paroles que nous vous transmettons ne relèvent pas de la théorie ni des principes savants [...] Elles ne s'adressent pas aux seuls écrivains, mais à tout concepteur de notre espace (l'archipel et ses contreforts de terre ferme, les immensités continentales), dans quelque discipline que ce soit, en quête douloureuse d'une pensée plus fertile, d'une expression plus juste, d'une esthétique plus vraie.¹²

Cette nécessité d'une esthétique plus vraie, c'est notamment la nécessité d'un réinvestissement du créole - notamment par la littérature - mais aussi d'un autre comportement par rapport au français. Car le français, langue dominante, parfois niée parfois idolâtrée - est une langue seconde conquise, ainsi que l'analysent les auteurs. Cette langue conquise fut "tour à tour (ou en même temps) octroyée et capturée, légitimée, et

12 Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau, *Eloge de la créolité*, Paris, Gallimard, 1989, p.13.

11 *Solibo Magnifique*, exergue.

adoptée". Cette langue fut aussi enrichie et préservée, détournée et "habitée":

En elle, nous avons bâti notre langage, ce langage qui fut traqué par les kapos culturels comme profanation de l'idole qu'était devenue cette langue. *Notre littérature devra témoigner de cette conquête.*¹³

Cet usage créateur, subversif et jubilatoire de la langue française est magnifiquement illustré par Chamoiseau dans son dernier roman *Texaco*, avec une telle profusion de trouvailles, une telle résolue inventivité que le lecteur ravi mais parfois submergé se trouve, par moments, partagé entre volupté et lassitude, entre le plaisir de ces mots, de cette syntaxe, et le léger agacement que peut produire cette volonté, si clairement manifestée par Chamoiseau, de mettre à jour, systématiquement, les infinies ressources de son langage.

Mais *Texaco* n'est pas seulement une brillante démonstration linguistique, ce roman n'est pas seulement, non plus, le fabuleux récit de la conquête et de la Ville, il est aussi une réflexion, large, sur l'acte d'écrire.

Marie-Sophie Laborieux, personnage central dont le marqueur de paroles diffuse les "cahiers", exprime, à plusieurs reprises, le vertige de la langue à écrire puisqu'elle est écartelée entre le désir d'écrire en français - et le désir de faire revivre et de transmettre la parole d'Ester nome - parole évidemment créole. Marie-Sophie Laborieux, écrivant pour faire revivre, a l'impression, au contraire, de mourir de cette tentative d'écriture:

Vers cette époque, oui, je commençai à écrire, c'est dire: un peu mourir. Dès que mon Ester nome se mit à me fournir les mots, j'eus le sentiment de la mort [...] Chaque phrase d'écriture formulait un peu de lui, de sa langue créole, de son intonation, de ses rires, de ses yeux, de ses airs [...] Autre chose: écrire pour moi, c'était en langue française, pas en créole. Comment y ramener mon Ester nome tellement créole? [...] je mesurais ce gouffre. Parfois je me surprénais à pleurer de voir comment (le retrouvant pour le garder) je le perdais et l'immolais en moi: les mots écrits, mes pauvres mots français,

13 Ibid., pp. 46-47.

dissipaient pour toujours l'écho de sa parole et imposaient leur trahison à ma mémoire. [...] Le sentiment de la mort fut encore plus présent quand je me mis à écrire sur moi-même et sur Texaco. C'était comme pétrifier des lambeaux de ma chair. Je vidais ma mémoire dans d'immobiles cahiers sans en avoir ramené le frémissement de la vie qui se vit, et qui, à chaque instant, modifie ce qui s'était produit. Texaco mourait dans mes cahiers alors que Texaco n'était pas achevé. [...]

Oiseau Cham, existe-t-il une écriture informée de la parole, et des silences, et qui reste vivante, qui bouge en cercle et circule tout le temps, irriguant sans cesse de vie ce qui a été écrit avant, et qui réinvente le cercle à chaque fois comme le font les spirales qui sont à tout moment dans le futur et dans l'avant, l'une modifiant l'autre, sans cesse, sans perdre une unité difficile à nommer?¹⁴

Il est ici évident que le passage de la parole créole à l'écriture en français est une opération non seulement difficile et douloureuse mais encore mortifère, porteuse d'un extrême danger: l'assèchement, l'évanouissement de cette parole, sa totale dilution dans l'écrit. Ici, ce risque, cette menace pèsent non seulement sur l'écriture de Marie-Sophie - son désir de préserver et transmettre - mais aussi sur son être tout entier. Car la dépossession de la parole est une dépossession totale, c'est un état de manque absolu et d'essentielle carence, un infini vertige et un gouffre béant. Cette recherche inquiète de Marie-Sophie Laborieux est autant le désir d'un langage neuf et véritable qu'une interrogation angoissée sur les pouvoirs de l'écriture. Dans *Le Discours antillais*, Glissant affirme:

Mais l'écriture s'émince à marquer de loin ce qui là (ici) se défait sans répit. Il semble que de jour en jour le tour de l'effacement pour nous Martiniquais s'accélère. Nous n'en finissons pas de disparaître, victimes d'un frottement de mondes. Tassés sur la ligne d'émergence des volcans, exemple banal de liquidation par l'absurde, dans l'horreur sans nom d'une colonisation réussie, qu'y peut l'écriture, elle ne rattrape jamais.¹⁵

14 Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, pp.353-354.

15 *Le Discours antillais*, p.15.

A cette déclaration feront écho, quelques années plus tard, ces paroles de Chamoiseau sur Solibo, le conteur dont il tente de restituer la parole:

Je lui avais dédicacé mon livre mais il ne s'était jamais intéressé à moi... Il ne s'intéressait pas non plus à mon projet d'écriture: l'écriture pour lui ne saisissait rien de l'essence des choses. Ce qui n'est pas mon idée, bien entendu. Nous sommes ici dans un frottement de mondes, inspectère, un espace d'érosion, d'effacement.¹⁶

Il est possible, en effet, que l'écriture "s'émince", comme le dit Glissant ou qu'elle ne puisse saisir "l'essence des choses", comme le pense Solibo. Ce qui est certain, en revanche, c'est que l'effort pour fixer dans l'écrit ce qui, selon Glissant, "s'évapore tout alentour", est en lui-même un accomplissement puisque c'est de cette recherche, souvent inquiète mais aussi éblouie, qu'un nouveau langage prend forme. Et c'est ce langage neuf, inoui qui est une première réponse à cette question fondamentale, inlassablement posée, formulée de diverses façons et notamment dans l'avant dernier roman de Glissant, *Mahagony*:

Quel dialogue pourrions-nous dévaler dans tout ce cri qui nous nomme sans retenue?¹⁷

La recherche de l'Histoire et celle d'une écriture sont indissociables. L'effort, vital, de connaissance, de transmission et de transmutation du passé se confond avec la nécessaire recherche d'une esthétique. L'un et l'autre sont indissolublement liés, rassemblés dans l'interrogation fondamentale: comment nommer l'innommable?

Les stratégies romanesques pour nommer l'innommable et lever le voile opaque de l'Histoire sont nombreuses et diverses dans les romans d'Edouard Glissant. L'une de ces stratégies est, notamment dans *Mahagony*, l'enchevêtrement quasi constant des paroles des différents personnages. Dans ce roman, le narrateur est Mathieu, l'un des personnages des romans

précédents qui, jusqu'alors, avait laissé à un narrateur le soin de rendre compte du mystère de son existence. Mathieu devient à son tour, dans *Mahagony*, chroniqueur et accède au statut de narrateur; il figure ainsi le fil du récit qui s'étend de 1785 à 1979: "Puisque j'étais le fil (dit Mathieu) je pouvais aussi bien devenir le révélateur et nul besoin de chroniqueur pour ce travail".¹⁸

Le chroniqueur disparaît ainsi derrière Mathieu, désigné alors comme révélateur mais, dans le récit qui nous est fait, il semble impossible de démêler la part des paroles de l'ancien chroniqueur de celles du personnage devenu signataire du récit, ainsi que le récit le révèle lui-même:

En sorte que la course, du personnage que fut Mathieu à l'homme d'écart qu'il devint, à l'auteur lui-même, gagné en vitesse par cela même qui lui était opposé, n'a cessé de s'écheveler. Qu'à la fin, ni l'informateur ni l'auteur n'eussent pu se reconnaître l'un à part de l'autre; et que le lecteur attentif ne saurait non plus, du moins sans vertige, les distinguer.¹⁹

Cet enchevêtrement des paroles de Mathieu et du chroniqueur est à la mesure de cet autre "embrouillamini", de cet autre vertige qui est celui de l'Histoire caraïbe. Cette sorte d'opacité romanesque, notamment par l'enchevêtrement récurrent, est habituelle dans les romans de Glissant. L'enchaînement, la mise en abyme, le télescopage ou le parallélisme temporels, la rupture systématique du fil narratif, la complexité des intrications parentales ou encore la difficulté à distinguer les différents locuteurs dans ce qui apparaît parfois comme une parole collective énoncée par plusieurs voix qui n'en font qu'une, toutes ces stratégies, tous ces choix, toutes ces ruses - parfois éblouissantes - du récit sont une seule et même façon, diversement modulée, de dire la difficulté de la remontée dans le temps, de cette fouille du passé et de l'opacité qui le caractérise. La difficile remontée dans le temps ne peut se faire dans l'ordre et la lumière. Elle induit, elle réclame le

16 *Solibo Magnifique*, pp.159-160.

17 Edouard Glissant, *Mahagony*, Paris, Seuil, 1989, p.18.

18 *Mahagony*, p.22.

19 *Mahagony*, pp.228-229.

tâtonnement, la redite, l'effleurement puis la plongée, le ressassement, le constant retour en arrière aussi bien que le lyrisme des visions prophétiques, aussi bien le constant sac du réel de l'Histoire présente que la poésie hallucinée du passé imaginé. Et c'est ainsi, d'ailleurs, que s'effectue le retour sur soi, le "discours du discours" dont Glissant affirme la nécessité. *Mahagony* est une réflexion du discours romanesque sur lui-même en ce qu'il est une subversion interne du récit. *Mahagony* est le roman même d'un marronage fondamental et multiple, il met en scène les différentes figures du Marron: Gani, Maho, Mani ou encore l'esclave Hégésippe qui, en secret, apprit à lire et écrire. Mais ce roman proclame aussi un autre marronnage, une autre subversion maintenant tout aussi essentiels: ceux de la loi et du cadre du récit - et le personnage devient signataire - ceux de l'Histoire et de la Chronologie - nécessairement bousculées, reformées -, et, bien sûr, ceux de la langue qui se transmua en langage inouï exprimé par les voix innombrables, diverses, contradictoires ou unanimes qui peuplent ce roman. Cette polyphonie à l'œuvre dans *Mahagony* est également présente dans de nombreux romans caraïbes dont, notamment, *Traversée de la Mangrove*, de Maryse Condé, roman également nourri de l'opacité douloureuse des Histoires antillaises tant individuelles que collectives.

Ce retour sur soi, le discours du discours, est encore plus évident dans le dernier roman de Glissant, *Tout-Monde*, vaste et complexe construction, récit foisonnant éclaté dans le temps et l'espace, ouvert à tous les vents du Divers du Monde. L'obsession de l'Histoire se trouve, dans ce roman, diffractée, relayée, amplifiée par une autre préoccupation fondamentale: le Chaos ancien et présent, persistant et affolant du Tout-Monde. Déjà, dans les romans précédents, profondément inscrits dans l'univers caraïbe, se lisait cette Poétique de la Relation dont Glissant a fait la matière de son dernier essai. Dans *Mahagony*, il nous était dit:

Car si tant d'histoires, de paroles, de femmes entêtées et d'enfants récalcitrants se rencontraient et se quittaient dans cette masse acharnée de temps que le chroniqueur avait débroussaillé pour sa sauvegarde - face à tant de sourds opposants, de réticentes surdités - comment ne pas penser

d'une part que c'était là une image en condensé de ce qui vaquait terriblement sur toute la terre des hommes, où tant et tant infiniment se rencontrent et se quittent, dans le fracas des famines et le silence des apocalypses, à travers les complots de destruction menés contre tous par quelques-uns.²⁰

Tout-Monde, sans abandonner aucune des obsessions des romans précédents, les porte, semble-t-il, à une sorte de point d'incandescence, symbolisé par cet élément narratif et emblématique majeur: le voyage, le voyage total, la longue errance de Mathieu Béluse et Raphaël Targin dans la splendeur et la folie du Tout-Monde. Dans ce roman, l'innommable est non seulement celui du passé mais encore celui du présent dont l'obscène et inévitable image est partout, ainsi que le déclare l'un des personnages:

Vous essayez de tracer le tracas du monde, la folie en exercice, tout ce chaos que vous respirez, mais allez donc monsieur, ça ne résonne pas comme ça. Chaque fois vous ouvrez un journal ou voyez une télévision, oui chaque fois, la plus décervelée des déraisons que vous avez en conception, la voici qui déroule sous vos yeux. Tout ce que vous pouvez imaginer de plus abracadabra, de plus dévergondé dans le sang et la démission de l'humanité, toutes les bêtes détraquées qui paradent dans vos têtes et vos entrailles, allez donc, ouvrez n'importe quel journal et n'importe quelle radio et n'importe quelle télévision, et même quand c'est radio-bagnole au coin de la jetée, - tout cela est devant vous en déboussolade.²¹

Et c'est pour résister à cette "déboussolade", à ce chaos, à ce vertige - dont il n'est même pas sûr qu'ils soient féconds - qu'il importe de retrouver et préserver, s'il se peut, les traces du passé, ces traces qui témoignent de la splendeur menacée du Divers du Monde, ainsi que tentent de le faire, dans *Tout-Monde*, divers personnages, dont Artémise Marie-Anne qui "commencent de chercher les traces":

20 *Mahagony*, p.23.

21 Edouard Glissant, *Tout-Monde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1993, p.414.

La mémoire leur manquait, comme à une personne d'âge ou à un peuple démunis. Elles couraient ces noms (Mani, Maho, Lomé, Gani) qui avaient fait route aux histoires folles qu'elles avaient traversées, - elles s'équivoquaient dans les attributions. Elles mélangeaient les visages, les lieux, les dates, tournant comme dans un virage, s'effrayant de leurs vides. Elles se raccrochaient à des morceaux de pays, c'est-à-dire à des pans de paysage, dont elles croyaient qu'ils racontaient l'avenir. Elles rêvaient béantes à l'entrée de ces contes, ne sachant où ça menait [...] Soudain, elles déboulaient leur parole dans un débordement de cyclone. Elles récitaient leur absence.²²

Lui-même trace, trace visible et palpable, enclose dans l'écrit, du Divers du Monde, *Tout-Monde* apparaît comme la somme d'une recherche fondamentale, initiée il y a plus de trente ans et poursuivie avec une obstination, une détermination farouches à la mesure même de la résistance de l'Histoire. La dépossession ancienne et continuée, l'innommable qu'il faut pourtant nommer et l'irrémissible et nécessaire opacité sont toujours au mitan de cette recherche, elles en forment l'inévitable structure mais la création, le langage romanesques sont à la fois une expression et un dépassement de l'innommable et de l'opacité de l'Histoire.

Ce qui reste de l'innommable, c'est la trace, une trace qui se dépasse mais une trace indélébile, aussi vivante et persistante que cet arbre, le mahogany, témoin muet mais constant, dans *Mahagony*, des passés innconnus:

Un arbre est tout un pays, et si nous demandons quel est ce pays, nous plongeons à l'obscur indéracinable du temps, gardant sur nos jambes et nos bras des cicatrices ineffaçables.²³

La création romanesque, mémoire de ces cicatrices et tentative renouvelée de cicatriser la blessure de l'Histoire, permet ainsi

non seulement de nommer l'innommable et de résister à la douleur - consciente ou inconsciente - qu'inflige le passé, mais elle permet aussi l'irruption, à sa convenance et selon ses propres modalités esthétiques, du Tout-Monde. Elle permet le surgissement fabuleux du Divers, le voyage total et l'errance puisqu'elle est elle-même voyage et errance, cette errance dont il nous est dit, dans *Tout-Monde*, dans le livre II du traité de Mathieu Béluse:

L'ERRANCE. - C'est cela même qui nous permet de nous fixer [...] et de dériver enfin. Dériver à quoi? A la fixité du mouvement du Tout-Monde. A ces marelles, tragiques - ou endiablées, sages, ou bienheureuses que nous jouons tous et dont les horizons ne forment pas les lignes. Qui nous permet donc de nous fixer à cette dérive, laquelle n'égare pas. La pensée de l'errance débloque l'imaginaire, elle nous projette hors de cette grotte en prison où nous étions enfermés, qui est la cale ou la caye de la soi-disant unicité. Nous sommes plus grands, de toute la grandeur du monde! Et de son incompréhensible absurdité où j'imagine pourtant. Alors, portant les yeux ailleurs, nous ne voyons que désastres, - l'impossible et le déni! Mais cette mer qui explose, la Caraïbe, et toutes les îles du monde, sont créoles, c'est-à-dire imprévisibles. Et tous les continents, dont les côtes sont incalculables. Quel est ce voyage, qui serre sa fin en lui-même? Qui bute dans une fin! L'être ni l'errance n'ont de terme - et le changement est leur permanence, ho! - Ils continuent toujours.²⁴

Priska Degas
Université Aix-Marseille III

22 Ibid, p.163.

23 *Mahagony*, p.13.

24 *Tout-Monde*, p.124.

The Thiaroye Massacre in Word and Image

The refraction of an historical incident through the medium of literature or her sister arts can be instructive in various ways, throwing light on the complex patterns of perception both of history and of art. The present essay seeks to investigate three notable responses to the shameful massacre which occurred at Thiaroye military camp on the outskirts of Dakar towards the end of the second World War. Each response uses means appropriate to its chosen medium - poem, play or film - while inevitably reflecting the reactions and views of the writer concerned. To the best of our knowledge, the three responses considered here are the only ones to which the general public has access, but the massacre itself is little known, its details still obscured both, in a practical sense, by certain archives still not being available and, in a moral way, by an understandable sense of shame on the part of the colonial and then post-colonial authorities.¹ That the authorities of the time should

1 In addition to the three items studied here, it is known that the Senegalese film-maker Johnson Traoré attempted in 1984 to treat the subject but was forcibly dissuaded. Those who held the keys to the relevant archives "se refermaient comme des huîtres" when he mentioned the word "Thiaroye": see Frédéric Ploquin, "Histoire d'un film interdit", *L'Événement du jeudi* (12-18 nov. 1992), p.98. Ploquin also observes of Sembène's *Camp de Thiaroye* that, after being denounced as lying propaganda, it will not be screened in France, in the cinema or on television. In discussion, at Trinity College Dublin in March 1993, Sembène Ousmane suggested that other plays had been written in Senegal on the subject, but he could not remember details and they are certainly unpublished.

A note on authorship is in order: the idea for this study was proposed by Professor Little to his final-year student, Nicola Macdonald for her undergraduate dissertation at Trinity College Dublin in 1992. See Nicola Macdonald, "The Thiaroye Incident: responses in the work of Senghor, Diop and Sembène", unpubl. B.A. diss., Trinity College Dublin, 1993, 59pp. (available for consultation on request at the Department of French, T.C.D.). Through R.L., N.M. met Monique Hugon, Jean-Louis Joubert and James Leahy, all of whom provided useful information, in London at the ASCALF conference in November 1992, and interviewed Sembène Ousmane in Dublin in March 1993. At her own initiative, she met Drs Donal and Rita Cruise O'Brien in London. The present essay was written by R.L. using the

have been the Free French under De Gaulle, rather than those of the Third Republic or of the Vichy regime, has made it exceptionally difficult for post-war French historians to come to terms with the state breaking its contract with a group of men to whom, among others, it owed its very existence.

Our corpus comprises Senghor's poem "Tyaroye" from *Hosties noires*, Boubacar Boris Diop's play *Thiaroye terre rouge*, published with his first novel *Le Temps de Tamango* in 1981, and Sembène's powerful 1988 film *Camp de Thiaroye*.² Each will be considered in due course, but it is necessary first to establish the historical facts about the massacre insofar as they are available. Fortunately for the literary critic, this work is already done, notably by Myron J. Echenberg in both a book which retraces the history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, in which five pages are devoted to the Thiaroye incident, seen as the most serious of a series of clashes at various repatriation camps, and in a substantial article dealing exclusively with it.³

The essential facts are as follows. In a few minutes on the night of 1st December 1944, thirty-five *tirailleurs sénégalais* were shot dead at Thiaroye by the French colonial authorities.

factual and critical material conscientiously gathered by N.M. at his instigation but adding extra references and making his own interpretations. The text was reviewed and agreed by both signatories, but the views expressed are ultimately those of R.L. alone.

2 Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Hosties noires*, in *Oeuvre poétique*, nouvelle édition, Coll. Points, Paris: Seuil, 1990, pp.90-91. Boubacar Boris Diop, *Le Temps de Tamango suivi de Thiaroye terre rouge*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1981, pp.145-203. Sembène's film won several prizes after its first screening in 1988, notably at the Venice, Carthage and Ouagadougou festivals. It has been screened on television in Britain by Channel 4.

3 Myron J. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: the tirailleurs sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960*, Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann; London: Currey, 1991, pp.100-04; and "Tragedy at Thiaroye: the Senegalese soldiers' uprising of 1944", in *African Labor History*, ed. Peter C.W. Gutkind, Robin Cohen & Jean Copans, Sage Series on African Modernization and Development 2, Beverly Hills & London: Sage Publications, 1978, pp.109-28. This same volume also contains a chapter (pp.129-154) by J. Suret-Canale on "The French West African Railway Workers' Strike, 1947-1948" which provides invaluable background information for the reader of Sembène's novel *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*.

Twenty-four died instantly and eleven died from their wounds. A further thirty-five were seriously wounded and hundreds more suffered less serious injuries. The men formed part of a contingent of some 1,280 African ex-prisoners of war who were gathered at Thiaroye awaiting demobilisation and - because the misnamed *tirailleurs sénégalais* were in fact drawn from all over French West Africa⁴ - repatriation. They had been among the ten thousand or so African prisoners held in German camps following the fall of France in June 1940. "Return to the rigid, autocratic atmosphere of the colonies was then an unpleasant reminder for many soldiers that, despite any illusions they may have had about having served France, to the civilian administrators and Frenchmen in private life, the old colonial ways had not changed".⁵ Before leaving France, they were told to wait until they arrived in Dakar to receive their back pay and other due bonuses. Many also had substantial sums in European currency for labour done at work-camps during the war, and this they wished to have converted into *Francs C.F.A.* Despite instructions from the Minister for the Colonies that standard gratuities should be paid, they were not; and even their own money was withheld from them "in safe keeping" and a mere 50% of the standard exchange rate offered for it. The soldiers' protest took the form of a refusal to obey officers' orders, and at one point the Commander in Chief of French Forces in the Dakar region, General Dagnan, was held to ransom for a few tense hours. Because the men were still in uniform, partially armed and under military discipline, the uprising officially constituted a mutiny. It was brutally suppressed with massive fire-power. On the colonial side, no lives were lost. Some thirty-five survivors among the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were paraded through the streets of Dakar the next day to intimidate the local population, then tried and sentenced to terms of up to ten years. Five more died before an amnesty was declared in June 1947, but all forces of order, whether French colonial and Muslim at the time or Senghor as President after Senegalese independence in 1960, did everything to draw a veil over the

⁴ Sembène took care to have actors of different national and tribal origins to play his *tirailleurs* in *Camp de Thiaroye*.

⁵ Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye", p.118.

appalling affair.⁶ However, the public parade through Dakar and the rapid dispersal of all the survivors paradoxically ensured throughout French West Africa the maximum publicity for the massacre that the authorities dreaded. "Thiaroye represented a brutal act of repression against soldiers whose only crime was to claim money that was rightfully theirs".⁷ So as to reconstitute the facts of the case, Echenberg was obliged to turn to unpublished and scattered accounts. It is clear, however, that he has established them in all essentials and that they not only tally in large measure with what Sembène presents in his film but also more than justify the sense of outrage which is generated by it.

*

We shall turn to a closer consideration of *Camp de Thiaroye* in due course, but should first, if only for reasons of chronology, investigate Senghor's response in his sixteen-verse poem "Tyaroye". It is dated "Paris, décembre 1944", so suggesting that the poet is reacting "à chaud" to news of the events in his homeland.⁸ Significance is clearly accorded to the poem by its position in the collection, last in the longest section in *Hosties*

⁶ For the conservative Muslim reaction, see *Colonial Conscripts*, pp.101-2 and "Tragedy at Thiaroye", pp.121,124. As for Senghor's, Echenberg writes (*Colonial Conscripts*, p.170): "After independence [...], Senghor found Thiaroye too painful and embarrassing a moment in the history of Franco-Senegalese relations to be commemorated. Perhaps he resented the manner in which the symbol of Thiaroye had been appropriated by his more radical political opponents. Despite occasional requests from Senegalese veterans, Senghor did not permit a monument to the fallen at Thiaroye and allowed the cemetery to remain in shabby disrepair." Senghor was nonetheless active, in 1946, in lobbying for a pardon for the victims of Thiaroye after gaining the veterans' vote in the 1945 elections to the Constituent Assembly. President Auriol finally signed the amnesty in June 1947, but a pardon is not, of course, an acquittal.

⁷ Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye", p.121.

⁸ The term "à chaud" is borrowed from Lilyan Kesteloot's comments on the poem in *Comprendre les poèmes de L.S. Senghor*, Paris: Editions Saint-Paul, 1986, p.40. There is no reason, as there might be with other writers (such as Hugo), to doubt the authenticity of the stated date of composition.

noires, "Camp 1940", and followed only by a final "Prière de paix". Other poems in the volume proclaim Senghor's sympathy with the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, with the suffering of infantry- and artillery-men and especially of prisoners, of which he had been one himself. The various semantic aspects of the title of the collection, with its notable reversal of the traditional whiteness of the eucharistic host and its overtones of sacrifice, death and redemption, make of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* the Christ-like victims central to the poet's attention.⁹ The blood of *tirailleurs sénégalais* has been shed not merely for France but in the name of "la Vierge-Espérance". Yet "Tyaroye" opens on a note of disbelief in the repeated "est-ce donc vrai [...]?". In typical manner, Senghor echoes, in "la France n'est plus la France", a phrase that every Third Republic schoolchild would have learned to recite by heart: Du Bellay's famous sonnet which begins: "Nouveau venu, qui cherches Rome en Rome / Et rien de Rome en Rome n'apperçois..." and various similar sentiments expressed in *Les Antiquitez de Rome*. Using such a familiar moment from French poetry as a rod to beat the latest manifestation of French dominance cuts into the quick of "la nation oublieuse de sa mission d'hier".

Repetition plays an important role in the poem as so often in Senghor's work, building as it does both on the techniques of biblical verse and the modern exponents of the *verset* on the one hand and on the practices of the African oral tradition on the other.¹⁰ The repetition, in the opening line, of both

9 An exchange in Genet's *Les Nègres* seems to poke fun at Senghor's negotiation of compromise expressed by the very title *Hosties noires*: "when the Missionary asks Diouf "Inventerez-vous une hostie noire? ...", Diouf replies "Mais, Monseigneur, nous avons mille ingrédients: nous la teindrons", and suggests "Une hostie grise". When this is rejected by the Governor, Diouf comes back plaintively "Blanche d'un côté, noire de l'autre" (J.P. Little, *Genet: "Les Nègres"*, Critical Guides to French Texts 80, London: Grant & Cutler, 1990, p.33)

10 "Verset" is the word used both for verses in the Bible and, in modern French prosody, for long lines of verse, pioneered by Claudel and developed by Saint-John Perse, both of whom were important models for Senghor. Some examples of the indigenous tradition are to be found in Senghor's translations, collected at the end of his *Oeuvre Poétique*. See Roger Little, ""Je danse donc je suis": the rhythm of Senghor's two cultures", in *The*

"prisonniers" and "la France" sharpens the focus on the ambiguity of the term "prisonniers français", both French prisoners and prisoners of the French. For the policy of *assimilation* which gave privileges to selected citizens of Dakar, Rufisque, Gorée, and Saint-Louis was distinct from that of association, which, as part of France's *mission civilisatrice*, maintained all other French West Africans as subjects. The word "sang" spills itself no less than eight times over the first eleven lines of the poem, and then is gradually stanching, first grammatically by the indirectness of the relevant pronoun, then by the poet's clutching at hope, which provides the final word of the poem. The attempt at self-persuasion in the repeated "Non, vous n'êtes pas morts gratuits" of the third stanza may not fully persuade the reader that those murdered at Thiaroye are "les témoins de l'Afrique immortelle [...] les témoins du monde nouveau", since injustice seems a poor basis for such a future. The poet's voice, a leitmotif throughout the poem, declares itself angry but in typical Senghorian manner maintains its moderation. So, at the end, we read about, rather than listen to, this "voix de courroux que berce l'espoir", seeing few signs of anger or grounds for hope. The very obliqueness and sophistication of the writing - each line of the first stanza is, pointedly, a rhetorical question - undermines the power of the emotions which the bloodbath at Thiaroye might legitimately have generated when the news first came through. Furthermore, the number of first-person pronouns or possessives in the second stanza seems in itself a form of self-indulgence incommensurate with the horror of the event, and the insistent alliteration of sibilants reinforces the impression of emotion prettified by aestheticism:

Sang sang ô sang noir de mes frères, vous tachez
l'innocence de mes draps
Vous êtes la sueur où baigne mon angoisse, vous êtes la
souffrance qui enroue ma voix
Wô! entendez ma voix aveugle, génies sourds-muets de la
nuit.

Others have interpreted the poem in a far more positive light, and the virtues of its lyricism must not be underestimated. However sophisticated its qualities, it reaches towards an absoluteness of statement in its refusal both to condemn and to condone. Whatever plagues might be sent to torment Senghor's people - "Pluie de sang rouge sauterelles" -, he will assert himself as their Moses, lift up his voice to the heavens, and lead them towards a promised land.

In many of his poems, Senghor can be seen to select colours or coloured features for deliberate effect, lush greens, endless sky-blues and savannah ochres forming an appropriate backdrop to many a text, while black and white figure, sometimes with telling irony, in the foreground. In "Tyaroye", a patriotic tricolor provides a subtext in the blue of "azur", the white of "l'innocence de mes draps", the red of spilt blood. No other colours appear. So the mildness of the reproach represented by the rhetorical question "est-ce donc vrai que la France n'est plus la France?" is further coloured by this veiled allusion - whether conscious or not matters little, though our psychological interpretation may differ accordingly - to a symbol of the republican tradition. Senghor plays down the political dimension, concentrating on his disbelief, his pity and his trust in redemption.

*

The political confrontation is more directly faced by Boris Diop in his play, *Thiaroye terre rouge*, comprising six tableaux and an epilogue. The first tableau, set in 1940, opens on a peaceful village scene of men gathered under the palaver tree, and the initial exchange both records the deprivation from which they suffer and attributes it unambiguously to the impact of the colonisers:

1er VILLAGEOIS. - Toujours la même chose.
 2e VILLAGEOIS. - Oui. Et depuis bien longtemps. Rien à manger et cette pluie qui ne vient jamais!
 3e VILLAGEOIS. - Et si elle venait? Même la pluie, ils nous l'ont volée.
 1er VILLAGEOIS. - Il en est ainsi depuis toujours.
 3e VILLAGEOIS. - Non. Seulement depuis que les Européens sont dans notre pays. Mon grand-père me parle

souvent de l'époque où les hommes n'étaient pas aux travaux forcés dans les plantations de Monsieur Dalmas et du Commandant de cercle.

2e VILLAGEOIS. - Et pour notre malheur ce Commandant adore la musique nègre; non seulement il nous faut travailler et avoir faim, mais encore chanter et danser (*il se lève, esquisse un pas de danse, retombe grotesquement*). Je ne peux pas danser, j'ai faim ...

1er VILLAGEOIS. - Cela ne changera jamais. Nous aurons toujours faim. (pp.147-48)

Despondency forces the villagers of Sanankoro beyond the bounds of reason to the point where Europeans are even responsible for the lack of rain, but the impact of this opening is unambiguous, physical and social deprivation combining with a measure of self-denigration to set the scene for a political message. The third villager answers his own question "Qu'est-ce un Nègre?" not as an anthropologist, nor as a metaphysician in the manner of Genet¹¹, but with the stark declaration: "Où rencontre-t-on cet animal? Vous savez: nous sommes des esclaves. Nous ne sommes que des esclaves!" (p.148]. Seeing themselves through the eyes of Europeans and adopting their criteria in a mind-set well analysed by Octave Mannoni in *Prospéro et Caliban, psychologie de la colonisation*, by Albert Memmi in his *Portait du colonisé* and by Fanon in his various writings, the Africans are left with the belief that they are the colonisers' creatures (as Caliban is Prospero's "creature"): "Dès qu'ils ont posé le pied en Afrique, nous sommes devenus des sauvages" (pp.148-9).

Showing "tous les signes de la malnutrition", a friend, Naman, joins them and announces the death of his son from lack of food. He is the first to show signs of revolt against their plight and jolt his fellows from their supine lethargy:

NAMAN: [...] Un enfant ne doit pas mourir de faim. (Pause. Il reprend sur un ton plus violent.) Ecoutez mes frères, cela a assez duré. Tant que nous ne nous dresserons pas contre l'envahisseur, il continuera à se gaver de notre chair et de la chair de nos enfants. (p.150)

11 See the epigraph to Genet's play *Les Nègres*, "Qu'est-ce que c'est donc un noir? Et d'abord, c'est de quelle couleur?"

The simple statement "Un enfant ne doit pas mourir de faim" encapsulates a powerful principle on which action may be founded. Could it be with a glance at Senghor that he adds: "Ne restons pas là à pleurnicher comme des poètes, le ventre creux à n'en plus pouvoir. Nous devons résister"? There is in Naman's determination to act something of Soyinka's retort on Negritude that the tiger does not go on about its tigritude but rather pounces on its prey. That the former Senegalese president should be a target seems to be confirmed by the later trivialisation by the French recruiting sergeant of another idea dear to Senghor's heart: "Sans compter qu'ils [les futurs tirailleurs sénégalais] pourraient voir du pays... C'est ça le métissage culturel" (p.158).

The arrival of the chief, Makhary, calling his fellow-villagers to arms in the cause of France is a splendid comic moment born of high tragedy. His discourse is that of his white masters, by whom he has been thoroughly indoctrinated. France is "notre chère patrie", Strasbourg and Paris are "une partie de nous-mêmes, de notre âme", "nous devons notre magnifique prospérité [!] à ce pays qui nous a adoptés et qui, maintenant, se confond absolument avec nous dans la plus absolue fraternité" (p.152). Naman is the first to rise to ask the key what's-Hecuba-to-him-or-he-to-Hecuba question; and to affirm his refusal he reiterates the key image of Negritude, so forcefully used in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*: "Je suis debout maintenant. Pour toujours" (p.153). The scene ends with Naman's argument persuading every last villager that the reality of food is more important to them than the shadow of Strasbourg: "Mes frères, si l'un d'entre vous est sûr qu'il mangera demain à sa faim, qu'il aille à Strasbourg". Such common sense routs the chief and his henchman, Dièye, who flee before the general shouts of "A bas les traîtres! A mort les traîtres!"

The scene shifts to Palissot the recruiting sergeant's office, where Makhary and Dièye try to cover for their ineffectual efforts, going so far as to propose first bribing then hanging Naman *pour encourager les autres*. It is Palissot's turn to underline on Diop's behalf the absurdity and self-delusion of the colonialist discourse:

PALISSOT. - (*Comme absent*). Refuser d'aller se battre! Au moment même où l'ennemi piétine l'herbe tendre de

nos vertes campagnes de Normandie... Refuser d'aller se battre! Des gens que nous avons nourris, soignés, éduqués. Hier encore les plus sinistres barbares de la terre, ils vivaient dans de misérables paillotes et maintenant, grâce à la colonisation, ils peuvent mourir dans des hôpitaux ultra-modernes. Les ingrats. Je vais leur apprendre à refuser, moi. (p.156)

Dièye's use of the argument "ils n'ont pas l'habitude de dire non", is itself a telling indictment of which he is serenely unconscious. But when he swears by his ancestors, Palissot explodes:

PALISSOT. - Ah non! Pas de couplet sur les ancêtres! Pire que des animaux. Ils se massacraient à chaque coin de forêt pour un morceau de manioc... Mais quand nous sommes venus, refuser d'aller se battre! Ils veulent donc croupir dans la misère? Ah je vous le dis, les nègres sont stupides... Quand je pense qu'ici, à Sanankoro, ils ne peuvent même pas manger leur voisin alors que dans l'armée... Des idiots. [...] Pour des cannibales, rien de tel que la guerre pourtant... On peut bouffer autant de types qu'on veut. (p. 157-158)

Palissot's utter contempt for blacks here takes on a double-edged irony, just as it does when it transpires that Dièye has passed his *certificat d'études* whereas Palissot has not, a fact mirrored in the fifth tableau when the African N.C.O. Bachir says "Vive Descartes!" and General Modiano wonders: "Descartes? Qui est ce type? [...] Ah oui, Descartes, le poète!" (p.197). The reversal of values means that all sense of human proportion is lost. His parting instructions to Makhary and Dièye cap it all: "Tuez seulement les femmes, les enfants et les vieillards. La France immortelle a besoin de soldats" (pp.158-59). A volley of shots and screams off stage follow immediately: the orders have been carried out to the letter. The opening tableau thus acts as a proleptic analogue of what is to follow.¹²

¹² The useful term "proleptic analogue" is also applied to Césaire's use of the cock-fight between cocks called Pétion and Christophe: see Roger Little, "Questions of intertextuality in *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*", *French Studies*, forthcoming, and indeed to many other instances in literature (e.g.

The pernicious corruption produced by colonisation is shown in the tragi-comedy of the first tableau to infiltrate the minds of the colonisers as devastatingly as it does those of the colonised. Yet for all Diop's snide allusions to Senghor, he is left with the same paradox of death and hope and chooses to close the tableau with an old man reflecting on the massacre in poetically heightened language not a million miles from the *versets*, inversions, repetitions and colourful metaphors of Négritude:

LE VIEILLARD. - [...] Sanankoro était debout et secouées au loin les termites malfaisantes!
[...] Sanankoro, un village pacifique perdu au cœur de la forêt, Sanankoro n'existe plus.
Hurlement des femmes éventrées.
L'enfant écrasé sous les bottes et les bombes.
Ma barge blanche salie par la boue et par le sang
C'est en vérité
Le prix de la liberté.
Sanankoro sera libre! (p.160)

The second tableau finds Naman four years later among other *tirailleurs sénégalais* at Thiaroye waiting to be demobilised and repatriated. In the course of it, he establishes himself firmly, both among his comrades and in the face of Bachir, "sous-officier à la solde des colons", as the hero of protest against colonial injustice, and is unambiguous in his view of Thiaroye: "J'ai passé trois ans à Dachau et à Buchenwald. Aujourd'hui c'est Thiaroye. Un autre camp de concentration" (p.162). In his mind's eye, Sanankoro is very much present, but it is merely representative of all the villages of Africa, and those who share his plight will hear his call:

NAMAN. - [...] Je vois les morts de Sanankoro et à travers eux ceux de tous les pays. Je sens encore les chaînes qui m'ont surpris en plein sommeil. J'entends les cris des innocents de mon village, ceux qui ne voulaient pas aller à Strasbourg. Je suis debout au centre de Sanankoro qui n'existe plus mais qui se réinstalle dans les plus profondes fibres du plus profond de mon corps. (p.164)

the opening rowing-boat episode in Maupassant's *Pierre et Jean*, which adumbrates the later ocean crossing).

Bachir, a prime example of Shakespeare's "petling petty officer", uses all his borrowed, brief authority but cannot deny Naman's moral armour. His threat to have the soldiers shot for insubordination is countered by Naman's portentous reply: "Notre mort, levain qui dresse et conforte la voix irréversible du peuple des justes" (p.166). Disconcerted, Bachir finally conveys General Modiano's message to the men to prepare for departure home in forty-eight hours. It is Naman, as one might expect, who asks to know when the money due to them will be handed over, and the answer is no less expectedly evasive. Naman closes the tableau with a straightforward statement: "Nous réclamons notre argent et nous ne partirons pas sans l'avoir reçu". The spring is set. As a survivor of the real Thiaroye was to recall:

C'était plus une question de principe que d'argent: les sommes qu'on nous devait étaient souvent peu de choses, même si certains "petits Blancs" nous trouvaient trop exigeants. Mais nous étions intransigeants: ce qui est dû aux Français nous est dû, nous sommes comme eux des patriotes et des défenseurs du monde libre.¹³

The third tableau finds Naman in conversation with some Thiaroye villagers and reveals a new facet of his character through his love for Kadia. Yet his hatred of injustice is stronger, and the village supports his stance, encouraging tenacity and patience. Two of his fellow soldiers are designated to confront General Modiano who feeds them with empty promises and relishes his deceit: "Les idiots. Je leur ai fait beaucoup de promesses... Du vent. Ils seront tous fusillés le moment venu". To which, Bachir, who recognises in himself "une ordure nécessaire à la colonisation", obsequiously adds, out-Heroding Herod: "Il faut détruire les insectes dont l'insensé bourdonnement nous empêche de jouir des bienfaits de la

13 Doudou Diallo, "L'Aube tragique du 1er décembre 1944 à Thiaroye (Sénégal)", *Afrique-Histoire*, 7, (1983), p.50. According to Echenberg's figures ("Tragedy at Thiaroye", p.114), Diallo would seem seriously to underestimate the sums involved: between them, the 1,280 men at Thiaroye held 18 million French francs, an average of some 20,000F per man, the equivalent of ten years' wages for a black worker in A.O.F.

colonisation" (p.181).¹⁴ Carrying out the general's instructions to say anything he likes to appease the soldiers, Bachir exasperates Naman in particular, who shouts defiance and, again in heightened tones, calls for vengeance: "Nous serons les justes aux mains tachées de sang... Nous lutterons... Les fusils éclatent. Mille soleils. Et soudain un éclat de rire infini dans toutes les cases de l'Afrique" (p.185). A burlesque scene of Bachir's report back to Modiano ends the tableau by pitting comedy against tragedy as the general orders spies to collect incriminating evidence against the leaders of the insurrection and reaffirms his intention of punishing without mercy any insubordination they may detect.

The pace quickens: the rest of the play takes less room than the third tableau alone. The brief fourth tableau shows Naman testing the mettle of his fellows: "Notre action sera sanglante. Elle ne constitue qu'une étape de la lutte des peuples d'Afrique" (p.190). Death with honour will prove their humanity to the whole world. "Soyons organisés et sans pitié!" The preliminary details are agreed... and relayed verbatim by one of their number to Modiano in the next tableau. The spy there wears a cheapjack African mask, a fact which prompts Diop, through Modiano, to another jibe at Senghor: "Tu sais, mon garçon, il ne faut jamais enlever ton masque. Il symbolise les valeurs de civilisation négro-africaines. Nous en aurons peut-être besoin un jour pour régner" (p.193). The General shows his true colours when he shouts at Bachir: "Il me faut absolument un prétexte pour les faire fusiller tous!" When Bachir retorts "Qu'avons-nous à faire d'un prétexte?", Modiano replies with an irony which Diop clearly invites us to relish as we deplore its implications: "Prends garde à tes paroles, Sergent Bachir Diallo! La France est un pays de droit!" (p.194).

A rag-taggle array of white soldiers (whom Modiano had at first been terrified to believe were *tirailleurs séngalais* advancing towards his office) then decide the course of subsequent events. A pretext has been found - "entrave à l'effort de guerre par des revendications intempestives" (p.197) - and

14 Animal imagery is significant in the play: the French are "chacals" and "hyènes", beasts of prey; the Africans are dismissed (or, adopting the coloniser's discourse, dismiss themselves) either as "chiens" or, as here, as "insectes".

the details of the action determined. The fifth tableau ends with a stage direction very pointedly requiring a repetition of the gun-shot noises and screams "exactement comme à la fin du premier tableau". The short sixth tableau shows Kadia and an anonymous young man symbolising Africa's future keening over Naman's body. The lyricism contrasts sharply with the preceding brutality, and its resolutely forward-looking hopefulness is not very different in nature from Senghor's position at the end of "Tiyaroye":

LE JEUNE HOMME:

Je suis peuple en haillons! Je veux être un homme car
l'ennemi a saccagé mes entrailles, arpenté mon sang,
craché sur mes cadavres.
Tiyaroye charnier dis-je!
Mais voici
Désormais fermes en mes mains
Les résolutions nouvelles!

KADIA:

Patience! Vous de Tiyaroye et d'ailleurs les fils avancent
sans vacillement.
[...] alors le fleuve sera libre
Et l'enfant caressera les crêtes du soleil. (pp.200-01)

The young man's last words echo round the wings as the brief epilogue has Naman and other dead *tirailleurs* recognise that the flame of the truth they have died for is being carried into the future to fight "le vrai combat contre les vrais ennemis", as Naman's final words have it, repeating an earlier phrase he had used (III, iii, p.185). But the last word is reserved for one of his fellow-soldiers in a piece of self-conscious withdrawal from play-acting while remaining in character. The temptation to poeticise such a massacre, such injustice, is fiercely rejected, and Diop, through Moctar, urges the audience to both vigilance and vengeance after a final side-swipe at Senghor:

MOCTAR. - Pouah! Un poème...! Je déteste ceux qui
mettent en musique le sang des autres! (Désignant
hargneusement le public, voix fatiguée et tendue:) Regardez-les, ils sont venus à un spectacle et ils se disent:
c'est beau comme un poème la mort d'un innocent! [...] Je

ne voulais pas mourir. Et vous, mes frères, qui me regardez pourrir au fond de ma fosse, vengez la mort d'un homme qui ne voulait pas mourir. (p.203)

*

Sembène's two-and-a-half-hour film, *Camp de Thiaroye*, written and directed in collaboration with his protégé Thierno Faty Sow, foregrounds neither lyricism nor symbolism, even if elements of both qualify his realism. It is firmly set, as are his novels, in the naturalistic tradition. It opens on the scene of *tirailleurs sénégalais* disembarking at Dakar to a hero's welcome, the strains of military music and the cheers of the multi-racial crowd. The next time the harbour will be seen is in the closing shot of the film, when a new batch of *tirailleurs* embark for departure, emphasising how little has changed despite the intervening tragedy. The wounded are helped off first, and individuals whose particular fortunes we shall follow are singled out for special attention. Pays, who has lost the power of speech at Buchenwald, but who will prove to have developed other faculties to a high degree (he has a particular flair for sensing treachery, dishonesty and danger), is introduced. Often accompanied by a melancholic leitmotif on the harmonica, Pays, Sembène has suggested, embodies Africa.¹⁵ Sergent-chef Diatta, bright and fit, greets his family, but the mood sours when he introduces his commanding officer Capitaine Raymond, the Frenchman who will prove to be the most sympathetic to the troops: yet the family is dismissive of his handshake and his effort to greet them in Jola, their native tongue. It is the first instance of the black/white tension which subtends all the other tensions explored in the film. Raymond in turn greets captains Labrousse and Auguste, the colonial officers who are to take charge of the *tirailleurs*. They march to

15 "Pays is Africa. He has been abused and traumatized. He can't talk. He is alive, he can look and see, he can touch, and he can see the future. He is the beholder of the drama of the past, of the concentration camps, of colonisation, very disciplined, very alone, very solitary, but he can't express it." Cited thus by James Leahy, "The Language of African Cinema" in *Protée noir: essais sur la littérature francophone de l'Afrique noire et des Antilles*, ed. P. Hawkins & A. Lavers, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992, p.195.

the transit camp at Thiaroye and a change of mood accompanies the change of scene. Raymond is aghast: "C'est dans ces baraquements que vous allez les loger?" Labrousse insists on the temporary nature of their stay and addresses a eulogy to the men in terms whose very emphasis is a foil for the contrast in treatment to come. Although not a recruiting speech such as that of Makhary Faye in the opening scene of *Thiaroye terre rouge*, Labrousse's harangue is no less founded on the deceptions of colonialist discourse. Cut to Diatta and Pays behind the barbed-wire fencing, stressing the concentration-camp nature of Thiaroye in an image as stark as Naman's blunt comment on it. Indeed, the camp is directly compared in a flashback to a German POW camp, the visual impact once again replacing words, and while singing and other recreations show resigned cheerfulness, the cramped conditions are underlined when a few visiting relatives fill Diatta's modest room.

Such scene-setting acts as a foil to complaints and quarrels about the food some twenty minutes into the film: "Pas bon! Nous pas cochons".¹⁶ Then Diatta becomes the centre of attention, firstly to show his European musical tastes, partly fostered by the French wife he has taken (to the discomfiture of his family, who have promised him to his cousin Binetou), then in an episode which allows the exploration of complex racial relationships. At a local brothel run by a white woman, Diatta, who has removed any signs of rank or allegiance, is taken for an American and drink prices are duly doubled. When he orders Pernod, his cover is blown: "Madame, madame, venez vite, il y a un nègre ici!", to which Madame replies: "Pas de bougnoules ici, et il n'y en aura jamais. [...] Mais qu'est-ce que tu attends? Que j'appelle les flics? Allez, fous le camp!" Diatta's forlorn comment: "j'étais même pas venu pour baiser, j'étais venu pour boire un pot!" is of no avail against her racism, just as his innocence cannot protect him against being beaten up and carried off by American soldiers passing in a jeep. In retaliation, the *tirailleurs* capture an American soldier, and a swap is arranged at which Diatta alone is in a position to act as interpreter. The episode is not mere by-play, therefore, but an

16 Nicola Macdonald presents a useful episode-by-episode table of the entire film with approximate timings, loc.cit, pp. 29-42.

opportunity to establish (as Diop does with regard to the ignorance of Palissot and Modiano) a reversal of the usual assumptions about who is educated and who is not.

News of developments in Europe impinges through radio broadcasts and discussions between Diatta and Raymond. One telling exchange goes as follows:

DIATTA. - Voyez-vous, je fais un parallèle entre Effok¹⁷ et Oradour-sur-Glane.

RAYMOND. - [...] On ne peut pas comparer la barbarie nazie aux exactions de l'armée française. Non. C'est pas possible.

DIATTA. - C'est l'armée coloniale. Même mentalité. Les officiers, qui en 40 ont refusé le ralliement des forces de l'AOF aux forces françaises libres et qui ont fusillé des Sénégalais ralliés à ces forces, sont les mêmes officiers qui sont à présent aux côtés du chef de la France libre et contrôlent les colonies.

RAYMOND. - Ne vous emportez pas! Vous connaissez bien le peuple de France. Vous savez que ça n'est pas pareil.

Captain Raymond doth protest too much. Sembène is inviting us to make the comparison between two regimes, one of which is acknowledged as barbaric, the other of which hides its barbarism behind protestations of justice, even of generosity. Even De Gaulle does not escape unscathed.

Only some two-thirds of the way through the film does the matter of the men's money arise. First Diatta on the parade ground and then Raymond in the mess are seen defending the soldiers' rights, and Raymond is consequently ostracised by his fellow officers. Now that the crucial issue has been broached, it is the focal centre of all the action. Suspicion leads to a hunt for hidden weapons in the barracks; then the general arrives to pacify the outraged men, and he is promptly captured as a guarantee of justice being done. This he promises, but with the

17 At Effok, people including Diatta's parents had been killed for resisting demands to requisition the rice harvest. Cf. Sanankoro in *Thiaroye terre rouge*. Oradour-sur-Glane was of course the town which the Nazis destroyed on 10 June 1944, the inhabitants being shot or burnt alive.

forked tongue that one has come to expect, and the scene of rejoicing gives way to a night-time shot of tanks approaching the camp, followed by the din and terrifying spectacle of the massacre taking place. The survivors are left to bury their dead comrades; Labrousse confirms to the general that his orders have been carried out; the general in turn affirms that the Minister of the Colonies and the Governor-General of French West Africa gave their approval. There is no heavy underlining of a moral or political lesson: the brute facts are left to speak for themselves. As the new ranks of *tirailleurs* join their ship, there is no easy reconciliation between black and white. Raymond looks in vain for Diatta, as does his promised black bride, Binetou. She, in the most human and non-political way imaginable, bears a touching hint of reconciliation in the form of a bag of coffee destined for Diatta's French wife.

*

The response of three Senegalese creative artists to one of the most traumatic moments of their national history is inevitably in some ways determined by their chosen medium of expression: poem, play or film. The impact of each will again depend in part on our preferences and presuppositions. Yet the play alone is not fully realised as we have it, for the printed page is a poor substitute for performance, however much our imagination might compensate for the unavoidable inadequacies of any particular performance. Diop, born in 1946, is also alone in not having been alive at the time of the events he evokes nor therefore, by definition, having borne arms or been taken prisoner in the second World War.

A difference of audience is also implicit in the three works. For Senghor by definition and for Diop so far in practice, since his play has not to our knowledge been performed¹⁸, a literate reader is required. Sembène revels in imposing no such requirement: "Le cinéma n'est pas réservé à une élite. Le cinéma est démocratique."¹⁹ Elsewhere he wrily observes: "Il

18 A fact confirmed by Sembène, as far as Senegal is concerned, in discussion in March 1993.

19 Sembène, Dublin, 8 March 1993, interviewed by Nicola Macdonald and cited by her, p.44.

est vrai que la littérature s'adresse à une minorité [...]. La plupart des Africains, une majorité dans une ville, vont au cinéma, même nos bonnes ménagères. [...] Pour moi le cinéma devient [...] un moyen de communication avec mon public, mais personnellement je préfère la littérature."²⁰ Whatever of the cinema's capacity to portray gesture and context, expression and detail, and to cut or fade seamlessly from one location to another, it lacks elasticity once the editor's scissors (or the censor's) have done their work. This temporal fixity can be made a virtue, of course, but film of its essence imposes its time-scale on the spectator in a way which is more absolute than in the theatre, where different timings and pace are possible within limits, and at variance with the independence from a predetermined time-scale in the case of a poem.

Such generic variations inevitably subtend any discussion of the material under consideration here. Revealing differences of mood and manner also emerge. Senghor may well condescendingly wish Sembène's films "moins superficiels, moins politiques, donc plus nègres, plus culturels - au sens de la profondeur"²¹. The boot could easily be put on the other foot and Senghor's work berated for not being something it is not trying to be. Let us rather delight in the variety of creative responses to which the appalling events at Thiaroye have given rise and hope that there may be more such responses, since it is too much to hope, as the 1960 Sharpeville massacre was to prove²², that there should be an end to the violent oppression of right by might. And may there be, on 1st December 1994, some honest commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre.

20 Sembène, "Cinéma et littérature en Afrique: entretien avec Sembène Ousmane", in *Protée noir*, p.204. Not surprisingly, Senghor too prefers literature to the cinéma: see notably *La Poésie de l'action*, Paris: Stock, 1980, pp.230-31.

21 Senghor, *La Poésie de l'action*, p.231

22 Among other literary responses to massacres in Francophone work is Williams Sassine's novel *Wirriyamu* (Présence africaine, 1976) based on the massacre of Wirriyamu in Mozambique by the Portuguese authorities in 1972. See Jeremy Carpenter, "Literary Responses to Independence: Recent Developments in the French-African Novel", unpub. Ph.D. diss., T.C.D., 1984, esp. chap. VI.

Ultimately it is the disproportion between the particular expression at Thiaroye of man's inhumanity to man and any of the artistic responses we have examined which most strikes us.²³ They all assuredly act as monuments to the dead; what counts humanly is the extent to which they condemn a system that gave rise to such unnecessary and unjustifiable slaughter. Senghor's temporising scores poorly on that moral scale, whereas Diop's telling ironies and Sembène's uncompromising realism pull few punches. The massacre at Thiaroye was a brutal political act of bad faith of the most extreme kind. Unhappily in the annals of colonialism, it is not unique.²⁴ The fact that it characterises the death-throes of an exploitative system is scarcely any consolation, particularly when it seems not of itself to have contributed to the overthrow of that system. Insofar as it offers a founding myth for a new nation, it is suspect, as similar episodes in decolonisation are suspect. But insofar as it stands as a permanent reminder that such man-made tragedies should never be allowed to happen again, any artistic production that draws our attention to it is salutary. When the poem, play, film, or potentially any other expressive medium, is also of high creative quality, its very prospects for survival in the public mind are a welcome guarantee that we shall not forget.

Roger Little & Nicola Macdonald
Trinity College Dublin

23 For a consideration of the significance of disproportion between events and literary responses to them, see, in relation to the first World War and French literature and thought, John Cruickshank, *Variations on Catastrophe: Some French Responses to the Great War*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1982.

24 In *Colonial Conscripts* (p.100), Echenberg records fifteen disturbances among the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in 1944-45, but in none other, it seems, were lives lost. In his article, "Tragedy at Thiaroye...", he also alludes (pp.109, 111) to earlier mutinies such as that of the Bengal army in 1857 and that of Indochinese soldiers under French command at Yen Bay, Tonkin, in 1930. One might also find close analogies with the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916.

ASCALF Conference 1993

The 1993 conference of ASCALF, predominantly Caribbean in orientation, took place from 26-28 November at the now regular venue of the French Institute in South Kensington, with members gathering from other parts of Britain and Ireland, as well as continental Europe and Africa. In a generally positive and upbeat conference, the one major disappointment was the enforced absence of one of the guest speakers, Boris Boubacar Diop, due to visa problems.

The Friday night session was devoted to a showing of Euzhan Palcy's film, *Siméon*, which, although highly entertaining, and with some excellent music by the group Kassav - and who will forget the two superb young drummers who accompanied the initial credits? - seems ultimately to prefer fantastic escapism to the addressing of real problems.

The Saturday morning session opened with Priska Degras's stimulating paper entitled *Histoire et littératures caraïbes: l'écriture des passés incertains*¹, in which she presented, largely through the writings of Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, the problem for the peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas, of "telling the past". No longer a simple "search for roots", the task becomes one of creating a language which will be adequate to its purpose, which can confront a history "faite de ruptures et dont le commencement est un arrachement brutal, la Traité", in the words of Glissant. Hence the development of creole as a literary language, the only language capable, perhaps, of "saying the unsayable". This renewing of the language is thus both a means of recreating the past and the lasting contribution of these writers to what began as a francophone culture.

The second paper of the morning was that of Michaëla Mongelard-Edlin, who continued the theme of the writer's relationship to the past in *Le tissage du passé dans "Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle"*. Developing the familiar notion that the West Indian writer's task is to recover "une mémoire collective" through the disruptions and dislocations of history, she showed how, in Simone Schwarz-Bart's novel, the second

¹ The text of Priska Degras's paper can be consulted in the present volume, pp.3-17.

part, "Histoire de ma vie", grows out of the first, "Présentation des miens", which is a kind of "archéologie" of the autobiographical story in Part Two. The need for continuity conditions thus the very structure of the novel, as well as a substantial part of its imagery, spider- and thread-imagery being particularly important. The first part of the afternoon session was devoted to three papers on aspects of Césaire, in honour of his 80th birthday, beginning with Clément Mbom's judicious presentation of *Les sources bibliques dans "Et les chiens se taisaient"*. In it he demonstrated the essential significance of the extensive Biblical references in Césaire's play: firstly, Césaire, through ironic juxtaposition, undermines the shameful exploitation perpetrated by the coloniser, and secondly, through his association of Jesus Christ and his central character, Le Rebelle, he gives hope to the oppressed everywhere, taking on a role as "éveilleur de conscience".

Peter Hawkins's enlightening parallel between Césaire and Derek Walcott, in *A tale of two odysseys: Césaire's "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal" and Derek Walcott's "Omeros"*, compared the effects of two different colonisations and two different moments of creation in a fruitful manner. Noting an underlying similarity based on their use of the journey-theme, Hawkins pointed out differences of tone: for example, Césaire being militant, angry, in the tradition of French romantic revolt, Walcott more the liberal humanist, detached and serene, ironic in post-modern vein. This polarity is illustrated too in their attitude to language, Césaire being subversive of French through neologisms etc., Walcott happy to use creole as a vehicle where appropriate. Useful reference was also made to the different political contexts of the two poets, Césaire writing in the shadow of the rise of Fascism in the '30s, Walcott reacting to the collapse of Communism and an atmosphere of global recession.

Emma Buxton, in her paper on *Aimé Césaire and the problem of black identity in Martinique*, pointed up in an original manner the dearth of critical writing encompassing both the West Indies, more particularly Martinique, and hispanic Latin America, suggesting that fruitful comparisons could be made. Elsewhere, she was concerned with the search for identity as exemplified in *négritude*, concluding with other writers and critics that it is cultural rather than racial in nature

and, in Césaire's perspective, defined in terms of suffering. As with previous speakers, for Buxton it becomes a way of coming to terms with a problematic past. The apparent exclusivity that this approach provokes, and the role of the poet in the creation of cultural identity, were the remaining issues raised in this paper.

The first of the two papers in the second session of the afternoon was offered by Romuald Fonkoua to replace that of the absent Boris Boubacar Diop, and was a closely argued series of *Réflexions sur le littéraire aux Antilles françaises*. Adopting initially a historical approach, he noted three "moments" in the development of Martinican and Guadeloupean writers' reflexions on *le littéraire*: 1930-1960, *le littéraire, le politique et le social*; 1960-1979, *l'intention et le littéraire*; 1980-1993, *la langue et le littéraire*. The first "moment" covers négritude, the creation of anthologies collecting significant "works", but comes to an end with the development at Independence of a new political reality in Africa, abolishing for ever the idea of political reality as a foundation for literature. The second "moment" centres on Glissant's fusion of intention and literature, a phenomenological approach which allows the essence of objects and thoughts to be grasped through the literary act itself. The aim of literature is "chaotic", in that the word becomes identified with its burgeoning reality. This primitive "chaos" is again evoked in the third "moment", where it becomes equated with "*la créolité*" within which all collective and individual reality is contained. The writer's task is to translate this reality.

Anna Ridehalgh's stimulating study of *Khadi Fall's "Senteurs d'hivernage": exile as metaphor?*, the only African as opposed to West Indian subject of the conference, closed this part of the proceedings. Maintaining that Khadi Fall has in this novel found an original way of writing about women, she suggested two different readings, the first political, based on the central character's earlier experiences in her native South Africa and later in Guinea - an interesting juxtaposition of political systems - but also in Senegal, where Tembi has problems being taken seriously as a professional woman. The other reading, a psychoanalytical one, broadens out to include the whole question of women's identity, where Tembi's experience of apartheid and exile become metaphors for experience.

Régis Antoine's richly illustrated *La littérature de Martinique et de Guadeloupe: avoir et être*, opened the Sunday morning session. Taking as his starting point the perennial destitution of the Caribbean from the time of the earliest conquests, he showed how writers had ultimately made a virtue of it - "la case" with its few humble objects depicted as a part of the surrounding natural world, but these objects invested nevertheless with an affectivity and a poetry rarely found in the rich listings of metropolitan bourgeois writers. It was also, of course, a political stance: the possessors of material objects were at the same time the (white) exploiters. Black possessions lay elsewhere, in social and moral values, and in language, created out of circumstances in opposition to the white man's language. It is only with Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, argues Antoine, that objects come into their own, and are no longer regarded as antithetical to existential fullness of being.

The final paper of the conference was given by Auguste Berthely, taking as his title *Le Théâtre de Maryse Condé: un diagnostic socio-historique impitoyable*. Making a plea to critics to take Condé's theatre more seriously, he illustrated vividly firstly her implacable criticism of black complicity in the slave-trade, and the barbarity of feudal society of that time, then her condemnation of much in modern black states from Africa to Haiti: corruption does not stem so much from a curse upon the black races, she maintains, as from our wilfully aberrant behaviour. In terms of social rather than political organisation, she castigates equally man's inability to come to terms with woman: Condé's plays are rife with illustrations of men's contempt for women, not even the mother-figure escaping derision. Berthely sees a glimmer of hope in this apparently savage criticism, in that a critical discourse is part of a redefining of society in view of a better future.

The early part of Sunday afternoon was taken up with the AGM of the Association, before participants dispersed after what was agreed to have been an enriching weekend, both furthering the cause of francophone black literary studies, and allowing many agreeable moments of respite, during which old friendships were renewed and new ones made.

BOOK REVIEWS

Suzanne Crosta, *Le Marronnage: Dynamique textuelle chez Edouard Glissant*, Grelca, Collection Essais No.9, Université de Laval, 1991

In her introduction, Suzanne Crosta outlines Edouard Glissant's career, and identifies his central motivation as the refusal to accept that the history of the Antilles is just a chapter of French history.

She takes as her starting point Glissant's statement that "literature, not history will restore the scattered memory and the sense of continuity of which the Antillais have been deprived" as meaning that literature cannot be divorced from philosophy, religion, sociology, and linguistics and sets out to examine five of his works of fiction in relation to those disciplines.

Her study is divided into three main parts, dealing with *La Lézarde*, *Le Quatrième siècle*, *La Case du commandeur*, *Malemort* and *Mahagony*.

First, she examines the religious and philosophical context of these novels as illustrating the confrontation of the Catholicism imposed on the slaves and their resistance to conversion as a form of "marronnage". She points to Glissant's rejection of voodoo as a syncretic blend of two religions; claiming that he views it instead as a subversion of Catholicism, and contrasts its role in Haiti on the one hand (where its practice kept alive the religious and philosophical culture of Africa) and the French Caribbean on the other, where it has been marginalized in the same way as official history has denied the part played by the escaped slaves.

As voodoo is characterized by the substitution of the loas' voice by that of the possessed, so, in Creole, the African linguistic/cultural substratum speaks through and subverts the colonisers' language. Crosta defines this second area of confrontation as an opposition between a written culture, French, posited as superior, and a surviving oral culture. Having dispossessed the slaves of their humanity, the colonisers exercised their domination on the bodies through which the slaves resisted subjugation. She shows that Glissant similarly subverts the hierarchical relation between written and

oral codes through an increasing use of Creole words and turns of speech in the "body" of his texts, Creole being read as the second form assumed by "marronnage".

Thirdly, Crosta explores the naming strategies which play a major role in Glissant's fiction. In the first three novels considered, the opposition between the two rival lineages of plantation and maroon slaves is underlined by the contrast between the first group, named according to their masters' genealogy, and the second group who preserve their right to name themselves and to keep their names secret. Refusing a Christian name is to refuse enslavement, the first Longué negating the sign of the cross with the sign of the snake. In *Le Quatrième Siècle*, Glissant also exposes the liberation of the slaves as a sham, since the re-naming was carried out as a parody of French cultural references.

Crosta's working theory is successful when dealing with the first three novels, rooted in the mythical past, where the "marron" stands out clearly as the founding figure of *antillanité*, but it is less obviously illustrated by *Malemort* and *Mahagony*, based loosely on present day outlaws.

In *Malemort*, she sees the proliferation of contradictory referents for Beauregard's name as the absence of a clear identity and his ambiguous status in the community. In the metaphorical reading of *Mahagony*'s various strands (Mahaut, Mani/Gani), Crosta detects a subtle play between French and Creole as well as an attempt to help present-day Martinicans combat alienation (or *déracinement culturel*, to sustain the tree metaphor).

She suggests that this expresses Glissant's refusal to be pinned down to any specific reading of his more recent work, opting for a multiplicity and an open-endedness which defeat synthetic apprehension, a contemporary form of literary *marronnage*, which he advocates as the way forward for French Caribbean literature.

Denise Ganderton
London

Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, in association with Comic Illusion Productions, Amsterdam, 1992, 259pp., £23 stg.



This remarkable and richly illustrated book is a compelling indictment of the insidious negative stereotyping of the Black promoted by the most common of everyday images around us. Concentrating on popular artefacts, it complements the superb series of volumes on the image of the Black in "high" western art published by the Menil Foundation under the general direction of Ladislas Bugner. Based on the material gathered in the sarcastically-named Negrophilia collection in Amsterdam, and stemming from the work done to prepare the "Wit over Zwart" exhibition held at the Royal Tropical Institute there in 1989-90, it concentrates on European images of the Black drawn from the last two hundred years. The author observes in his introduction: "The relations depicted are not those of dialogue but of domination."

Divided into three parts, the third of which is markedly shorter than the others, the book first presents images of Africa and its inhabitants. The continent is "discovered" (one is reminded of Perec's wry comment put into the mouths of

American Indians on the arrival of Columbus: "Tiens, nous sommes découverts!"), and its peoples viewed as savages and animals, the cursed descendants of Ham. The social construct of race and consequently of racism ensued, and chapters are devoted to images of slavery and abolitionism, and to the ambiguous role of the missionary seen as a precursor of colonialism and at one with its political ambitions. A brief separate chapter is devoted to representations of apartheid and the attitudes which preceded it. The first part ends with a substantial chapter on the popular scenarios of derring-do elaborated from the stereotypes examined, recalling adventures from Daniel Defoe to Edgar Rice Burroughs and finishing with images of cannibalism. If the electric toaster replaces the traditional cauldron in a 1987 drawing from *Bild am Sonntag*, the intention is to suggest how little Africans have changed over the centuries. The message we should read is rather how little Europeans have changed, fatuously but cunningly donating over-sophisticated technology both to satisfy their guilty consciences and to perpetuate dependence.



Part II follows the African diaspora and is treated chronologically not overall as, broadly speaking, Part I is, but

within thematic chapters. At issue is western culture and the various ways in which it incorporates Blacks. Two major transnational roles appear first: the Black as servant and as entertainer. The European image of the black servant seems to stem from Orientalism, usually with Moorish garb or, in the 18th century, the livery of the household, a recurrent stylistic element featured for aesthetic purposes of contrast - on a par with the adoring dog or cat - in portraits of fair ladies. This decorative function is retained in much 20th-century representation of the often diminutive black servant. An intriguing polarity is set up over the centuries between an erotic charge and emasculation, between illicit sex and the eunuch. Barthes observes in *Mythologies*, "la seule image pleinement rassurante du Nègre sera celle du boy, du sauvage domestiqué", but such reassurance is hollow if it merely bolsters our stereotyping. As Pieterse comments to end his chapter on servants: "Servitude is not merely a status, it is a way of being."

A notable way out of this condition has been through the entertainment media and sport. Minstrels, the cakewalk, jazz musicians, the "Revue nègre" of the rue Blomet, cinema (though surprisingly Griffiths' epic of America with its blatant racism is not mentioned), and sporting heroes are passed in review. Pseudo-explanations, (for example of physical as well as social inferiority), gave way to other pseudo-explanations such as "all brawn and no brains" when outstanding prowess was shown. Black success in such areas could mean the overthrow of existing social taboos and, on several celebrated occasions, political statements or gestures against discrimination. It could also lead to exploitation for commercial purposes in which Whites are the principal beneficiaries.

Images developed in individual countries follow: Sambo, Coon, Rastus, Tom, Uncle, Mammy and Buck in America; Golliwog in Britain; Sarotti-Mohr in Germany; Bomboula, Batoualette and Banania in France; and Black Peter in Holland. Such figures are particularly rife in the nursery, to which Pieterse pays a brief visit, and thus form part of a pernicious world-view inculcated from the outset. The ten little niggers disappear one by one, inept and unteachable. An English lad plants a union jack on a hilltop while others trudge around below, and he recites an ineffably patronising verse encapsulating all his society's assumptions of superiority:

Little Indian, Sioux or Crow,
Little frosty Eskimo,
Little Turk or Japanee,
Oh! don't you wish that you were me?

Such sentiments are often unfairly termed Kiplingesque. Kipling would have had his tongue planted firmly in his cheek when uttering such jingoism, and wrote verses (not cited here) which many would still do well to ponder:

All good people agree
and all good people say,
all nice people like *us* are *we*
and everybody else is *they*:
but if you cross over the sea
instead of over the way,
you may end up (think of it)
looking on *we*
as only a sort of *they*.

In those cases where children's tales have enjoyed continuing success, the more overt and odious racist features have been tempered in later editions, and just as the *Tintin au Congo* we can now buy differs considerably from its first guise, so the Mary Poppins and Dr Dolittle stories have had such sentiments as "a Zulu would have better manners" and such characters as Prince Bumpo, the African who wants to become white because he is in love with a white princess, duly expunged.

Chapter 12 is called "Libido in Colour" and deals with various aspects of sexuality. Shakespeare's "lascivious Moor" drew on an existing stereotype and is a forerunner of today's superstud. The Code noir of 1685 was designed *inter alia* to regulate sexual mores. In America, repressed sexuality focused centrally on the male: lynching often involved castration, and the image swithered uneasily between the servile black eunuch and the bestial brute. In Europe, the different historical circumstances produced a different image, one of the eroticised or bestialised savage. For the psychoanalysts, the "dark continent" was female (cf. such expressions as "the rape of the Congo") and female sexuality generally pathological. Pieterse's illustrations of this complex phenomenon range aptly from the

black Venus to fears and fantasies of various distasteful but illuminating kinds. A specific distinction is drawn (pp.182-87) between the phases and representations of British and French attitudes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The chapter on Blacks in advertising which ends Part II parallels in miniature the *Négrilpub* volume reviewed in *ASCALF Bulletin* N° 7, but reproduces several different and complementary examples.

The final part, entitled "Power and Image" has a chapter on white negroes understood broadly to illustrate interactive western patterns of exclusion by race, class and gender. The overt comparisons made in particular societies between Blacks and Irishmen, Chinese or Jews could be extended to show the demonisation of many a group through an uneasy mixture of contempt and fear which are bound up with ignorance and a spurious but self-perpetuating sense of superiority. Otherness is traditionally measured from the viewpoint of the dominant white male, unwilling for many reasons to be tipped off his perch, and in this respect, as Pieterse observes (p.222), "imperial and domestic hierarchies converged in identical imagery." Yet as Sander Gilman has remarked, "Everyone creates stereotypes. We cannot function in the world without them." Notions of identity as well as of hierarchy are permeated by them and indeed dependent on them, charged with meaning and values.

The author calls for a fresh look at representation through imagery which is not determined by literary models and for analyses which are not hidebound by the stark polarities of anthropological structuralism. He also points, however, to the danger of tautology, cognitive patterns being explained in terms of cognitive patterns. Deconstructionist discourse imposes its own endlessly self-regarding presuppositions of there being no facts, only interpretations. A multi-disciplinary approach is clearly imperative. So Pieterse argues the necessity of a comparative, historically based analysis, "historical, because a significant feature of representation of others is their historicity" (p.227), a position which is amply justified by this outstanding contribution to the literature of otherness.

Roger Little
Trinity College Dublin

NOTICES

ASCALF Conference 1994: Call for papers

The ASCALF conference will take place as usual at the French Institute, 17 Queensberry Place, South Kensington, London SW7 2DT over the last weekend in November, from Friday 25th to Sunday 27th. We hope to welcome the Zairean critic and novelist Pius NGANDU NKASHAMA, and to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *Notre Librairie*, its editor Marie-Clotilde JACQUEY. Offers of papers welcome: please write before 30th September giving a title and summary in French or in English, to Peter Hawkins, Dept of French, University of Bristol, 19, Woodland Road, Bristol, BS8 1TE, U.K. Tel: (44-272) 303423 or Fax: (44-272) 288922.

ASCALF Conference in Dublin: April 1995

8th to 10th April 1995, at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. The Conference will be residential - details of reasonably-priced accommodation to follow. Offers of papers to Dr Pat Little, Department of French, St Patrick's College by 9th January 1995, giving title and summary in either English or French. Tel: (353-1) 8376191 and Fax: (353-1) 8376197.

ASCALF Yearbook

Members are invited to submit articles for inclusion in the forthcoming ASCALF Yearbook to the Editor, Peter Hawkins, Dept of French, University of Bristol, 19 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TE, UK. Tel: (44-272) 303423 or Fax: (44-272) 288922. Articles should be submitted in duplicate, with the author's name mentioned only on a detachable title-page, so as to facilitate impartial refereeing and, if possible, accompanied by a 3.5" double-sided, double density disc in a format readable on PC or Macintosh.

The *Yearbook* will contain 4-6 articles of substance, and is intended to complement rather than to replace the *ASCALF Bulletin*, which will continue to publish shorter, more topical articles and book reviews. We hope to publish the first issue by Easter 1995, in time for a launch at the Dublin conference.

Society for Caribbean Studies: Annual Conference

The Eighteenth Annual Conference of the Society for Caribbean Studies will be held from Tuesday 5th July to Thursday 7th July, 1994, at St Stephen's House, Oxford, UK. There will be six panel sessions, a round table, and a forum on carnival leading into an evening of music and the traditional rum punch party. There will also be an exhibition of carnival photographs and costumes.

A limited number of bursaries is available to cover the cost of the conference, excluding travel, for students and the unwaged, and preference will be given to those presenting papers. Forms for conference registration and membership application/renewal, and requests for bursaries, should be sent to the Treasurer, Vivian Kinnaird. Nominations for the 1994-1995 SCS Committee should be returned to the Chair, Jean Stubbs. Final details of the conference programme and a set of conference papers will be available at registration.

Panels: Slavery and Post-Emancipation in the Caribbean; Caribbean Literature; Current Post-graduate Research; Round Table: Reporting the Caribbean; Caribbean Communications and Media; Forum on Carnival(s) in the UK; Citizenship and Identity in the Diaspora; Race and Identity Politics.

