

What's In A Name: Elective Genealogy in Schwarz-Bart's Early Novels

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L'une de ces femmes héroïques, la mulâtresse Solitude, allait être mère. Elle participa à tous les combats au poste de Dolé; arrêtée et emprisonnée, elle fut suppliciée dès sa délivrance, le 29 novembre 1802. (Oruno Lara)

One of these heroic women, the mulatto called Solitude, was expecting. She took part in all of the fights at the fortress of Dolé. Captured and jailed, she was executed as soon as she had given birth, on November 29, 1802.

La liberté va venir. Courage, mes enfants, vous l'avez méritée. Ce sont de bons maîtres qui l'ont demandée pour vous. (Louis Thomas Husson)

Freedom is on its way. Keep heart, my children, for you deserve it. Your good masters have asked it for you.

The two quotations above purport to describe the historical circumstances of the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean. The first, written by a Guadeloupean historian in 1921, depicts the sacrificial heroism that defines freedom as a human right (*La Guadeloupe dans l'histoire* 138). The second, as caustically reported by contemporary critic Edouard Glissant of Martinique (*Le Discours antillais* 148), stresses the master's version: freedom is a reward for docile "children." To the first would correspond a narrative of action; to the second, one of reaction. Which was the "true" version of the past? For Caribbean writers, it is an all too familiar question.

It has become self-evident that a growing body of writers who claim their Caribbean heritage, whether born and raised on the island or elsewhere, do so by positioning their narratives within the collective past. Their narrators work the question of history through the very text they compose, writing themselves back to a sense of origins. This gradual elaboration of the subject in writing that the Western tradition locates in Plato's *Cratylus* sees the act of naming as the point of departure for the searching self (and the searching for the self): "The word seems to be a compressed sentence signifying that the object for

which there is a search is a name" (*Dialogues* 3, 71). From Plato onward, the conviction that the self is the legitimate subject of its own enquiry has been accompanied as well by the discovery of its non-adequation: "The fact is that nearly all things are falsely, or rather inadequately, named" (*Dialogues* 3, 54).

The search that classical philosophy grounds in ethical thinking begins, for Caribbean writers, with an interrogation that is neither fully epistemological nor solely ethical but political as well, for it embraces simultaneously the Middle Passage as historical reality—however incompletely documented by the dominant discourse—and as symbol for an erased collective consciousness undergoing the process of its own rebirth. Witness, as early as the 1930s, Aimé Césaire's rhetorical phrasing in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*: "Qui et quels nous sommes, admirable question" (*Collected Poetry* 50). A generation later, the question of "who and what we are" resonates in Edouard Glissant's *L'Intention poétique* (1969), an essay that presents itself as a call to arms for sounding the depths of the collective past:

La MEMOIRE COLLECTIVE est notre urgence: manque, besoin. Non pas le détail historique de notre passé perdu (non pas cela seulement) mais les FONDS ressurgis. (187 emphasis his)

COLLECTIVE MEMORY is our urgent task: lack, as well as need. Not for the historical minutiae of our lost past (no, not only this) but for the reemerging of the DEPTHS.¹

Their common anguish reverberates through the collective historical condition of the Caribbean that the new Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, in his 1974 essay, "The Muse of History," termed "amnesia." In 1976, Maryse Condé repeated Césaire's question with the phrase, "what did we do before?," as a leitmotivic without clear answer in her novel, *Heremakhonon*. Michelle Cliff has since sought to adumbrate this question in *The Land of Look Behind* (1985).

What all these writers have in common is the definition of a Caribbean imagination that conflates tropes of time and tropes of space—an ontological desire for which Wilson Harris has wrought the apt phrase "womb of space," space being the displacement trope of History.² In short, the obsessive "looking behind" is a pre-condition, if not a conditioning, of contemporary writing. One might conclude that the modern Caribbean narrative is engaged in a quest triggered by the question of lost origins as imaginary origins—a not

overly original conclusion that myth criticism, from Eliade to Ricoeur, has applied to any self-reflecting narrative. Where things get interesting is that in the Caribbean corpus this return to origins (History) must proceed from the evisceration of available origins (history), rather than positing ideal beginnings once lost but now poetically recoverable. This Caribbean text, therefore, erects its ontological base oppositionally against origins defined by a dominant, territorializing, (once) metropolitan, (once) phallocratic discourse that it wishes to reterritorialize.³

Within this contested territory, where images generate narrative and narrative questions the generating of images (what Glissant calls "depth-sounding"), I wish to carve a small space; that of the question of naming which, in some novels, makes possible the birthing of a different ontology, an alternative self that need not be oppositional. In the work of Guadeloupe's Simone Schwarz-Bart, it is a question raised from novel to novel in a dramatized primal scene that serves as matrix for the fictional discourse; it is a moment of revelation—the "aletheia"—that simultaneously structures the narrator's consciousness and the unfolding of a once rumbled, illegible narrative.

Schwarz-Bart's corpus should be read as a gradual expansion of storytelling as naming moment. Making sense of the past always happens in the retelling of it, the other key Bartian feature that binds the written narrative to its own origins, the oral tradition. Thus, every Schwarz-Bart novel contains at least one matricial scene (sometimes, as is the case with *Ti Jean L'horizon*, many), staging the retelling of specifically Guadeloupean origins: the resistance to the reinstatement of slavery and the ensuing tragedy on Matouba in 1802. As early as the first novel, *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (1967), the child Mariotte, refusing the white values of her household, claims as ancestor a real historical figure, Solitude, who fought alongside the martyrs on Matouba. Later, through the connecting links of the oral chain, Télumée regains her dutiful place within a whole genealogy that is both biological and elective. Taking Solitude as its point of departure as well as its ending, it is a "telos" as well as an "agon." Eventually, for Solitude, as for Télumée, elective self and authentic self coincide. In the text's matricial moment the daughter refuses the name—and the law—of the patriarchal Father (upending Lacan's "nom/non du père," so to speak) to (re)claim the name, and, in Solitude's own pregnancy, the body of the Mother. It is a political act in that its coming to existence demands a radical shift in power relations as well as in consciousness. For a Schwarz-Bart heroine, this represents the first

necessary step to grounding herself in a tradition and an oral chain of her own choosing, with Negritude as its implied counter-text.

Négritude, at least for the first generation of writers, developed out of the sons' open quarrel with the Father—the white one who would deny their existence and the enslaved one who could not save them. From the Rebel of *Et les chiens se taisaient* to his rewriting of *The Tempest*, Césaire has mined this particular Caribbean vein. Of course, Freud had already told us it was a very old plot, even if there never was just one Negritude. But whether essentialist (à la Senghor) or contextual (à la Césaire), Negritude valorized a difference that had hitherto been represented to the rest of the world as inferior. If, in the wake of Montaigne's *Cannibals*, the Shakespearean *Tempest* had launched the West's discourse on the Other, an African-Caribbean at long last closed the epistemological circle by giving the white discourse a black subject who refused to become a party to his own subjugation. In Césaire's *A Tempest*, the end (Prospero tamed inside, Caliban out and about) reverses the order of the beginning (Prospero in charge, Caliban stuck on the corner of the island) and subverts the ideological message of a triumphant *mission civilisatrice*. Inverting the Shakespearean model, Césaire's fable of displacement uncovers the original void. There is no Father; Prospero is a fake. As I have argued (Zimra, "Tracées"), the cipher of absence points toward quite a different ideology of presence: that of a Mother whom Caliban pointedly refuses to deny, even as he mourns her absence.

One Of These Heroic Women

As serendipity (or History) would have it, there is a female heroine in the Delgrès saga who very seldom makes it into the history books. Delgrès, who was a free-born mulatto from Martinique and an officer in the Republican Army, led the resistance against the impending reinstatement of slavery by Napoleon's troops (those same troops who were fighting Toussaint in Haiti). Encircled into the hilltop fortress of Matouba, Delgrès, together with three hundred of his men and their families, chose to die by blowing up the fortress and all within it rather than surrender. Among the survivors was a pregnant woman by the name of Solitude. Solitude is the connecting thread in the collective Schwarz-Bart corpus, three tightly interwoven meditations on reclaimed history.

Plat de porc recounts the last nineteen days of a destitute black woman in a French home for the poor. She is the only African-Caribbean in what she calls "the Hole," a term that, in French slang,

refers to the prison experience. More precisely, it is the padded, airless cell of solitary confinement. The same term can be used as well to designate a lunatic asylum (and, indeed, many of her roommates would qualify). Furthermore, it also refers to the experience of the Middle Passage in the living hell of the ship's hold. In this Parisian hellhole, Marie chronicles with savage irony body functions that she can barely control and that others around her can no longer control.

In the charity home, one's name is a label imposed by others who do not bother to ask. For the former colonial man who remembers tropical females, Marie is "Doudou," the infantilizing nickname of compliant exoticism.⁴ For the tough orderly, she is "Quatorze" (fourteen), the number on her chart. But in her dreams of home, she becomes "Mariotte" again, the affectionate baby name for Marie. It is as "Mariotte" that she remembers the moment of self-revelation when, as "red Nigger girl child" upbraided by Man Louise one too many times, she had claimed her own elective descent from the runaway mulatto Solitude—a biological connection that becomes elective.

At the opposite ideological pole, in *La Mulâtresse Solitude* (1972), we find a child conceived in rape during the Middle Passage, born with eyes of different colors that the other slaves believe to be the sign of the devil, and rejected by the African mother because she is not black enough. This historical character takes center stage as we follow her successive selves and her successive names (roughly from 1760 to 1802). In a very real sense, the Caribbean quest has folded back upon itself in perfect self-adequation of name and self. The pregnant revolutionary captured on Matouba is what she has willed herself to become, Solitude's true as well as elective self simultaneously. Finally, in *Pluie et vent sur Têlémée Miracle* (1972), the main character reclaims Solitude's genealogy by moving up the oral chain of Caribbean resistance, literally through the discursive power of female memory (Condé's "la parole des femmes" 'women's discourse'), of which the heroic Mother constitutes the metaphor and the embodiment—truly a poetics of the empowering body for whom, until then, to be named was to be subjugated.

I am of course aware that literally-speaking, *Plat de porc* is the joint work of André and Simone Schwarz-Bart. Simone claims exclusive authorship for *Têlémée Miracle*, whereas André claims exclusive authorship for *Solitude*. Both writers, however, are on record, particularly in their joint notes to *Plat de porc* and in their participation in the 1979 series of conversations in Guadeloupe, as emphasizing the collaborative aspect of what was intended at the outset as a joint

trilogy (Toumson). Hence, the full title of the first (and only) joint installment, *La Mulâtresse Solitude: Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes*. Some have even argued that the most “lyrical” passages in the joint work, those that show most clearly the influence of creole or orature, must be attributed to Simone (most recently, Toureh). Foucault and Barthes have taught us that authorial centering is but a modern convention. In the Schwarz-Bart case, it would do nothing to enrich our reading, although it may complicate it. What is of interest here is that the matricial moment—whether defined by one or the other writer originally (and, in *Plat de porc*, by both)—is the crucial structuring principle for both that of a textual self-birthing that occurs through an act of naming fully aware of its polyvalent gender inflections.

If *Plat de porc* and *Téluée* set up the imaginary female genealogy that constitutes Schwarz-Bart’s narrative signature, *Solitude* enlarges upon the conditions of its narrative functioning. The telling distinction between André and Simone may well be that Simone sees her heroine as fully active, aware of the consequences of her rebellion, even if her daughters do not (in Mariotte’s case) or will not (in Man Louise’s case); whereas André sees his heroine as reactive, and her gradual descent into insanity as an exemplary martyrdom—even if it is one resulting from separation anxiety (to simplify frightfully). Who can forget the unbearable scene of the distraught child waiting for her mother to fall asleep, night after night in the slave shack, before noiselessly crawling toward her feet to encircle the mother’s ankle with a tiny hand, a gesture that will not protect her from abandonment.⁵ The rejection scene stages the mutual destruction of self inherent in the condition of giving birth against one’s will after what is bluntly described as gang rape aboard ship (the ritual “triade,” a reward for the crew upon sighting the American shore and, of course, the captain’s opportunity to increase his own profit) and of being a child so conceived. Later, *Solitude* erases her mother’s humiliation by giving birth to a child conceived with an African who, having escaped into the hills upon arrival, was never a white man’s slave. Only after she is able to dance to his African drums can she conceive and, in so doing, rebirth herself. Just as the insane half-breed of *Solitude* is brought out of her madness by her association with the runaways, so will be Mariotte, in *Plat de porc*, by her association with Raymoninque, whose rebellious ideology and ritual drum playing clearly identify him with the Maroon legacy (and, intertextually, with Césaire’s famous “maroon poetics,” “poétique du marronage”).

Yet Solitude's self-birthing is also a replay, by females, of male heroics in the Negritude mode, which sought a full-blooded acceptance of the African heritage. In this sense, Solitude emulates her mother. It is the first of a pairing motif fairly constant in Schwarz-Bart, of which Toussine and Man Cia, in *Téluée*, remain the best example.⁶ Having run away, Solitude's Yoruba mother elects another full-blooded Yoruba for her mate and bears another, fully accepted, fully black child: a not so subtle commentary on endemic prejudices in the Caribbean. The free identity is mediated through a father seen as legitimate because racially untainted, who authenticates the self as African by erasing the murderous, illegitimate *white* father—including the fundamental erasure, that of erasing the white presence within the black womb. One thinks here of Césaire's baptismal bloodletting that explodes in *Cahier* as well as the early 1946 version of *Et les chiens se taisaient*: the gory murder of the Master-Father by the Son. This may encourage a reading of Solitude's identity as being entirely reactive, a reading that would eventually argue that she stumbles into her heroism by accident (as in her first crazed killing of whites, clearly so) rather than choice. Significantly, her "choice" of name is not autonomous:

Un jour elle marqua, *pour ainsi dire*, ses propres fers sur ses épaules. . . . Un petit Blanc s'arrêta au bord de la route et dit avec la voix qu'ils ont pour dire ces choses: "Ki nom a tifi?" ce qui signifie: comment t'appelles-tu mon enfant? Elle se redressa, s'appuya sur sa houe et eut ce rire, le rire des personnes qui ne sont plus là, car elles naviguent dans les eaux de la perdition.

—Avec ta permission, maître: mon nom est Solitude. (73; emphasis mine)

One day she put, *as it were*, her own branding iron on her shoulders. . . . A poor white had stopped by the side of the road to ask, with the kind of voice they use for such things: "So what yor name, gal?" Which means, what do they call you, child? She stood up, leaned upon her hoe and let go her laugh, the laughter of one who is no longer altogether here, for she had already sailed across the waters of no return.

—If you please, master: my name is Solitude.

Although the slave has chosen a new name for herself "as it were," such autonomy is severely limited by the presence of the master whom she must still "please." It is a name that depicts her alienated condi-

tion, out of the group and across the waters of self-oblivion, as the consequence of a socio-political situation not of her own choosing, unless we choose to hear the "if you please," the discourse of alienation, as a refusal. Unfortunately, at this point the refusal is as much a self-refusal, modelled both on her mother's refusal of her and on the whites'. The fact that the "master," here, is a poor white to whom she owes submission, although he probably could not afford to buy her, reinforces the self-denigrating subtext. In the lowlands, the white man's territory, her act of self-naming is a badge of subjugation, a "branding" as if she were still in irons. When her madness intensifies and she is no longer of any use to them, her owners will refuse to feed her and she will take to the hills, a chronotope that will eventually lead her to the Maroons' preserve and the full incarnation of her name.

The bonding of the character created by André in *Solitude* remains with the elusive mother figure alone, an exclusively two-generation, female-oriented dialectics. Simone's subsequent works expand the scope, going up and down along the memory chain to bypass—eventually, to integrate—the male heroics to give a more balanced picture of the past by way of the contribution of the oral tradition. Thus, going from André's work to Simone's, the narrative modulates from heroic, life-taking Father in the Negritude mode (*Solitude* as a clone of Delgrès) to life-bearing Body of the primal Mother (*Solitude* as self-birthing and rebirthing), a trope that eventually may un/gender as well as en/gender the Caribbean text.

The person who, in *Plat de porc*, discloses such origins to the child Mariotte is Raymoninque, her mother's jailed lover and possibly Mariotte's own biological father. The child visits him before his execution carrying the symbolic last supper, the mess of pork with green plantains of the title. As it so happens, the child's grandmother is believed to have been *Solitude*'s own child, born before her execution; and so, the pauper wasting away in a French hospital, whose scattered pencilled notebooks we have just stumbled upon, is none other than *Solitude*'s great-granddaughter.

As is often the case with Schwarz-Bart, the unilateral gendered reading is immediately challenged. It is Raymoninque who reveals the full meaning of her genealogy to her:

Il eut même à plusieurs reprises, de véritables larmes dans les yeux pour me vanter la femme *Solitude* de Guadeloupe, qui était selon lui, selon son coeur, selon sa connaissance de Nég-Brave . . . une *négresse définitive*, un grand morceau de Monde, Ouaye! (*Plat* 117)

Several times, real tears came to his eyes as he praised the woman Solitude from Guadeloupe to me, a woman who, according to him, his heart, his own knowledge of Black courage, had been . . . most definitively a Negress, a worthy piece of the World, oh yah!

From the standpoint of action, this male ancestor is subordinate, since he only retells the female past. But from the standpoint of ideology, he plays as central and crucial a part as the women do, since he triggers and redirects Mariotte's choice of the past by legitimizing her revolt, by deed (he will die for striking the white man) and by word. It is he who explains to her the consequence of the color system in a way that Fanon would approve:

Le Blanc méprise l'Octavon, qui méprise le Câpre, qui méprise le Nègre, qui méprise sa négresse, qui méprise le Z'indien, qui méprise sa Z'indienne, laquelle frappe son chien, ha, ha; et moi Ray Raymon Raymonique je vous regarde tous et je ris en moi-même; et si vous me demandez qui est mon frère de sang, je vous dis que c'est le chien. (127-28)

The white man despises the octoroon, who despises the quarteroon, who despises the full-black (Negro), who despises his Negress, who despises the Coolie man, who despises his Coolie woman, who, in turn, beats her dog, ha! ha! As for me, Ray, Raymon, Raymonique, I watch all of you and I'm laughing inside. And if you should ask who my blood brother is, I shall choose the dog.

It is this parallel retelling of their origins, the failure of the glorious rebellion followed by its ideological consequences, the triumph of the pigmentation caste system, that motivates the child. As her mother's common law husband, Raymonique may well be Mariotte's real father (as Delgrès might have been of Solitude's child). But it is as elective father figure that he receives full importance, foreshadowing the lesson of *Télumée Miracle* that the truest affiliation comes from the heart and not from the bloodline. At this point it no longer matters whether Man Louise is really descended from the Matouba woman, although Solitude is the ancestral name both Toussine and Man Cia will transmit to the child Télumée.

This prison scene, during which the child discovers her lineage, exhibits several features typical of the Schwarz-Bart corpus. First, it is crucial that this story of origins be retold to her, for the Caribbean self is not born knowing it. Second, it is just as crucial that the teller be not

exactly biologically related to the listener. As with all oral tales upon which this moment is modelled, the purpose is to achieve group cohesion. The tale must show that all Caribbeans are symbolically bonded by choice rather than genes. Last, it does not clearly assign gender roles. It is Raymonique, the elective father, who has watched over this child; it is he who, on the eve of his own execution for having defiantly struck the white master, retrieves for her and insists that she honor her lost origins. A master of the giant drum (*gwo-ka*) that used to be the Maroons' instrument of communication, Raymonique is a symbolic reincarnation of the drum master who, in *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, fathers the rebel's child—as is the drum the metaphor for the culture that brings Solitude back from madness.

Just as Solitude had been delivered of a child before dying for striking the white masters, so now is Raymonique “delivered” of the truth. In so doing, he presides over the true birth of another child, Mariotte, Solitude's great-granddaughter. The narrative matrix of *Plat de porc* is thus foregrounded against the Caribbean-specific master-text of the Heroic Father, but with a twist, for Guadeloupe: the primal moment of origins, the taking of freedom, is always the glorious tragedy on Matouba, echo and repetition of another glorious rebellion in the Caribbean, that of Haiti. Blurring the gender roles and, perhaps, the gender specificity of the quest for a glorious past that she had inherited from Negritude, Schwarz-Bart assigns a “female” nurturing role to the figure of the putative father, Raymonique, and a “male” aggressive role to that of the rebel mother, Solitude, to insist that origins integrate them both. It is a much different set of values that Man Louise, the obedient grandmother who is Solitude's own daughter, would inculcate in her defiant “Red Nigger girl child.”

Thus the Caribbean narrative unfolds acts of naming: women naming themselves, women being named by others, women moving through successive layers of putative selves and elective naming, each uncovering, or peeling away, the false ontological layer that separates her from the person she will become. It is important to remember here that unlike Man Louise, Bobette's child (the mulatto conceived in rape, who happens to be Man Louise's own mother) does not wish to erase the memory of her own biological African mother, but to emulate her, whom she eventually rejoins in the maroon camp. For Simone Schwarz-Bart, this un-naming and re-naming is not necessarily—not always, as it is in the Césairean male mode—the symbolic murder of the male parental figure. Thus one cannot categorically say that there is a strictly “male” mode of un/renaming, or a strictly female one. Indeed, Raymonique could, grammatically, be either male or

female. To the motherless Mariotte, Raymoninque, the mothering (elective) father gives back Solitude, the fathering (biological) mother. Likewise, Schwarz-Bart's final novel, *Ti Jean L'horizon* (1980) plays fully on this ambivalence of textual self-birthing with a folk tale hero who can, at will, be reborn male or female.

Do Not Utter This Name

In contrast to *Solitude's* generational, female-bonded dialectics, *Plat de porc*, the joint work, and *Téluinée*, Simone's solo work, stage Solitude as a creature of choice.⁷ It is through the oral contribution that Simone's characters are empowered and through the act of telling that they achieve a living connection with the past.

Schwarz-Bart starts with the valorization of Woman's memory as an alternative to the Son's heroics. Fanon's devastating attack on Capécia's novels, in *Peaux noires, masques blancs* (1952), had defined for the world outside of Martinique a female literary tradition that was assumed to be both derivative and ideologically corrupt, since it refused to separate the issue of gender from that of race. Condé's *La Parole des femmes* (1979) was to show that a strong sense of tradition pre-existed for Caribbean women writers, who did not need the psychiatrist from Martinique for self-authentication. In Fanon's interpretation of Capécia's plot, the neurotic female refuses to look back, but uses her procreative biology to look/move forward (and up, socially); a case of "up from slavery," but through the womb. Condé's own *Hermakhonon* (1976) would, years later, dissect what happens to the Capécia plot when it is transposed and upended, the lactification urge being replaced (but not displaced) by the melanification urge of a Negritude taken too literally. The difference, of course, is that Capécia does not clearly distinguish herself from her character, which made it easy for Fanon to posit coincidence of writer and character, whereas the biting irony of Condé's narrative distance left no doubt as to the fact that she is NO Véronique. With Schwarz-Bart, we get a couple of years earlier, in *Téluinée* (1972), a look back that excavates from the smoldering ruins of Negritude a very different power play between narrator and narrative.

Schwarz-Bart's narrative stages the transmission of the oral chain through the self-naming. This self-naming uncovers a process of elective allegiance that is destined to overcome the primal shock of rejection by Mother Africa (Solitude's descent into madness) as well as (given the brainwashing conditions so virulently sketched in Fanon) the exiled child's rejection of Mother Africa (Man Louise's worship-

ing of the lighter skinned). Whereas Mariotte's life ultimately ends with the failure of the process—not only because Mariotte's removal from the island has made it impossible for her to fit in the metropolitan group, but also because, as a child, she was never allowed to act upon her elective allegiance to the memory of Solitude—Télumée, encouraged by her mother figures (Cia and Toussine), does succeed. The one variable has to do with the character's own ability to position herself within a past of which she feels herself to be a full participant. One could argue, of course, that Mariotte reintegrates the group through her writing. Nonetheless, in *Plat de porc*, such reintegration is achieved, literally, at the cost of her life; the last notebook ends on an unfinished sentence, its narrator cut off, final resting place unknown. Still, she has managed, in her "cahiers" (the Césairean echo is never accidental), to leave us a legacy, our first link to understanding the genealogical chain: her/story (Solitude as historical figure) is embedded in her story (the one Mariotte writes), a structural device Schwarz-Bart will fully develop in *Télumée*.

As a cultural representational practice of the colonial system, then, naming vehiculates the unwanted ideology and unwanted identity of the slave-driver who falsely posits an artificial, oppressive equation between the sign and the (human) thing, oblivious to the ontological gap between the name and its object. To grant freedom within this gap would be to grant the property ontological self-reflection, which is to say, human status. Thus, the slave's name makes an adequation between sign and thing, and self-as-thing. It is this rigid adequation that the grandmother of *Plat de porc*, acting as the master's substitute, seeks to enforce:

Misère du Ciel on voit tout de suite que la Mariotte enfant Capresse est possédée; on voit c'est quel sang qui coule dans ses veines de chat-huant (non, non, ne me parlez pas de celle-là solitude que vous dites: prononcez pas ce nom . . .). (109)

Heaven have mercy you can see right away that the red Capresse girl child Mariotte is possessed; you can see what kind of blood it is that flows in her owl's veins (don't, don't, don't you talk to me about that other one solitude what you say: do not utter this name . . .).

Steadfast in her belief that the name is power and has power to bring the dead back (a bastardization of the African "Nommo"), Man Louise refuses the Mother's bloodline in the child she considers

cursed—the owl being a bird of ill omen—as she has always refused to pronounce “this” name. Shrouded in silence, the primal name itself is here written in lower-case, relegated to the common status of a noun; yet, in this very fact, it takes back its full symbolic status, since, as Derrida tells us, the noun is but the oversingularization of the name. Indeed, the choice of the name “Mariotte,” an echo of Capécia rather than Matouba, is intended to exorcise the unwanted affiliation and erase the primal memory that seeks (literally, says Man Louise) possession of the child.

When Mariotte decides to claim the unuttered name, she re-territorializes the ontological gap—which is to say, she politicizes her self-birthing. By her defiant behavior as well as by her looks, Mariotte is the living re-utterance of the Ancestress whom she resembles, since she, too, has unusual eyes (one green, one yellowish grey, for the fictional Solitude, once called Deux-Ames, “Two Souls;” bright green, for the historical rebel). The body of the child “counter signs” the existence of the Mother and her own survival in her writing daughters, Mariotte and Simone Schwarz-Bart herself. The indirect reference to Minerva, in turn, countersigns the memory further and ensures the genealogical continuity of the oral chain, for Minerva will be one of Télumée forebears.⁸

Man-Louise puts her grandchild in the same double bind she has been put by the system. For Mariotte is but a further creole variation of Mayotte (a language that tends to elide the rough sound of the French letter “r”), and marks the child with the abject submission of Mayotte Capécia’s heroines. We find here all of the negrophobic clichés of her novels turned inside out. In a terrifying fit of madness, Man Louise on her death bed relives a physical punishment administered by her sadistic mistress:

Mais je vous jure par toutes les plaies du Christ que c’est vous ma mère, ô maîtresse: que je n’ai jamais eu d’autre maman que vous! . . . Cette femme-là, Solitude que vous dites, je ne la connais pas. (*Plat* 93-94)

But I swear to you, by all of Christ’s blessed wounds, that you are my true mother, oh mistress: I swear I have never had any mother but you! . . . As for that woman Solitude as you call her, I do not know her.

Of course, since the rebel was executed the morning after giving birth, it is quite possible that the mistress is the only “parent” she’s

ever known. But the mistress's cruelty and the slave's terror go well beyond the literal. It is a powerful (non-)naming scene, what Althusser would call an example of religion as coercive state apparatus that erases all selfhood, including that constituted by the free memory of origins. The mistress is the mother as the master has always been the father. Knowing its own vulnerability too well, it is the white memory that keeps alive unto itself, in order to erase it from the children's racial memory, the name of the rebel whom the daughter dutifully refuses to acknowledge, here, for the second time.⁹

The grandmother—as unnatural daughter, who has chosen the white mistress's version of herself, and as unnatural mother, who rejects her dead child's own child—reenacts the absolute and abject alienation of the self. *Plat de porc* is strewn with genealogical clues she refuses to decipher. For instance, her own name, Louise, in its evocation of Louis Delgrès, is the revolutionary cipher of her lost origins. It is she who is truly “possessed,” psychically dispossessed by her memories of slavery. In its implicit reference, her own name raises the possibility that Man Louise herself may have been Delgrès's child, since she is Solitude's surviving offspring; and, if she is not in fact, she should have been in spirit.¹⁰ I wish to emphasize, rather than a factual lineage, the symbolic one—Man Louise's denial of the heroic life-affirming force hidden in her name and that of her mother. But all is not as simple as it appears, and rejection is, always, a plea for a love that will not come. Although she ends up spitting on her grave, Mariotte's crippling emotional bond remains with the grandmother whose words hound her unto death:

Rappelle-toi, sans vergogne, sans-maman que tu es, rappelle-toi ce que je t'ai toujours dit: si ta place de négresse est sur le seuil, alors ne pénètre pas dans le salon. . . . M'entends-tu, poussière? (46)

Do remember, shameless hussy that you are, motherless that you are, do remember what I've always told you: when your Negress place is by the door, don't you dare walk into the parlor. . . . You got that, speck of dust?

The term “poussière/dust,” only intended to convey the insignificance of the child, is a common enough creolism; it also makes full use of the Christian echoes (“dust to dust”): for Man Louise the “nigger” is a fallen creature. However, “poussière” also resonates with a more unpleasant meaning, that of “dirt.” The moral uncleanness of the

child is compounded by her physical uncleanness (her skin is "wrong," her hair is "wrong," and at one point, Man Louise compares her to a cockroach, the unclean, brown insect *par excellence*). It may also explain why, as an adult, Mariotte is obsessed by scatological body functions and their linguistic equivalence, in French. French marks the terrifying erasure of creole in the text. Hallucinating her grandmother's racial insults, Mariotte, to her utter despair, can only recall her in FRENCH French: "Et si subitement les mots de ma langue maternelle me quittaient, comme ils avaient fait tout à l'heure, tandis que je me souvenais involontairement de Man Louise en FRANÇAIS de France" "what if all of a sudden, just like a while back, the words from my mother-tongue suddenly took their leave of me, while, in spite of myself, I could only remember Man Louise in FRENCH French?" (71). It is creole words of sweet tenderness that, standing in her little girl's finery, she yearns to hear to the very end: "Seulement ces mots que j'attendais de toi, grandmère; seulement ces mots: alors Mariotte, coumen ou yé chère? Coumen ou yé chère? . . . chère?" "Only these words did I ever want from you, grandmother; only these: So tell me, Mariotte, how you be, chile? How you be, deah? . . . deah?" (49). The allusion is to Damas's Negritude poems, of course. But it also evokes Caribbean reality (and any colonial system), when, not so long ago, students were punished for speaking their native tongue at recess. In contrast, the frightening absence of *créole* and of its nurturing values will be exorcised in the next novel, *Télu-mée Miracle*, where creole folk tales will "open the way" to a child's full awareness of self that only the folk memory can provide.

To understand Mariotte's claim, one must go back to her elective Ancestress, one last time. In *Solitude*, the half-breed's African mother, called Man Bobette by the white master, is known as Reine aux Longs Seins by the slaves. This, of course, would echo, for a Schwarz-Bart reader, one of *Télu-mée*'s names for Toussine, "Reine sans nom," and thus graphically underline the textual desire to establish a female genealogy. However, a Caribbean reader will also "hear," in Bobette's more glorious name, Reine aux Longs Seins, the echo of a famous Creole proverb that a woman's breasts are never too heavy for her chest. The gloss on the biological implies that the self-sacrificing Caribbean mother should be ever ready to nurture her offspring physically as well as emotionally, and, again, it is a proverb applied several times to *Télu-mée*. But the proverb also moves from the literal into the universal (and, with this, into the historical since the "universal" experience of the island is the experience of slavery). It then implies that the necessary courage can always be found to carry the

greatest load (a biological, gendered version of where there's a will, there's a way, as it were). As such, it also constitutes Woman's call to arms and becomes the signature for Solitude's own life: she will be captured weapon in hand.

Female genealogy as ideology of choice is at the heart of the narrator's discourse in *Téluée Miracle*. As Busia has aptly demonstrated, the narrative re-enacts several times the retelling of the autobiographical tale, thus bringing to the surface the repetition principle that undergirds myth making. But what she does not emphasize is that within the narrative chain itself, such repetition allows for recontextualization and, thus, historical validation, for each re-telling of the chain that connects the Lougandor women to Solitude varies according to time, circumstances and each woman's own specific needs. These features give the depth of life to what might otherwise have become an empty gesture, give hope—at least in Schwarz-Bart's universe—against hope in the stark, unchanging conditions of colonial legacy in the Caribbean. The Daughter becomes both the living mother, because the former's life closely mimics the latter's (Téluée, like Toussine and Cia, ends up as an elective mother), and the reborn Mother to whom she, the daughter, is giving birth by giving her a voice (Téluée retells Toussine and Cia, who have retold Solitude). Which is to say, this time, that instead of claiming their names, she "names" them in a role-reversal that emphasizes the mutual, reciprocal gesture of authenticated origins. The past is that which can, and must, be shared collectively, we had said. For Téluée, it is above all that which can be reproduced, i.e. "passed down" to the next generations; and, by the same token of its mythic dimension, that which can be passed "up" because it enables the next generation, who is listening, to go "back."

Behind Reine sans Nom, the grandmother's nickname conferred upon her after the community became convinced of the exemplary quality of her life, stands her birth name, Toussine, the feminine form of Toussaint. The palimpsest of collective memory thus enfolds both the male and female versions of human dignity in the Caribbean: Toussine, the fictional heroine who, like Solitude, defeated madness and despair to become her people's Queen Without a Name, transmitter of their past and guardian of their future, and the female avatar of Toussaint, the Haitian liberator. Toussine-Solitude becomes the one sacrificial hero whose martyrdom simultaneously reshapes past and future in the text, as it should have in real life. Only after Téluée understands the true meaning of her grandmother's life, by understanding her successive names as movements from the singular to the collective, is she able to find her way back from her own madness as

well as from the white man's "hellhole," the lowlands where she had cleaned house and cut cane. In a spiritual as well as physical journey, she comes home, first to help her grandmother die, something that Mariotte could not achieve, and next, to cross the famous "Bridge of Beyond" in order to become a true disciple to childless Man Cia, keeper of traditional lore, her grandmother's best friend and alter ego, the last avatar of the woman from Matouba. Eventually, her final praise name of "Haute Nègresse" (a description of a high-spirited woman, as well as of a highly born one, that is a naming) relates Télumée with Reine aux Longs Sein and Reine sans Nom—thus neatly fusing the elective (*Solitude*) with the biological (*Toussine*). When her "false" daughter, Sonore, is taken away from her, Télumée's role as symbolic daughter-mother-queen to the whole island (and to Caribbean readers) can expand. She becomes the original textual Ancestress herself as the originator of the story we read—the textual embodiment of origins in the act of naming.

Two-Sided Drum Woman

In *Télumée*, as opposed to *Solitude* and even *Plat de porc*, the legitimacy of discourse is never in doubt; the matricial moment, wherein Toussine brings Télumée to Cia for the first time, unfolds with great physical and spiritual peace: "Tout était clair, serein, au ciel et sur la terre. Reine-sans-Nom et son amie Cia se tenaient appuyées l'une contre l'autre, les traits paisibles et assurés" 'All was clear and serene in heaven as well as on earth. Queen Without a Name and her friend Cia were seated, leaning against each other, with peaceful and self-confident faces' (70). The memory of Man Louise is exorcised in the faint echo of a Christian ritual (the French version of the Lord's prayer, "in heaven as well as on earth"), now appropriated by two older women who function as one narrator, in the narrative doubling of myth. Harbingers of a serene self-knowledge, they tell little Télumée the story and meaning of slavery for the first time in the child's life (thus repeating Raymoninque), but they do so by using Afro-Caribbean folktales, the traditional vehicle through which black people have managed to transfer their culture and their courage in the face of white ideology. It is thus through the folktale that Télumée, under the old women's tutelage, shall find her way back, across the "Bridge of Beyond," up into the Matouba hills of collective memory, to claim *Solitude* as her primal mother.

Like her elective mothers before her, Télumée, whose triumph over madness and despair reproduces that of Toussine, passes on the

meaning of the past to the next generation in the elective chain. Seated in Toussine's chair, Télumée has become her grandmother. It is a scene of great beauty, wherein the easy and deep bonding between foster mother and abandoned child cancels out, at last, both little Solitude's desperate hugging of Man Bobette's ankle as well as Man Louise's never uttered words of acceptance and welcome:

Le soir venu, elle s'asseyait à mes genoux, toute recueillie à la lumière du fanal, tandis que je lui racontais des contes anciens, Zemba, l'oiseau et son chant, l'homme qui vivait à l'odeur, cent autres et puis toutes ces histoires d'esclavage, de batailles sans espoir, et les victoires perdues de notre mulâtresse Solitude que m'avait dites grand-mère, autrefois assise à cette même berceuse où je me trouvais. (260)

Came the evening, she would sit against my knees, solemn and quiet by the light of the lamp, while I told her the old tales: of Zemba, of the bird and his song, of the man who used to live by his smell, hundreds of others, and then all of those stories from slavery, about hopeless battles, and the lost victories of our own mulatto Solitude, as grandmother had told me a long time ago, sitting in the very same rocking chair where I now sat.

The Schwarz-Bart heroine rereads her collective past by opening, for others and for herself, a different kind of future in the (white) gap between the name and the thing. And does so again, and again, and again: Télumée "reiterates" Toussine, just as Toussine reiterated Solitude, and in so doing, reiterates Mariotte, who would have liked to reiterate Solitude. This is the matricial moment, the first moment on the chain of Caribbean memory that starts the genealogical re-entry into history. As a repetition, a movement from the singular (one historical Solitude) to the general (all of her putative daughters, including us), it is a reading of a historical self, out of amnesia into anamnesis. But what Derrida sees as a failure of fragmenting subjectivity, I prefer to see as an affirmation of the self-birthing subject.¹¹

Retrieved from oblivion, at long last, the name is uttered and Solitude is claimed as "ours." A lesson in past suffering and courage mediated by the folktale, the retelling simultaneously prepares Sonore for her forthcoming life as an adult who has reclaimed her past, and prepares Télumée (and us, readers) for the searing pain of Sonore's defection. Triumphant over this last abandonment by helping the very man who has stolen her child from her die a peaceful

death, Télumée will receive her communal name in the last naming act of her story: "Miracle."

But what Télumée is doing here is also "depth sounding," like a maroon drum. It is through the mediation of the folk memory, the tales, that Solitude's children are empowered to pronounce her name. The phrase, "lost victories," acknowledges simultaneously that the factual memory being retrieved had been lost and that the Matouba rebellion ended in defeat; a subtle yet compelling response to the glorifying urge of Negritude, it moves us from History to history.

This sends us back to the initial matricial scene, wherein Télumée meets Man Cia for the first time. Cia's departing comment is a blueprint for the child's future, giving her a name far more powerful, a *Nommo* far more magical, than the "miracle" her community will eventually select: "Sois une vaillante petite négresse, un vrai tambour à deux faces, laisse la vie frapper, cogner, mais conserve toujours intacte la face du dessous" 'Be a brave little negress, a true two-sided drum, let life beat it, hit it, hit it, but preserve forever intact, the bottom side/face' (70). This "two-sided drum," rendered symbolically richer in the original "face," a term that can pun and hold together simultaneously two meanings, the features of a human face and the sides of an object, connects Télumée both to Solitude, drum-dancing her freedom in the Maroon's camp, and to Mariotte listening to the sacred stories of Raymoninque's "gwo ka." Moreover, it links *Télumée* to a rather famous African intertext, and, in its wake, to its Caribbean transformation.

First, it draws on the Dogon myth-narrative of the sacred function of the primal drum that, on Creation day, beats spirit into matter. Upon awakening, the inanimate and animate creatures must remember that they are part of the same original, living body.¹² It is also a more obvious reference to a strictly Caribbean intertext, the work of Aimé Césaire and its poetics of "marooning," recast in the name of the great Mother.

Next, the drum reference harkens back, in turn, to the famous Martinican folk tale of the battle of Colibri (Humming Bird) and Poisson Armé (Armored Fish), as well as to the humming bird tales found in pre-Columbian tales. Three times did Colibri fight to defend his sacred drum, until Poisson-Armé beheaded him.¹³ It is the memory trace of a story of resistance and courage unto death. But in the pre-Columbian tale, the humming bird is also the sacred bird of paradise possessing the secret of eternal life; it can give birth to itself.

The Maroons' drum, as political fact and literary metaphor, ensures the transmission of the past that is essential to salvaging the

self mauled by slavery. Thus, the act of naming to which it is connected is the first step toward radical freedom and simultaneous integration in the community. In this moment of self-birthing, the power of a world (re)making Word cancels out the irresistible patriarchal logic of the Same. This is a first step, perhaps, toward the recasting of the Caliban trope that Sylvia Wynter has demanded of the new generation. Could it be that as Caliban's sister, Solitude has freed herself, at last, from Prospero's shadow?

Notes

1. All translations are mine.
2. I shall refer to history (lower case) as factual archives, recorded events and the like, and to History as the myth-making narrative that characterizes the imaginary projection of desire.
3. I am using the discursive categories elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka*. This is not to imply that the men were first or last at anything. Rather, I take for granted the historical correlation between the increasing visibility of feminist practice and the growing body of texts by and about women, who may feel free to "terrorialize" and, even, squat wherever they wish.
4. This is baby talk for something sweet (from "doux"). Applied to a female, its not so subtle charge is definitely one of easy eroticism.
5. More optimistic than I, Toureh, for one, sees in this necessary fact of slavery the reaction of a mother determined that a child destined to be sold away not become too attached. Even if this were a normal part of a slave mother's psychology, the important fact here is that the child lives the situation as if it were a true rejection. The Yoruba mother may well be the first anti-Capécia mother on record.
6. The fact that Delgrès died in Guadeloupe while being born in Martinique is contrapuntally recast here. Solitude, who died for Guadeloupe, is being claimed by Mariotte, a child from Martinique. What is emphasized are the cultural and political bonds between islands often at odds and occasionally at war (racially diverse) throughout colonial history, and, by inference, the need for a transinsular identity.
7. There is a strong existentialist cast to this interpretation, one that Case develops far more fully and far less optimistically than I.
8. I am drawing on Derrida's definitions of signature in "Signsponge."
9. There will be altogether three denials, and the ironic use of the Christian motif is far from accidental. Although Wilson clearly sees that "the figure of the grandmother, the matriarch, comes to symbolize the island-mother" (180), she fails to see/beyond Man Louise's destructive self-hatred, the redemptive figure of Solitude.

10. Maximin, who freely acknowledges his admiration for Schwarz-Bart in the *Lone Sun* interview, plays with the same situation and invents fictional descendants to Delgrès and Solitude, some of whom, too, forget the empowering power of their names.

11. Interview by Attridge. For a further definition of "reiteration," see "Aphorism."

12. This is not to claim that Schwarz-Bart is making a specifically Dogon reference; we know, however, that she studied religious anthropology during her years in Senegal. The drum reference is a recurrent image in Césaire's poetry, a corpus of which Schwarz-Bart is always fully aware. Prays Mariotte: "S.O.S. poétique, Saint Césaire aidez-moi, votre humble paroissienne, car femme suis et pauvrete et ancienne. Dites-moi la parole, frappez sur le tambour usé de ma mémoire" 'Poetic S.O.S. Saint Césaire help me, your humble parishioner, for woman I am and so poor and so old. Give me the word, do beat upon the worn-out drum of my memory' (157). S.O.S., of course, stands for "save our souls." A thorough study of Schwarz-Bart's Christian parody remains to be done.

13. Maximin makes full use of this in *Lone Sun*. See my introduction and, also, Zimra, "On Ancestral Ground."

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