The French Antilles-Guiana in Literature: Feminine and Diseased

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Gardens of Eden or prisons of disease and death? Since Christopher Columbus described these new-found lands with terms reminiscent of the female body[1] and gave them feminine names, [2] the Caribbean islands and Guiana have been associated with beauty, fertility, and life. Their lushness, primitivity, and defenselessness evoked in the colonizers the lust for possession. During the course of colonial history, the Europeans metaphorically raped these land-women, slayed their Indian lovers, [3] and turned them to a life of prostitution. In reaction to this abuse, the land-women have become frigid and sterile.

Within a year of the Caribbean islands' discovery, the explorers' first impressions were replaced with images of corruption. During Columbus's second voyage in 1493, a shore party lost in the forest of Guadeloupe came upon human remains and other evidence to support the Arawaks' stories of the Caribs' cannibalism. Later, after finding four bound, decomposing, European male bodies washed up on the shore at Monte Cristi, the expedition returned to the settlement established at Navidad to learn that all thirty-nine of the Spaniards had been massacred by Indians of Carib stock. The shock of the murders was mitigated by the continuing friendliness of the neighboring Taino Indians. It was also revealed that the slaughter had been provoked by the settlers' greed: they had appropriated as many as five Indian women each and frequently quarreled with the natives over gold (Morison 1942, 427). But following the killings at Navidad, the Spanish revised their characterization of the Caribbean people from guileless believers[4] to cruel monsters. From then on, the aggressiveness of the colonizer was morally justified (Antoine 1978, 47) to wrest the unspoiled isles from the possession of the Carib Indians, seen as incarnations of the devil. The myth of the feminized *îles fortunées*[5] (the wealthy islands) remains to this day, but literature about the French Caribbean and French Guiana, whose territory Columbus reached in 1498, is also marked by themes of disease, defilement, debasement, and death.

Another interpretation of the conquest of the West Indies and Guiana links the lands' fate with the myth of the Garden of Eden. Columbus had started out in search of the legendary terrestrial paradise in a temperate region at the end of the Orient, and he believed that he had found it (Casas 1989, 383). The theme of the sexual and moral seduction of innocent man by woman appears and reappears in the literature of France and the Antilles-Guiana. If the natural resources and fertility of these lands can be considered part of their femininity, then one can say that European males were lured into wasting themselves on an arduous and expensive venture that eventually left them economically ruined, demoralized, and encumbered with non-productive dependencies.

In reality, the Europeans' greater technical expertise gave them power over the natives, so that "official" Antillean history corresponds to the list of discoverers and governors of the islands (Glissant 1981, 139). The Amer-Indian people were almost totally eliminated by the conquerors, so that today's local elite of color tends to be the offspring of the planters and slave women. Before decolonization, the population of African origin continued to be exploited through slavery and the Afro-Antillean women were often sexually abused by Euro-American males. The relationship between the races was socio-economic: slave labor was essential to the European sugar trade. Fear of reprisal by the African "Other" perpetuated colonial domination. Colonial degradation of blacks demoralized them so that they would accept this domination. The myths of the French Caribbean reflect this fear, as well as an extreme ambivalence with regard to sexual relations between the races (Pieterse 1992, 172).

The European male conqueror had invaded lands rarely touched by his race before: the colonization of the Americas brought him in close contact with Amer-Indians, Africans, and eventually Asians. Since relationships between the races, however elusive, may always be characterized as sexual (Hernton 1988, 6), the literature of the Antilles-Guiana is pervaded with myths and stereotypes reflecting the sexual, as well as the socio-economic, oppression of people of color and their descendants.

Sexual Myths and Social Stereotypes Associated with the Antilles-Guiana

The myths that condition human behavior have ancient origins. The story of Adam and Eve, which postulates the corruption of an earthly paradise and imputes this sin to woman, has become a pervasive Western allegory. Cain, Adam and Eve's eldest son and a tiller of the soil, killed his brother Abel and became a fugitive. Due to his close connection with the earth and his enforced exile, some folkloric interpretations have associated the mark of Cain with black skin, making this figure the patriarch of sub-Saharan Africans. Abel is seen as the paternal ancestor of white Europeans. Thus blacks, like women, were associated with sin in some of our earliest recorded histories.

The black person or "blackness" as a symbol for the repressed libido descends from a Christian pattern originating with Saint Anthony's temptations. In the colonization of the New World, the concepts of the feminine and blackness were brought together in a new context in Western masculinist imagination. Both were associated with libidinous excess (Pieterse 1992, 179) and therefore, like the indigenous Indian population, were in need of being conquered, controlled, or repressed.

However, sheer greed was also a factor in American race relations. Colonial plantation farming required expensive exportation of products, and was not profitable without unpaid slave labor. Human beings could not be enslaved in

good conscience, therefore sub-Saharan Africans–chosen for their ability to withstand the tropical climate–were animalized to justify their subjugation. The resulting racism pervaded not only the economic, political, and social realms, but also our deepest interpersonal relationships. Since racism is triggered by physical appearance, and gender relations are a factor in domination, male/female characteristics–especially the genitalia–are a focus of white supremacists. Hostility between the races is "sexualized hatred" (Hernton 1988, xiii).

The plantation culture taught that Afro-Americans were licentious, over-endowed, and sexually abnormal. The "black brute," stereotyped as having an oversized libido to match his oversized penis, was denied the healthy enjoyment of his sexuality. He was especially forbidden contact with the most cherished sexual icon of his culture–the white woman. In addition to instilling deep-seated complexes in American men and women of both races, racial prejudice has resulted in unspeakable crimes-rape, castration, lynchings, burnings, mutilation–against blacks of both sexes. The ruling culture still attempts to limit black men to "safe" occupations, such as servants, entertainers, or athletes, so that they are trivialized and excluded from managerial roles which might allow them to dominate others, rather than be dominated.[6] Until recently, black women's occupational opportunities were generally limited to domestic work– low-paying unskilled labor that often exposed them to sexual exploitation by white males.

The black woman was introduced into the Americas for the breeding of slaves, but she was also considered part of the colonizer's plunder. Because she was the legal property of the plantation owner, she was defenseless against his sexual advances. Both his suppressed Oedipal complex and his adult sexual paranoia could be assuaged through her body (Hernton 1988, 112-13). Eventually, the Afro-American woman accepted the dominant society's view of her as sexually provocative and promiscuous (Hernton 1988, 127), an image that blamed her for her own abuse by white males. The light-skinned mulatto woman, who had the highest position on the American social ladder based on skin pigmentation, is glorified even today for her beauty and sexual desirability. This sexually threatening woman of color is countered by the other predominant persona of the black female–"the desexualized mammy of the Aunt Jemima type" (Pieterse 1992, 178).

"The myth of sacred white womanhood" (Hernton 1988, 14) was formulated by white plantation owners to mitigate the shame inspired by their relentless, covert sexual relations with black women. Their guilt-induced view of intercourse as indecent, shameful, and barbaric behavior inhibited sexual and verbal communication with their own wives. They correspondingly feared their women's attraction to black male "bestiality," so they created an icon of beauty and honor which the females of their families were expected to emulate. White

women exemplified chastity, inhibition, and morality, while black women represented sexual abandon, tender nurturing, and sensual pleasure. Ultimately, the white woman in American plantation society assumed the unproductive role of a china figurine–idealized, praised, but often ignored. She silently condoned her husband's liaisons with female slaves, while surrendering her children to the care of "black mammies." Her culture taught that all blacks–but especially the Afro-American male–were erotically superior to whites. Thus, out of boredom, sexual frustration, and genuine physical attraction, she came to crave attention from black males. Her fear of rape by a black man was a distorted illusion, "but also an accurate index of her sexual deprivation" (Hernton 1988, 17). The desexualized white female stereotype found in the literature of the French Antilles-Guiana is morally superior and unavailable, yet often depicted as frigid or sterile.

A masculinist point of view dominates this literature, even when the author is female. Several techniques are used to repress the female population: female characters, like women in everyday life, may be inferiorized; socially or spatially distanced from the dominant society; or socially or physically victimized by the dominant society (Essed 1985, 84). Regardless of skin shade, women are inferiorized through their depiction as a *femme-objet* (Beauvue-Fougeyrollas 1985, 104) (objectified woman); that is, metaphorically objectified as indigenous fruits, flowers, or other objects. These tactics of inferiorization and social distancing combine in the portrayal of women of color as lower animal forms, wild beasts, or sorceresses. Although rarely animalized, white women often appear as emotionally or mentally deranged. Physical aggression is evident in the sexual abuse of all women, but in particular women of color, who are generally unprotected by the disempowered subaltern male. In some Franco-Antillean poetry, an individual woman may be reduced to her body parts and symbolically dismembered, a practice reminiscent of the surrealist poets. A more subtle social aggression appears, particularly in post-1970s literature concerned with the psychological disorders of the French Antillean and Guianese people. While advocating the political and economic independence of the former colonies, contemporary authors such as Edouard Glissant have depicted their original cultures as threatened with extinction. The French Caribbean islands and French Guiana, like many of the female characters who represent them, are symbolically "imprisoned" in the French Union, like mental patients in an asylum (Corzani 1978, 6:268).

Like other American literatures studied in Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land*,[7] the literature of or about the French Antilles and Guiana tends to feminize the land itself and its physical features. Woman is associated with the earth, Mother of all but in need of cultivation by Man in order to be productive. Similarly, romantic poets viewed nature as chaotic, to be called "from the sway of

feminine anarchy into a masculine domain of feminine property" (Wolfson 1994, 50). The feminization of the colonial world[8] is an elaboration and expansion of dominant masculine "culture" onto new "virgin" grounds where it could hope to achieve its ultimate design. It also expresses the perceived physical subordination (Antoine 1994, 353) and moral inferiority of the New World and its indigenous population.

The Linking of the Feminine with Disease

The feminine and disease have long been linked in patriarchal cultures. Men have feared women's "mysterious" procreative powers, and these could be weakened or controlled through subjugation of the females themselves. The very definitions of "madness" and "mental health" are gendered (Chesler 1972, 115). Hysteria, defined by Hippocrates as "a disease of the womb" (Morgan 1994, 41), is an example of a feminine-gendered psychosomatic disorder (Morgan 1994, 44). In this way, females have been biologically linked with mental derangement. Sorcery has also traditionally been associated with women, especially those widowed, postmenopausal, or infertile for any reason. Luce Irigaray asserts:

> *Le "feminin" est toujours décrit comme défaut, atrophie, revers du seul sexe qui monopolise la valeur: le sexe masculin. Ainsi, la trop célèbre "envie du pénis"* (1977, 68).
>
> *The "feminine" is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex. Hence the all too well-known "penis envy"*[9] (1985, 69).

As Phyllis Chesler notes in her classic *Women and Madness*, women in patriarchal society who do not conform to the roles expected of them may be punished by being incarcerated in mental hospitals and treated with drugs or electric shock therapy. Significantly more women than men, both black and white, have *reported* psychological collapses, nervous disorders, mental apathy, and vertigo (United States 1972). Just as female psychological illness relates to "the male culture's colonial rule of the female" (Burris 1971, 20), so, too, hysteria, muteness, and other psychological deviancies so common to the populations of the French Antilles-Guiana relate to the white male culture's colonial rule of people of color. In their literature, many female figures escape into madness or suicide (Shelton 1994, 430). Phyllis Henley claims that the American medical establishment encourages heavy drug use by all women and Afro-American males, but women are treated with drugs that tranquilize rather than debilitate them (Chesler 1972, 216). This statement suggests that women of any race are

less threatening to the white power structure than are black men. Physical disease may stem from mental illness or its treatment, or it may result from conditions of poverty in which many women[10] of any race or people of color are often condemned to live.

The Social and Cultural Alienation of the People of the Antilles-Guiana

The people of the Antillean-Guiana are co-conspirators in their own subjugation. In *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon stresses that his compatriots are negrophobic and that they enslave themselves. Fanon accuses Antillean women of seeking white husbands so that their children will have a lighter skin tone and can thus raise their social standing. Fanon himself, however, married a white metropolitan French woman,[11] indicating that he was also deceived by the "myth of sacred white womanhood." A feminist analysis of *Peau noire, masques blancs* reveals the author's own failure to transcend the very cultural conditioning he decries: "... for Fanon, however, blacks too are overdetermined as bodies and images, reduced to biology and stereotype" (Bergner 1995, 80). Such alienation from their own race, a direct consequence of colonization and the politics of assimilation practiced by the French, reveals the psychological abnormalities generated by these oppressive relationships.

Antillean women may also be alienated from their own sex. French literary scholar Jacques Corzani claims that Maryse Condé feels a pathological hatred for the women of her country and voices it through Dieudonné, protagonist of her play *Dieu nous l'a donné*: "Malgré moi, j'ai sucé le mépris des femelles avec le lait vicié de ma mere" (Condé 1972, 49) (Despite myself, I sucked contempt for females with my mother's contaminated milk). Condé also shows disgust for the sexual mores of Guadeloupe, where she depicts men seeking consolation for their political impotence in sexual exploits (Corzani 1978, 6:221–2). The negritude movement actually sustains these stereotypes: note "the threatened masculinity of writers like Césaire and Fanon, the creators of the virile model of the culture hero who was to wrest the meaning of 'his'tory from the grasp of white European males" (Arnold 1994b, 565).

The Contrasts Inherent in the Social Stereotypes of the Antilles-Guiana

The exploitation of women of color began with Columbus's men[12] during the first expedition and continues today. The white masters claimed female slaves were licentious and depraved (Beauvue-Fougeyrollas 1985, 104). The myth of black sexuality portrays Afro-American women as highly seductive and relishing sexual adventures more than any other living being. However, these licentious images were actually imposed on them by the colonial *droit du seigneur* (right of the lord), which allowed the Békés or white plantation owners to

exploit them as *bêtes à plaisir* (beasts of pleasure). Conversely, Lillian Smith writes that between the planter and his female slave there were sometimes profound, passionate liaisons that drove his wife to despair (Smith 1963, 127). The mulatto class, socially ranked in terms of their shades of skin color, was born from these associations.

La Mulâtresse (mulatto woman), often called la *doudou*[13] from the French word *douce* (sweet), has become the very symbol of the French Antilles (Antoine 1994, 352). Her image as sexually available contributes to the myth of a simple, naïve people, more sensual than intellectual, and constantly seeking pleasure. In the Antillean imagination, *La Mulâtresse* has became the most sophisticated product, the most dazzling representation of wealth, and the most obvious sign of *joie de vivre* (Antoine 1978, 133) (joy of living). She is an alienated person, however, since she obscures the animosities of race and class (Antoine 1978, 380). Mulattoes often approximate Caucasian standards of beauty, which are validated by both whites and blacks; this intensifies self-hatred in ethnically pure Afro-Americans. The fact that *La Mulâtresse* in legend and literature was often a prostitute for Euro-American sailors and tourists underscores her ambivalent social and racial position, as well as the perpetuation of the colonial exploitation of the islands and their people well beyond the official colonial period.

The traditional exotic literature that glorified the *doudou* contrasts with the masculinist negritude movement initiated by Aimé Césaire of Martinique, Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, and Léon-Gontran Damas of Guiana. Césaire's classic negritude poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939)[14] metaphorically describes Martinique as a diseased body. Through computerized analysis of this work, Gérard Pigeon inventoried 152 anatomical terms representing organs or body parts belonging to the masculine or feminine sex, or to animal species in general. Of the 125 medical terms, forty-seven represent illnesses, especially of the skin. Having humanized Martinique, Césaire describes the progression of the disease and the hopelessness caused by the diagnosis of a contrived and imaginary illness (Pigeon 1977, 10–11). Other Césaire poems reiterate the islands' afflictions, while characterizing them as small, feminine, and confining.

The following passage illustrates the human fascination for– and repulsion by–the Other, an attitude which is at the root of the Caribbean's stark contrasts. As in Césaire's *Cahier*, the external beauty of Martinique hides internal disease.

> *Extérieurement, des chansons, des biguines, un sourire de doudou. Mais qui la prend dans ses bras découvre bien vite sous les lèvres fardées la bouche édentée, déchirée de chicots, bourgeonnante d'aphtes...* (Corzani 1978, 4:113).
>
> *On the surface, songs, biguines, a doudou's smile. But whoever takes her in his arms discovers very quickly beneath the rouged lips the toothless mouth, filled with stumps, burgeoning with ulcers...*

The dual nature of the sensuous young *Mulâtresse*, who seduces the unsuspecting white male at night only to be revealed as a repulsive hag in the morning, replicates that of the *Diablesse* or *Guiablesse*, recurring folkloric motifs in French Antillean literature. Her toothlessness behind her painted lips suggests her inability to nourish herself or to speak. The mouth ulcers show decay from within. The image is that of an island stagnating economically, mute from trauma, and consumed with self-hatred. Her powerlessness renders her situation hopeless.

French Guiana, sometimes called the "eldest daughter of France" (Jones 1994, 393), also evokes metaphors of lush splendor juxtaposed with those of illness and putrefaction. Settled by the French in 1663 and culturally related to the French Antilles, this "outpost of French colonialism" (Dash 1994, 311) boasts few well-known authors. Its reputation as "a graveyard for Europeans" (Jones 1994, 390) stems from the Kourou disaster of 1763. In an attempt to compensate for the loss of Quebec, some ten thousand French settlers were sent to Guiana to start a new colony. Unable to withstand the harsh climate, the vast majority perished within a year.

The legendary "Devil's Island" is located off the coast of French Guiana. However, the country itself came to be considered as a metaphoric prison colony, which was France's predominant use for it from 1794 to 1937. Bridget Jones observes that, in addition to the physical prison, the convicts were controlled by the isolation and hazards of the terrain itself:

> *... the ground was a treacherous swamp engulfing the unwary, vegetation advanced, and creeks teemed with alligators, anacondas, and piranhas, as did the sea with sharks. Equatorial insect life swarmed in the fevered imagination, bearing the still more insidious perils of disease* (1994, 390B91).

Of approximately seventy thousand prisoners shipped from France, only about five thousand survived to return (Jones 1994, 391). In stark contrast to Guiana's death camp reputation, the discovery of gold nuggets in creeks on the Approuage River in 1855 reinforced the legend of El Dorado. A similar contrast exists today in the unlikely construction of the European space center at Kourou, close to territories of the aboriginal Wayana Indians. European illusions of Guiana, like those of the French Caribbean, remain contradictory: longings for legendary treasures, for an earthly paradise, or on the other hand, hallucinations of agony, condemnation to a tropical inferno, incarceration, sickness, and death (Jones 1994, 389). The literature of the Antilles-Guiana reflects the co-existing contradictions of her land and people.

The Feminization of the Earth in the Literature of the Antilles-Guiana

The vibrant colors and density of the flora and fauna, the tropical climate, as well as the curves formed by the Caribbean volcanoes, make the Antilles-Guiana especially susceptible to metaphoric feminization. Eroticized images of the islands abound in literature. In "Regrets et tendresses" (1936), André Thomarel describes the Antillean landscape by extolling its "nuits voluptueuses" and "ardentes" (voluptuous and ardent nights) its "grands bois langoureux" (great languorous woods), its fauna ever ready to "se saoûler d'amour" (become intoxicated with love) (Thomarel qtd. in Corzani 1978, 2:316). These intimations of sexual pleasure are more specific in the following passage from the Guadeloupean Paul Niger's *Les grenouilles du Mont Kimbo* (1964). Mustapha, a young revolutionary fighting in Africa for liberty and justice, is in love with the married French woman Annette Dampierre. In an emotional exchange preceding their final separation, she begs him to abandon his revolutionary goals for her love. She depicts herself in terms more appropriate to exotic literature than to a novel of the 1960s:

> *Je suis ton champ, Mustapha; bêche, paysan; arrache en moi tout ce qu'il y a de souches mortes; malaxe ma terre inégale; écrase mes mottes orgueilleuses; enfonce un coin dans ma glèbe insistante; disjoins mes adhérences; draine mes eaux mortes comme la peur. Mais ne pense pas!* (Niger 1964, 140).
>
> *I am your field, Mustapha. Dig, Farmer. Uproot all the dead stumps in me. Knead my uneven soil. Crush my proud clods. Sink a corner of your spade into my resistant earth. Loosen my adhesions. Drain my waters as dead as fear. But don't think!*

While reinforcing the "Mother Earth" image of all women, Niger postulates a sexually passive white French woman who needs an over-sexed black male to empassion her. Mustapha is implied to be more innocent than Annette, who has been corrupted by Western civilization, while she believes he has the power to purify and renew her. This is essentially the same vision as in Condé's *Dieu nous l'a donné*, quoted above.

Les nègres servent d'exemple (1964) by the metropolitan Frenchman Salvat Etchart describes the passionate love of a personified Martinique from the male point of view:

> *Quand tu t'allonges sur cette terre humide et tiède, elle te souffle une haleine de femme. Elle sent sous toi!... tu deviens fou! tu cherches la bouche! et même si tu as une fille, tu ne sais pas exactement ce que tu fais; pourquoi; ni avec qui!* (Etchart 1964, 144).
>
> *When you stretch out on this warm, humid earth, it exhales a woman's breath. It moves beneath you!... You go crazy! You search for the mouth! And even if you have a daughter, you don't know exactly what you're doing, why, or with whom!*

Man's powerlessness before the irresistible sexual attraction of the female is underscored in this passage. Even his patriarchal obligation to protect his daughter and other innocent women is compromised.

The negritude poet Léon-Gontran Damas contrasts his hatred of the white European woman with his love for the women of his feminized native Guiana in "Bouclez-la" from the collection *Névralgies*. Implying in the first half of the poem that all Caucasian women are "repressed nuns," he orders them to "Shut your traps" ("Bouclez-la") or "I will rape you." "Rape" is a metaphor for defiling and destroying the falsely proclaimed chastity and moral superiority of the white woman, sometimes compared to the Virgin Mary. The poem illustrates the black man's urge to dominate and degrade this unattainable icon, that in turn humiliates and disturbs him. In fact, Hernton has claimed that any Afro-American man raised under the colonial system is a latent rapist (1988, 69).

Translating the "la" of "Bouclez-la" as the direct object pronoun "her" restates the title and first verses as "Lock her up." The coined word "moinesses" plays upon "moine" (monk), but also "moineau" (sparrow) in its colloquial use as "crook." The threatened sexual violence thus also responds to the poet's endemic hunger for his stifled cultural identity. The European colonizers "stole" indigenous cultural values by depreciating them in favor of their own standards. African conventions defining feminine beauty, deportment, and honor were

replaced with the myth of white womanhood (Hernton 1988, 62). This destruction of African culture in the name of Christianity was the original rape. The "nuns'" "gloussements" (cluckings) liken them to mother hens, scolding the colonized people like children. The invariable "le" (it) of "priez dieu pour l'être / de tout votre être" (pray God to be it / with all your being) suggests the "nuns'" yearning to be considered moral, pure, and sinless, in contrast with the corrupt, bestial, unholy world white supremacy imputes to black womanhood. The poet taunts the elitist white women by invoking the licentious "black Super-Male"[15]–the poet's own "first cousin" D'Chimbo le Roun'gou–whose "invisible terror" soothed pre-pubescent Guianese girls at night. This obscure personage apparently protected the women of his own race, while threatening to violate white women as a means of affirming his existence in a racially and socially divided society.

"Paix-là" (Peace) abruptly changes the tone, as the poet asks that his desire for his native country be alleviated, as well as his violent impulses. Conversely, the verses' intent can still be interpreted as racist. The substitution of the rhyming "Pie" (Pay) for "Pix" would parallel the imperative of the title and recast the woman of the early verses as a prostitute, rather than a nun. If, as in Hélène Cixous's writing, "faim" (hunger) recalls "femme" (woman) then "cette faim atroce" (that atrocious hunger) can be read as "cette *femme* atroce" (that atrocious woman), another reference to a white European woman.

In the final verses, the poet praises his own country, described as a beautiful woman.

Cette soif que j'ai d'Elle
Elle
Mon lait de corossol qui lave
Tout relent de nuit blanche
Paix-là
je dis
je redis paix-là
sur ce désir que j'ai d'Elle
Elle
Mon Île
De rose-Cayenne (Damas [1965?], 21).

This thirst I have for Her
Her
My soursop milk that washes
Any stench from a sleepless night
Peace
I say

I say again peace
On this desire I have for Her
My island
Of rose-Cayenne

While provoking his carnal desire, the Guianese land-woman simultaneously reinforces his native identity, quenches his sexual / cultural thirst, and offers him peace. Her milk of soursop–a large, dark green West Indian fruit–both nourishes and purifies him. The "stench" of "nuit blanche" ("white / sleepless night") implies his corruption by sexual contact with white European women, contrasted with the native fruit of Guiana. The metaphor of the rose associates native flora with a nation's women, discussed below. Here, however, it is a Guianese "rose-Cayenne," not a "rose-France." Damas's "blackness" was his ideological choice; his fairer-skinned mulatto heritage might explain his hostility toward whites.

The volcanic protrusions of the islands simulate breasts in the patriarchal imagination. Aimé Césaire writes of "des îles comme un sein de femme... des îles à doublure de champagne et de femme... " (1958, 50) (islands like a woman's breast... islands lined with champagne and women...) (Césaire 1987, 131) in *Et les chiens se taisaient...* Maternal nourishment is suggested, as well as sexual ecstasy. The islands' "doublure" (lining / double) also refers to the inherent duplicity of the region.

Sonny Rupaire reprises the metonym of the island as the female breast in "De quelle Amazone," from his poetry collection *Cette igname brisée qu'est ma terre natale* (1973). Although the strong, bellicose figure of the legendary Amazon of Madinina[16] dignifies Rupaire's country, the woman herself has been abused by men. Legend relates that Amazons cut off their left breasts, which would obstruct the aiming of their bows and arrows during battle. Ironically, rather than showing the Amazon's courageous disregard for her sexuality, the amputated breast in this poem signifies her violent subjugation and dismemberment by her (white male) enemies. The figure of the bow appears in the curve of the archipelago, but the tautness of the string "à la limite de tension" (to the limit of stretching) represents the stress of brutal oppression. The archipelago is described as a bow fashioned from a cane stalk; seen from afar, the islands / breasts appear to be pierced by plant shafts. The whipping of the Amazon, presumably by the conquerors seizing valuable metals, reemphasizes colonial violence and veniality. The terms "mer ou d'écume" ("sea or foam") relate to adventure and struggle. However, "lait" (milk) indicates maternity. The poet's repeated "je ne sais" (I don't know) expresses his helplessness to liberate his once noble and defiant island.

The land is frequently personified as woman in Édouard Glissant's work, in particular *Les Indes* (1965), a series of poems depicting the conquest of the West Indies. "Chant Troisième" portrays the conflict between the conquistadors' desire to rape the virginal island / woman by seizing the unmined silver and gold hidden within her vagina, concurrent with their yearning to make love with her. Their slaying of her other lovers refers to the massacre of the native Caribbean people. The beautiful but grieving island / woman encloses herself in a resistance of silence. In contrast with "le seul dieu" (Glissant 1965, 123) (the only god) of the conquerors, the divinities of the New World are mute goddesses, wordlessly communicating their indignation: "Déesses vertes, je vous entends sur ce voyage,... / Plus silencieuses que l'étoile... " (Glissant 1965, 102) (Green goddesses, I hear you on this voyage,... / More silent than the star...). The silent island / woman and her goddesses are, however, eternal, while the men and their crimes will pass away.

The economic exploitation of the islands and the sexual exploitation of their female inhabitants inspire their comparison to a rosary of volcanoes that riddle the sea like the cankers of a venereal disease (Corzani 1978, 4:113). The word "rosary" indicates their beauty at a distance while ironizing their physical and moral disease, as well as their God-forsaken state. The rich symbolism of the volcanoes will be discussed below.

The prostitution of the islands by European consumer societies is also decried by Salvat Etchart in *Les nègres servent d'exemple*. He compares the island to a girl with tender thighs, seen with her old pimp of a colonizer. Addressing the reader as *tu*, a compassionate confidant/e, he asks him / her to imagine what this old, corrupt capitalist does with the innocent girl. The disgusting traces of the colonial's wrinkled fingers on her fresh skin and his "love bite" in the hollow of her shoulder betray him as a vampire, sucking her vital juices to make sugar cane brandy for the consumption of the pampered and indifferent bourgeoisie.

The island as a harlot also appears in *Dieu nous l'a donné*, Maryse Condé's play mentioned above. Mendela, the sorcerer and healer, is paradoxically an incestuous criminal, the murderer of his wife, and the jealous lover of his daughter Maïva. Condé identifies Maïva with the island in order to criticize the venal commercialism of touristic Guadeloupe, while implying through Mendela's words that he is pushing his daughter into prostitution (Corzani 1978 6:222): "Je t'emmènerai à la ville... Je t'achèterai des robes et des parfums de prix... (Condé 1972, 75) (I'll take you to town... I'll buy you dresses and costly perfumes.). In a reconfirmation of Fanon's claim from *Peau noire masques blancs*, Condé's characters of color are implicated in their own oppression.

Woman Reified as a Native Fruit or Vegetable

"Elle est belle comme la canne à sucre." A woman's beauty may be compared to the produce of her native land.[17] The comparison of women to indigenous fruits in literature has become a cliché (Corzani 1978, 2:76). This objectification of women evokes Eve's tempting Adam with the apple and implies that women, like fruit, are destined for a man's consumption. Other fruits or plants used as metonyms for the female are:

> *.. de tabacs roses...* (Jammes 1906, 155) (pink tobacco leaves); *des fruits aux pulpes de velours* (Thaly 1964, 70) (fruits with velvet pulp); *une muscade fraîche... la sapotille... l'orange mûre...* (André Thomarel qtd: in Corzani 1978, 2:314) (a fresh nutmeg... the sapodilla plum... the ripe orange); *...une sapotille bien mûre... un mango juteux....* (Manicom 1972, 68) (a very ripe sapodilla plum... a juicy mango); ... *beau fruit...* (Glissant 1960, 114) (beautiful fruit); *Sapotille* (1960) and *Cajou* (1961), titles of novels by Michèle Lacrosil.

Sonny Rupaire's volume of poetry, *Cette igname brisée qu'est ma terre natale*, compares the misshapen island of Guadeloupe to a native vegetable. The upper segment of Grande-Terre and the lower segment of Basse-Terre, separated by the Rivière Satée crossing a narrow strip of land, can be pictured as a yam crushed in the middle. Unlike the sugar cane crop, the yam is symbolic of native resistance because it is indigenous to the tropics. It is "broken," much as Guadeloupe's revolutionary spirit has been broken. The two sections suggest the bi-polarities of black / white, male / female, rich / poor, French / Guadeloupean, powerful / dispossessed.

Césaire's fruit image from "Batouque" in *Les armes miraculeuses* (1946) is more ambiguous:

> *Ayant violé jusqu'à la transparence le sexe étroit du crépuscule*
> *le grand Nègre du matin*
> *jusqu'au fond de la mer de pierre éclatée*
> *attente les fruits de faim, des villes nouées*
>
> *having raped to the point of transparency the narrow sex of the dusk*
> *the tall Negro of the morning*
> *to the depths of the cracked stone sea*
> *takes on the hunger fruits of knotted cities*[18] (Césaire 1983, 146-47).

The image is a typical *métaphore filée* (surrealistic metaphor) constructed of contradictory terms. The verb "attente," (take on, make a criminal attempt,) implies that the "tall Negro" is raping or forcing open the fruits, as he did the dawn of a new age. While his hunger is for self-affirmation, "les fruits de faim" also suggests "les fruits de *femme*," implying the rape of women. The image of insemination points to the transplanted black's attempts to assert himself by taking possession of the white man's woman or by impregnating women of his own race as he puts down roots (s'enracine) in a new land. The black Super-Male's infusion of new life into an inert and sterile black society is the ideological message of Césaire's negritude. The sexual imagery of this poem makes revolt the fundamental life-giving act, as opposed to sexual congress.

Guadeloupean Michèle Lacrosil's novel *Cajou* is named for its mulatto heroine. The title designates both the cashew nut itself, as well as its red, consumable stalk. This can be interpreted as Cajou's doubleness: she doesn't know her real self and only seeks to know herself through the look of others (Corzani 1978, 5:251). Of these authors associating fruit with the feminine, only Lacrosil and Manicom, who are women, lend their female characters psychological complexity.

Lacrosil's heroines Cajou and Sapotille bear the names of fruits considered exotic by a European readership. This comparison of Antillean womanhood to objects of lush and pleasing appearance contrasts sharply with the characters' inner turmoil.

> *Le contraste entree les descriptions extérieures et les conflits intérieurs a une signification plus large. C'est toute l'île qui est travestie en Paradis alors qu'elle abrite tant de passions et... de frustrations... dualité d'une image touristique et d'une réalité autrement poignante, vécue de l'intérieur* (Condé 1979, 63B4).
>
> *The contrast between the exterior descriptions and the interior conflicts has a larger significance. The entire island is disguised as a paradise while it shelters so many passions... and frustrations... the duality of a touristic image and of a reality otherwise poignant, lived from within.*

In *Cajou* the theme of doubleness extends to the cultural conflict resulting from the protagonist's birth to an Antillean father and a Parisian mother. As a result, she suffers from a neurosis deteriorating into psychosis. Plagued by the fear of failure–a leitmotif of the entire novel–Cajou dislikes herself and doesn't know how to respond to the love of Germain, a blue-eyed blond "de sang

pur" (Lacrosil 16) (of pure blood). Pregnant with his child, she commits suicide in order to save herself and her child from the contradictions which torment her.

The Animalization of the Woman of Color

Regionalist literature has been accused of reducing men to the landscape (Corzani 1978, 2:99), but it is the women–especially the women of color–who are most often diminished, in negritude and even in much contemporary literature. In addition to being objectified as the land or fruit, they may be animalized as birds, wasps, snakes, mulatto "monsters," beasts, or demons. The very origin of the word "mulatto"–from the Spanish *mulato* for "young mule"–connects those of mixed race with non-human abnormalities of nature. Like mules, mulattoes were erroneously considered to be sterile. In all these cases, the individual is denied (Corzani 1978, 1:93).

Their assumed predilection for sexual pleasure would naturally make Antillean women inconstant, flitting from man to man like birds, as they are portrayed in the following Creole ditty. It was adapted from an elegy written by M. Dupuis of Les Îlets, Martinique, about a jealous man of color with a metropolitan French officer as his rival (Antoine 1978, 208):

Colibri li tini bel plume
Mais zailes aussi pour voltiger.

The hummingbird has beautiful feathers
but also wings to fly away.

The bright-hued hummingbird is indigenous to the Americas. Its small size, rapidly beating wings, and penchant for feeding on nectar liken it to a petite, vibrant, and sweet mulatto woman. No matter what his personal qualities, the Antillean man of color cannot compete with the social prestige of a white, French military man, although he blames his failure on the "innate" fickleness of the Martinican woman.

The reification of women as fruit and birds is also evident in Michèle Lacrosil's first novel *Sapotille et le serin d'argile*. The sapodilla, an edible tropical plum, is often associated with the smooth skin of mulatto women such as the heroine, a Câpresse.[19] She is raised in a convent where one of the sisters convinces her of the blackness of her soul by her frequent comment, "Cette fille, c'est un monstre..." (Lacrosil 1960, 46) (That girl is a monster...). During a school festival, Sapotille's white classmates play the roles of fairies, princes, or princesses, while she is relegated to making sound effects in the wings by blowing into a clay canary. *Serin* also connotes "birdbrain," an association that further trivializes and dehumanizes the young girl. Lacrosil links religious racism

with the colonial system (Corzani 1978, 5:244), and she offers no solutions to the resulting psychological problems.

While Lacrosil's bird is cast in clay and cannot escape its confinement, Édouard Glissant presents a more positive feminine bird image in "Afrique" (1960), his first poem dedicated to that continent. "Voici, la nasse est nue, voici au sable l'Africaine... " (Here is the empty fish net, here in the sand is the African woman...) (Glissant 1960, 114) juxtaposes an empty fish net with an African woman on the sand, also implied to be "bare, nude." The freedom from constraint is accentuated by the action of cleansing as she takes the sea salt into her unbound hair. Defined as "an element that gives liveliness or pungency," as well as "sharp, biting wit" (*Random House Webster's College Dictionary* 1991), salt activates yeast. Here it evokes the potential for change, growth, and fermentation, whether tantalizing or bitter. The metaphors "... beau geai, beau fruit..." (Glissant 1960, 114) (beautiful jay, beautiful fruit) cast the woman as a glorious song bird ready to take flight, or a fruit ripe for the plucking. They signify fecundity, the continent's ripeness for change through emancipation from colonial subjugation, and the possibility of its future emergence onto the world political scene. Africa's new-found freedom is contrasted with Martinique's own desire for independence, as the poet proposes self-determination for all colonized nations (Corzani 1978, 5:30). Politically, the French Antilles-Guiana are still metaphorically caged birds.

Paul Niger's feminization and animalization of Africa presents a more sinister image. Having ardently guided the continent / woman toward independence, the poet ceased calling her name as he watched her lie listless, digesting herself like a python "[a]vant le midi du chacal" (Niger 1960, 62) (before the noon of the jackal). The jackal, a wild, nocturnal African dog that scavenges or hunts in packs, connotes a scoundrel acting as another's accomplice. The jackal's noon appearance thus signifies the apex of depravity. But an unidentified man denounces the corruption, calling Africa "ma mère qu'est la fécondité souriante du monde..." (Niger 1960, 62) (my mother who is the smiling fecundity of the world). Mother Africa is awakened by a masculine presence that gives her a name and an identity, revealing her to herself. As in Césaire's poem "Batouque," the masculinist vision predominates, as the poet and the man are identified with the Super-Male of negritude.

Inconstant, stupid, vexatious, or stagnant, animalized women in French Caribbean literature may also be wanton. It was therefore men, especially the more socially prestigious white men, who were to fear victimization by mulatto women, not the opposite. This same "bestial" nature made men of color suspect of raping white women, although this theme of colonial violence was more prevalent in metropolitan French literature than in Creole literature (Antoine 1978, 211).

The racially pure Negress cannot be condemned as a mongrelized "she-dog" (Hernton 1988, 99) like the *Mulâtresse*, but she is still blamed for seducing white males. In *Cri des colons*[20] (1810), colonist F. Richard de Tussac denounces *De la littérature des nègres* by Bishop Grégoire, who affirms the modesty and delicacy of African women, while supporting allegations of racially-inspired sexual violence against them. Tussac responds that slave women not only "ask for" sexual attention from white slave traders, but that they are "lucky to get it!"

> *La pudeur des négresses!... Pour le coup il y a de quoi rire... pour prouver que les négresses des Antilles ne connoissent ni pudeur, ni modestie... , nous dirons que presque toutes les jeunes négresses vont nues jusqu'à l'âge de puberté;... plus d'une fois que ces pudiques Africaines paroissoient très flattées d'être ce qu'il appelle outragées par les blancs, ne fût-ce que par les matelots, et qu'elles regardoient cela comme un honneur* (Tussac 172B76).

> *The decency of Negresses!... Don't make me laugh... in order to prove the Negresses of the Antilles know neither decency, nor modesty, we will say that almost all young Negresses go nude until the age of puberty;... more than once these decent African women appeared very flattered to be what he (Bishop Grégoire) calls outraged by whites, be it only by sailors, and that they saw that as an honor.*

Tussac's racism, sexism, and elitism are equaled only by his ignorance. The slave merchants displayed females naked and available for inspection by prospective owners. This humiliating practice destroyed black women's modesty and self esteem (Hernton 1988, 128). More than a century later, Martinican poet Lionel Attuly will elevate Afro-Antillean women over their white sisters, as discussed below.

The portrait of the sexually voracious mulatto woman appears in Eugène Sue's romantic serial novel *Les mystères de Paris* (1842-43), where it expresses the nineteenth-century theme of vampirism (Antoine 1978, 132). In the character Cécily the role evolves from the bestial to the truly demonic:

> *Disons-le, cette grande créole, à la fois svelte et charnue, vigoureuse et souple comme une panthère, était le type incarné de la sensualité brûlante qui ne s'allume qu'aux feux des tropiques.*

> *Tout le monde a entendu parler de ces filles de couleur pour ainsi dire mortelles aux Européens, de ces vampires enchanteurs qui, enivrant leur victime de séductions terribles, pompent jusqu'à sa dernière goutte d'or et de sang, et ne lui laissent, selon l'énergique expression du pays, que ses larmes à boire, que son coeur à ronger* (Sue 3:425).
>
> *Let's be frank, this tall creole woman, both slender and fleshy, vigorous and supple like a female panther, was the type incarnated by the burning sensuality which only ignites in the fires of the tropics.*
> *Everyone has heard of these girls of color who are, so to speak, fatal to European men, these enchanting vampires who, intoxicating their victim with terrible seductions, pump up to the last drop of gold and blood, and leave him, according to the country's energetic expression, with only his tears to drink, his heart to eat away.*

Antillean women of color are like panthers: black, beautiful, lithe–and carnivorous. Their exotic lustfulness thrives in the physical and emotional heat of the tropics. These female seducers, like prostitutes, drain the hapless European male morally, financially, and physically, leaving him only with his regrets.

The image of the black female demon continues into the immediate post World War II period with *Issandre le mulâtre* (1949) by Jean-Louis Baghio'o.[21] The story is based on a legend told by the author's grandmother, Guadeloupean musician Marie de Virel. Issandre is attracted to the priesthood, but he is imprisoned in the cave of the Soufrière volcano by *la Guiablesse amoureuse* (the she-devil in love), associated through the symbol of the volcano with physical and emotional upheaval. Herself the victim of the one she wishes to entice and damn, this bewitching creature is crazed with desire. Her sexual excesses exhaust Issandre's body without gaining his soul. Against his religious beliefs, Issandre secretly loves a young creole woman. Discovering this, the *Guiablesse* plots her murder by a deformed black man. When Issandre becomes a priest, the she-devil, having experienced human sorrow, flees and is lost in the torturous recesses of the island.

As so often in Western tradition, black woman is here associated with insanity, sexual insatiability, and damning influence over white men. With the "deformed" black murderer, this story reinforces the image of black female *and male* abnormality, while the white man is portrayed as morally superior. Issandre's self-control allows him to withstand the devil-woman's efforts to turn him from his faith. Her own evil deeds seem to drive her to her destiny. Being lost

in the island's rugged terrain and tropical forest is a metaphor for her psychological delirium. The fact that the author is an Antillean mulatto illustrates the pervasiveness of this stereotype.

This same tension between sexuality and spirituality appears in "Obsession," a poem from the collection *Les jeux du soleil*, which Baghio'o claims to have found in his family archives. Each time the poet joins his hands to pray, his sacred thoughts are distracted: "j'associe et mélange / Les grains du chapelet aux bouts des seins dorés!" (Baghio'o 1960, 28) (I associate and confuse / The rosary beads with the tips of golden breasts!). It is the young mulatto woman, and not God, whom the poet truly adores.

In "Nue" (1961, 36-37), Gilbert de Chambertrand, a white Guadeloupean Creole, similarly glorifies the smooth, sensual body of his mulatto lover, while mingling their sexual communion with mystery, passion, and the struggle between shadow and light. The words "splendeur" (splendor), "divin" (divine), "aurore" (dawn), "lampe" (lamp), and "claret" (light) suggest spirituality, but this impression is countered by the more troubling terms "creuses" (hollow), "mystères" (mysteries), "luttes" (struggles), "charme" (charm) and "ombre" (shadow). The woman's name is not mentioned, just as her individuality and personality are denied. Her presence is never that of a complete being; the description of her body parts symbolically dismember her. Sensual excitement is stimulated by the words "convie" (invite), "mouvant," (moving) "émouvant" (emotionally moving) and "semant" (seeding), which connotes "semen." The dominant impression, however, is one of the man's psychological struggle with miscegenation, exemplified by the contrasts between light and dark.

Demonic females appear among the stock exotic formulas of *Biguines*[22] (1956), a collection of novellas written for her European public by Guadeloupean Florette Morand. Morand exemplifies a woman perpetuating negative female stereotypes as part of the ambient culture. In "Aïcha la petite Indienne," a beautiful young Hindu girl of Saint-François has been raised by her grandfather Youmé to have all the social graces. However, she rejects the young Hindu man he has chosen for her husband and surrenders instead to the Parisian Marc de Saint-Géran. Marc impregnates the innocent Aïcha, then abandons her and becomes engaged to another girl. Aïcha's nursemaid wreaks vengeance by poisoning him on the day of his wedding. Once again, a young woman of color refuses marriage with a man of her own race for a sexual adventure with a white European male, "the personal embodiment of pride and power in [the West]" (Hernton 1988, 155). When she is predictably seduced and abandoned, the unwary white man is punished through "black witchcraft."

Morand's "La sorcière amoureuse" (the sorceress in love) tells how Karitah, a sorceress enamored of the fickle Sonson, avenges his preference for Nonnô. She tranforms herself into a *soucougnant*, a wife of Satan particular to

the Caribbean. Having assumed the qualities of a flying vampire, Karitah bleeds all of Sonson's cattle. Sonson consults a medium who identifies the source of his misfortune. Awaiting Karitah one night, the young man douses her with a magic potion and impales her with his cutlass. Karitah's spirit begs for his absolution, which Sonson grants. After ridding himself of this "black witch" by murder Sonson marries Nonnô, sires many children, and prospers.

Another *diablesse*, Man Zabyme, appears in contemporary author Patrick Chamoiseau's first novel *Chronique des sept misères* (1986), in which "magic is a sinister undercurrent" (Ormerod 1994, 447). Pipi, leader of a small group of *djobeurs*,[24] experiences declining fortunes in the post World War II years. His supernatural experiences seem to precipitate his decline, since his perception of the ghost of a murdered slave prevents him from acquiring a buried treasure. Man Zabyme harasses him, finally luring him to his death (Ormerod 1994, 447).

Some More Positive Images of Women of Color

In *Coeurs martiniquais* (1922), the *Da* or nursemaid for the Béké's children is the only black person whose existence is recognized. Animalized and desexualized, this black female stereotype does not threaten masculinist society. Mlle Clémence Cassius de Linval used the male pseudonym "Jean Max" to publish this early twentieth-century novel in which her racist discourse portrays the old, faithful *Da* as a familiar animal (Corzani 1978, 2:129). The passive "mammy" elides any more assertive or active roles for black women.

In a remorseful poem addressed to his wife Diamwali Sidibé, whom he has betrayed with an adulterous French woman when he was "encore prisonnier de Paris" (Attuly 1947, 125) (still a prisoner of Paris). Martinican Lionel Attuly contrasts the African woman's silent strength, modesty, and untiring devotion, with the white woman's weakness, vanity, and disdain of physical labor. After serving in the Services Civils de l'Afrique Occidentale Française in the Soudan, Attuly finds the African woman life-giving, while the more "civilized" European woman represents death. His poem "Par-dessus la frontière" ("Over the Border") describes the white woman's bold sexuality, compared with the modesty and chastity of his wife, a chief's daughter. It constitutes a fitting rebuttal to Tussac's derision of black women's sense of decency. Attuly blames the white woman's provocativeness for pushing him "over the border" of his own moral standards. However, Attuly also duplicates the patriarchal rule that equates woman with womb and maternity.

Paul Niger's *Les grenouilles du Mont Kimbo*, mentioned above, further reinforces female stereotypes, while presenting a healthy prototype for the black man. The "greater" earthiness, sensuality, and fertility of African women is set in opposition to the "frigidity and sterility" of European women. Aline, a fifteen-year-

old French girl, offers to be Adiomou's wife and servant, but his refusal in the name of his anticolonialist cause negates the myth of monstrous black male sexuality.

He explains that Aline smells of "washing powder" and her vagina tastes like "wet laundry." Her white flesh cannot rival the hot-blooded African woman's scent of "burned wood" (Niger 1964, 169)–a natural, musky odor that incites passion. The black woman's labia are like the lips of the antelope, a deer-like ruminant indigenous to Africa with the traditionally feminine qualities of silence, grace, and passivity. However, the simile of the antelope's lips nibbling young plant shoots on laterite slopes implies the sexual assertiveness of the African woman, perhaps to the point of appropriating the typically male role of sexual consumer. Laterite, a reddish ferruginous soil formed in tropical regions from the decomposition of underlying rocks, is mentioned in Césaire's poetry and also points to regeneration. Niger hints at the breaking up of the old order for a more just world to come.

Social Stereotypes of White Women

The preceding citations affirm that women, black or white, may be objectified or cast in the role of the crazed seductress in the literature of the French Antilles-Guiana. White women are often portrayed as indolent, too privileged to be concerned with physical work. However, my research yielded fewer examples of the reification of white women as compared to women of color. In "Regrets et tendresses," André Thomarel's metonymous fruits–the nutmeg, the sapodilla, the orange, the star apple–all refer to women of color, while the white female alone is symbolized by a shell (Thomarel qtd. in Corzani 2: 314).[22] As in earlier white / black stereotypes, the shell associates the white woman with hardness, cleanliness, fragility–but also frigidity and sterility. Like fruits, the women of color are more vivid, more voluptuous, more nurturing, and earthier–with the implication that they are more "fruitful" sexually.

Verses from Francis Jammes's "De l'Angélus de l'aube à l'Angélus du soir" tell of a planter's daughter who accepted the sexual advances of a black naval officer. Going out to watch "the passage of Venus' on a hot night, the young ensign finishes the evening by "... metta[n]t la fille du planteur nue / Dans l'habitation basse..." (Jammes 1906, 163) (... denuding the planter's daughter / In the lower house...). Linking the white woman to the planet Venus, named for the goddess of love, elevates her by association with the Greco-Roman tradition, while signifying that love can transcend earth-bound social and racial barriers. However, the poet's use of the familiar "tu" in addressing the black man reveals his condescension.

Jammes, a Béarnais with creole ties, hyperfeminizes the Antilles in conjunction with the economic and political dependence of the islands, thereby

devaluing them as charming and somewhat frivolous (Antoine 1978, 296, 303). This fetichism was further developed between the two world wars in a literature celebrating the character of the *doudou*. However, the wars also raised the need for more masculine personnages, and the poet Alexis Leger, better-known as Saint-John Perse, provides the most striking of these through the eyes of the boy-narrator of his collection *Eloges* (Antoine 1978, 306). Although creole men dominate in Perse's poetry, a few well-known lines depict the aristocratic white woman's social superiority over her darker-skinned servants. A Guadeloupean plantation-owner employed in France's diplomatic service, Perse writes that his pride was that his daughter be very beautiful when she gave orders to the black women; his joy, that she uncover a very white arm "parmi ses poules noires" (among her black hens); and his hope, that she not be ashamed of his own rough cheek when he returned home muddy from the fields (Perse 1960, 11).

Radiance and whiteness are joined in the poet's daughter, while blackness, animality, and dirtiness are associated with the female servants. The daughter's metaphoric feeding of the black hens demonstrates a *noblesse oblige* generosity. A "lily lady" (Hernton 1988, 123), she is elevated above the grimy agrarian tasks assumed by the black women and her father.

The white Creole's wife, isolated in the plantation house during the early colonial period, led "l'ennuyeuse existence d'une orientale" (the boring existence of an Oriental woman) in *Nos créoles* by A. Corre (1902, 154-55). This lack of control over her own destiny makes the white woman as susceptible as the woman of color to romantic diversions. Sexual attraction to black men can be interpreted as the white woman's rebellion against the uneventful life of confinement and "false chivalry" (Hernton 1988, 26) imposed by her husband. Her erotic passion for a man of a different race will be diagnosed as a psychological illness, rather than an effort to escape an intolerable existence.

The white woman pulled between temptation and revulsion, ardor and abhorrence, veneration and obscenity, "the beauty and the beast of black men" (Hernton 1988, 27) is captured in Raphaël Tardon's novel *La caldeira* (1948). Its publication coincided with the appearance of the mulatto class in Martinican public life and the progressive eviction of the "Grands Blancs" from the French Antilles (Corzani 1978 6:142), events which had heightened racial anxiety on the island. The countess Athénaïs, ironically named for Athena,[25] the virgin deity of the ancient Greeks, lives cloistered in her villa, guarded by ferocious dogs, yet she desires the forbidden black man as much as she fears him. Sexually dissatisfied, she unconsciously attributes her husband's insufficiencies to his whiteness (Corzani 1978, 6:146-7). In her irrepressible hallucinations parade growling black men whose ruthless grins reveal the fangs of Tonkinese tigers. One of them in particular attracts the young countess's attention by the huge size of his penis, bristling with cactus barbs which are undulating like sea urchins.

> *... malgré l'effrayante répulsion que lui inspirait le colossal nègre, la jeune femme se sentait incapable d'en détacher son regard comme si elle se trouvait en même temps soumise à une influence hypnotique. D'évidence, Satan lui-même habitait ce monstre aux sortilèges* (Tardon 1948, 141B42).
>
> *... despite the frightening repulsion that the colossal Negro inspired in her, the young woman felt incapable of tearing her eyes away as if she were under a hypnotic influence. Obviously, Satan himself inhabited this monster of evil spells.*

In addition to being animalized as ferocious, grimacing tigers, their specification as "Tonkinese" exoticizes these men as part of the savage French colonial world. The gigantic penis sporting animated protrusions dwarfs the human being. The black man is perceived primarily in "genital terms –... a... 'walking phallus.'" (Hernton 1988, 38). The white woman's conflicting passions of repugnance and longing merge, making the black male appear to be a sexual monster. In fact, she *wants* him to rape her (Hernton 1988, 39).

The idea that the devil inhabits the black body also fascinates her. Black skin is associated with black magic, evil, death, disaster, hatred, filth-anything negative. Tardon's image focuses all the emotions of the frustrated planter's wife, while exaggerating the myth of the sexually potent black man to the grotesque.

Women of Color as Symbols of Their Psychologically Scarred People

In the second half of the twentieth century, women of color in French Caribbean literature often become emblematic of their own people. Simone and André Schwartz-Bart's *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (1967) portrays the daughter of the Mulâtresse Solitude as the character Man Louise. While pregnant, the historical Solitude fought with Lieutenant Louis Delgrès's troops during the Guadeloupean Revolution of 1802. The slave population of the islands had been liberated following the French Revolution of 1789. However, reportedly at the request of his Martinican wife Josephine, Napoleon sent an expedition to reenslave them in 1802. On May 2, three hundred men, women, and children under Delgrès's command were trapped and surrounded by the French at the Danglemont Plantation on the heights of Matouba. Rather than capitulate, the insurgents chose to perish in a huge blast of dynamite. At the moment of the explosion, Solitude escaped into the woods to preserve the life of her child. Captured by General Antoine Richepanse's soldiers, she was executed the day after giving birth.

Because she is suspected of inheriting her mother's penchant for violence, Man Louise wears "les chaînes dans son âme tout au long de sa vie,-plus profondément inscrites que la marque au fer rouge de son sein droit" (Schwarz-Bart 1967, 47) (chains in her soul her whole life,-more deeply engraved than the red iron mark on her right breast). Animalized by the authors, she cringes "avec son air de bête apeurée" (Schwarz-Bart 1967, 47) (with her appearance of a frightened beast). Man Louise represents the Antillean people: their fear, their submissiveness, masking the hidden but ardent desire for a free development (Corzani 1978, 6: 232).

Toward the end of the novel, Mariotte, the granddaughter of the Man Louise, is "une vieille Mulâtresse" (an old mulatto woman) wasting away in a Parisian nursing home. She is subjected to the indignities forced upon her by the white porter's jokes and the curiosity of her roommates. She even allows "ces deux vieilles pies" (Schwarz-Bart 1967, 190) (these two old magpies) to place their hands between her legs to see if "le derrière des Négresses est aussi chaud qu'on le dit" (Schwarz-Bart 1967, 190) (Negresses' behinds are as hot as people say). Although a direct descendant of the proud Mulâtresse Solitude, Mariotte is condemned to die in France, isolated and unknown. Her exile is symbolic of the future of the Antilles, whose traditional culture is evolving into one modeled on that of the Western industrialized countries (Corzani 1978, 6:233).

Frantz Fanon included an analysis of Maybe Capécia's novels in his denunciation of the Afro-Antillean woman's presumed preference for white men. Capécia's *La Négresse blanche* (1950) exposes the profundity of Antillean racism: Isaure, the light-skinned mulatto woman, is doubly alienated because she is rejected by both the white and the black communities. She has internalized the European stereotype of black sexual bestiality and seeks liaisons only with light-skinned men. Set during the Vichy occupation of Martinique, the novel illustrates the rage of the blacks who see their women appropriated by the French soldiers. They often brutalize the *doudous* with razors, and one night Isaure is herself attacked by a band of blacks in the streets of Fort-de-France. They finally lynch her lover Pascal, a *Béké goyave*[26] who, ironically, is sympathetic to the Negroes' plight. Capécia's novels are indicative of the autodestruction and unconscious masochism of the Antillean people of color (Corzani 1978, 4:206).

In *Sapotille et le serin d'argile*, mentioned above, Michèle Lacrosil decries these psychological problems and their principal causes: the alienating French culture imposed on Guadeloupeans, the related racism that scars them from birth with an indelible inferiority complex, and the racist policies of the Catholic Church in the islands. The "holy sisters'" blatant preference for the white boarders at the convent has ruined Sapotille's early years. She speaks of this to her friend Denise:

> *Quand est-ce que ce ne serait que ce dégout que (mon enfance) m'a laissé: Denise, est-ce que tu es content de toi? Je vex dire: de ton être? Moi, il y a des jours où je voudrais me vomir*... (Lacrosil 1960, 78).
>
> *When will the disgust my childhood left me go away: Denise, are you happy with yourself? I mean: with your existence? There are days when I want to throw up...*

After leaving the convent, Sapotille discovers the racial partitions of Guadeloupean society. Patrice, a handsome mulatto doctor, presses her for sexual intimacy, but she is convinced that he will never turn his back on his own caste to marry a Negress. Instead she marries a Câpre, who is sick from having been tortured during the war. He is jealous and beats her until she loses the child that she is expecting. Her reactions reveal the scope of the psychological damage caused by her convent education and the seriousness of the island's racial tensions: Sapotille is joyful that her miscarriage has spared her child this "monde partagé, races, castes, ennemis!" (Lacrosil 1960, 236) (divided world, races, castes, enemies!). She leaves for France, believing that the French are unfamiliar with Antillean society's social stratification and class exclusions, when in fact, it was French colonial racism that created the problems in the first place.

Jacqueline Manicom, of mixed African and East Indian ancestry, takes up the same theme in *Mon examen de blanc* (1972). "Passer son examen de blanc" in the French Antilles signifies a person of color's efforts to be assimilated into white society in order to share its privileges. However, the process entails the individual's denial of his or her own cultural identity. Madévie Ramimoutou, of sub-Saharan and East Indian origin, has an affair with Xavier, a wealthy French industrial's son interning at the same Parisian hospital where she is a medical student. Her desire to be sexually initiated by a white male recalls the native island women's deification of the original European conquerors. Xavier's exotic wish is to deflower a mulatto virgin, if he can find one (Manicom 1972, 40). Although critical of the prejudices of French society, Xavier nevertheless sides with his "enlightened" family in rejecting interracial marriage. When Madévie tells him she is pregnant, he feels obligated to marry her but requires a prenuptial agreement to divorce after the birth of their child. Repulsed by this ill-disguised racism, which makes her feel that it is a crime to be a young woman of color (Manicom 1972, 106), she aborts the fetus herself.

After returning to her native Guadeloupe, the young woman doctor assists the French surgeon Dr. Cyril Démian in his clinic. However she dreams, as did Mayotte, Sapotille, and Cajou (Corzani 1978, 6:208), of being "belle, blonde, blanche et Claire" (Manicom 1972, 11) (beautiful, blonde, white, and

light-skinned) like Marie-Dominique, the 20-year-old French girl training as a surgical nurse. Démian is himself an enigmatic character. His name is an intertextual reference to the novel *Demian* (1919) by Hermann Hesse, in which the main character Emil Sinclair embarks on a spiritual journey which concludes with the realization that the answers to his questions lie within him.

> *Demian is the mentor Sinclair continually finds himself returning to. As he learns more and more, the lines between good and bad, right and wrong, man and woman begin to fade* (Partnow<http://www.asd.k12. ak.us/schools/west/review/~Demian/DemianReview.html> [Web page expired]).

Like Hesse's Demian, Dr. Cyril Démian acts as a spiritual guide in encouraging Madévie to tell him about Xavier's traumatic rejection and her self-inflicted abortion. His acceptance enables her to dispel her fantasy of marrying into white bourgeois society and thus find her "true self" (Partnow) in her native identity. Despite Démian's compassion for her, a woman of color, his character has a more sinister side. While performing a caesarian section, he insensitively teases Madévie about having maternal instincts. His voice is paradoxically sniggering and angelic, and his flabby, shaking shoulders make him an infernal sight above the woman's open abdominal cavity (Manicom 1972, 99). When delivering another baby, he appears to almost enjoy tearing his black female patient's genitalia, and he re-sews the ruptured vagina badly (Manicom 1972, 50). Elsewhere Madévie refers to "les gynécos mutilatrices de Cyril" (Manicom 1972, 163) (Cyril's mutilating gynecological surgeries). Her statement that appendectomies and hysterectomies are performed when the symptoms could be treated as parasitosis implies that the Guadeloupeans' primary disease is physical and psychological dependence on France. Under the guise of a gentle, disinterested friend, he is a demonic racist who takes vicarious sexual pleasure in her confessions. It relates to the ambivalence of the French presence in the Antilles.

Madévie fully embraces her own creolized Guadeloupean identity only when she becomes romantically involved with Gilbert, an attractive dark-skinned teacher and a member of Liberté, the pro-independence party. The arrival of jets at the airport across from the clinic no longer reminds her of Xavier, "[c]ar Gilbert, lui, a aimé ma peau sombre" (Manicom 1972, 207) (because Gilbert liked my dark skin). She allies herself with him and his ideas–those of Fanon, Glissant, Boukman, and Rupaire (Corzani 1978, 6:211). With the insertion of pleas for Guadeloupean independence, Manicom's conclusion bears the influence of her second husband, a Marxist-Leninist activist (Corzani 1978, 6:211). Gilbert is

killed in an agricultural workers' protest when the *képis rouges*[27] open fire on them. Madévie is bereft-her lover slain, the revolution aborted, and her friend Cyril repatriated. Ironically, the handsome, mulatto surgeon who replaces him drives a sports car and flaunts the bourgeois French values Madévie has come to detest. Although France may pretend to "free" her former colonies, she continues to inundate them with her culture and her consumer products, smothering whatever native culture has managed to survive.

Vincent Placoly's *La vie et la mort de Marcel Gonstran* (1971) is another Antillean treatment of the theme of inescapable failure and despair. After meeting the French prostitute Eléonora on the streets of Paris, the Afro-Martinican Marcel falls passionately in love with her. This prostitute representing sophisticated Europe is a reversal of the fetishized Mulâtresse. The glittering elegance of Europe's great cities hides the filthy prosperity of its world of prostitution, much as the vivid beauty of the Antillean prostitute hides the poverty and exploitation of the islands (Placoly 1971, 39).

Eléonora and Marcel are both excluded from the dominant culture and forced to wander, physically and emotionally, in search of their respective identities. The alliance of black males and white females against the white male Other is frequent in French Antillean and Guianese literature.

Once again, the pungent, maternal odor of the woman's body recalls the earth, which speaks to Marcel through Eléonora. He longs for the depth of his native sky, the expanse of the ocean, the Caribbean night seething with scents and sounds (Placoly 1971, 46). In her ability to recall the eternal aspects of nature, Eléonora is able to anchor and succor "l'homme déraciné" (the uprooted man) as do the women in Césaire's poetry. Contrary to the stereotype of the white European woman, she is fertile, but the couple's passion is derailed by the birth of an abnormal child, signifying the tainted fruit of the Franco-Antillean union. The fact that the child is female further emphasizes her vulnerability.

The failure of this cross-cultural relationship represents the Antillean people's powerlessness to surmount the curse of institutional racism, which since colonial times has depicted them as somehow deviating from the norm. Like Man Louise, Marcel Gonstran spends his life in dread of a catastrophe, in fear of contact with madness. The apparent calm of the Antillean world hides hostility ready to burst into hatred and violence (Corzani 1978, 6:249-50). This paradox is reflected in the duplicitous face of the prostitute.

Bertène Juminer's *Les bâtards* (1961) also illustrates this Antillean theme of duplicity and fear of contamination. Beyond the images of nubility, fertility, and sexual voraciousness, Juminer associates the feminine with putrefaction and decay. In addition to playing on the theme of illegitimacy, he emphasizes the irreversible psychological damage that can be caused by interracial love affairs in a neo-colonial situation.

The last section of the novel, "Une Fille-Mère Nommée Guyane" ("An Unwed Mother Called Guiana") (Juminer 1989, 143) bears the epigraph by Aimé Césaire "J'ai longtemps erré et je reviens vers la hideur désertée de vos plaies" (Long have I wandered and I return to the deserted hideousness of your wounds) (Juminer 1989, 143). Juminer, a medical doctor with specializations in parasitology, bacteriology, and immunology, depicts his Guianese protagonists and their compatriots as cultural and psychological "bastards" with all the implications of illegitimacy, miscegenation (Warner 1989, xxxi), and exploitation of women. The imagined Gallic father, who represents France, abandoned the pregnant African girl symbolizing Guiana on the banks of the Amazon River. Their hypothetical descendants are thus doubly dispossessed: both historically and culturally anonymous. But their strong, matriarchal African heritage, subsisting in the unwed mother of Guiana, will give them an identity and save them from self-destruction (Juminer 1961, 83).

The first section of *Les bâtards* describes the life of young Guianese medical students who, like Juminer, received scholarships to study in France. Their *retour* to the Antilles-Guiana parallels that of Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas. Accustomed to the higher metropolitan standard of living, the repatriating protagonists are shocked by France's neglect of their homeland, despite the richness of its soil and resources. Personified as a woman, Guiana is suffering in its soul and body from an inexorable misery (Juminer 1961, 117).

Although they are determined to improve local conditions, the young doctors Chambord and Cambier are pawns of the colonial administration. Because they themselves have been molded by French convention, they have become strangers in their own country and are identified with the very authority they wish to destroy (Warner 1989, xxxviii). While they may succeed in improving the physical health of their countrymen, the self-hatred resulting from cultural colonization (Knight 1994, 553) is more insidious and pervasive. Chambord remarks to Cambier that assimilation will replace malaria as the predominant disease (Juminer 1961, 187).

The first section of the novel is set in Paris, where the Guianese medical students sexually exploit the ever-available French women, while the second section takes place in Guiana. In both environments, there are frequent references to an unhealthy, magnetic, metropolitan "fluid" (Juminer 1961, 83, 47, 65) and occult forces (Juminer 1961, 47). Pursued by these strange powers that rattle his furniture and cause objects to levitate, one metropolitan medical student was forced to move three times. This free-floating "fluid" later haunts Cambier as a psychological malaise. When his French fiancée Charlotte offers herself to him, he is unable to perform. He blames the fluid and the rum for his intoxication, but secretly fears that an evil spell has caused his impotence (Juminer 1961, 50). The deaths of two African students within a year–one accidentally, the other by

disease–contributes to his feeling that the black students are somehow cursed. When he finds a spot on his leg, Cambier consults a doctor at the medical school, and the questions asked about his family cause him to dread his own possible contamination with syphilis. Without waiting for the results of a blood test, he decides to break with Charlotte and to return to Guiana to research his family medical history.

Cambier's fears about his health are assuaged "through his contact with Guianese soil, and through his acceptance of his Africanness" (Warner 1989, xlii). However, no other young black Guianese women are portrayed besides his sick sisters (Warner 1989, xliv). Cambier is reminded of his domineering female relatives, "une survivance africaine: le matriarcat" (Juminer 1961, 41) (an African survival: the matriarchy) (Juminer 1989, 35). His apprehension concerning "le fluide maternel" (Juminer 1961, 41) (the maternal fluid) (Juminer 1989, 35), his mother's abortions, and the illnesses of his sisters links the feminine and disease once again. Another French girlfriend, Brigitte, also conveys a fluid (Juminer 1961, 136), but a more positive force which moves Cambier to confess his fear of syphilis. This woman has a healing influence over him. She reveals that she was not contaminated by sexual intercourse with him and urges him to have a blood test which proves negative.

Cambier's investigation of his sisters' illnesses discloses that it is not a family disease that ravages them, but rather the germ of prejudice (Juminer 1961, 201), diffused through the colonial mentality. Imprisoned in the cesspit that serves as Cayenne's psychiatric asylum (Juminer 1961, 158), Caroline suffers delirium stemming from traumas in years past: her father's rejection of the man she loved for being "too black;" the imposed abortion of their child; and her father's death by heart attack when she confronted him over his tyrannical behavior. Demented and locked in a cell, Caroline lives in the past, rejecting her brother and the doctors for trying to kill the memory of her lover. In her more lucid moments, however, she reveals that her dreams of love have been shattered: "L'amour, tu comprends? L'amour, cette vierge suspendue par les pieds au mât de l'éternité!" (Juminer 1961, 162) ("Love, you understand? Love, that virgin hanging by her feet from the mast of eternity!") (Juminer 1989, 185). Virginal in the sense of morally pure, Caroline has been crucified by the hatred of the Other. She is imprisoned physically and psychologically, condemned to live between heaven and hell, incapable of either healing herself or of being healed. She represents Guiana today, torn by racial prejudice, oppressed by colonial exploiters, powerless to heal. The phallic mast evokes the ships of the conquerors and the slave traders whose continuing legacy persecutes her. Cambier's discussions with Chambord, who is Caroline's physician, confirm that her situation is hopeless.

His sister Hortense, whose leprosy was transmitted by a childhood friend, is physically cured. Strongly resembling her grandmother "la Négresse," she is the most well-balanced member of the family (Juminer 1961, 183). Despite his fear of female domination, Cambier associates health with Africanness, in particular with his African grandmother long renounced by her mulatto family. In her racial purity she represents his cultural identity. Writing of slave mothers, Lillian Smith claims "these old black matriarchs knew secrets of child rearing and of sanity" that modern psychiatry has taken years to discover (Smith 1963, 119). She praises "their wisdom, their capacity for accepting life and people, their deep laughter, their unashamedness," but especially their ability to dominate hatred and fear (Smith 1963, 119). Traditionally the head of her own household due to the frequent separation of slave families, black women were forced to fend for themselves and their children, who stayed with their mothers until they themselves could be sold. But most significantly, the sexual dynamics of plantation society allowed the black female to acquire emotional sway over the planter, his wife, and her own black mate (Hernton 1988, 111).

Toward the end of the novel, Cambier decides to find his grandmother and bring her to live in the master bedroom of his house, putting her in charge of the home once occupied by his racist parents. By redeeming his grandmother, he redeems himself, as well as Africa, Guiana, and their children (Juminer 1961, 202).

Cambier rejects his desire to reestablish his relationship with Charlotte. He realizes that between the two of them, there would always be that "virgin hanging from the mast of eternity" (Juminer 1961, 201). The difficulties of Caroline's insanity and Guiana's inhabitability divide them, but Cambier also sees that he is separated from Charlotte by his own nature which condemns him, like the virgin, to eternal indetermination. Caroline is among those of her compatriots who have forgotten themselves because they have suffered too much; the neocolonial administrators are those who forget the Guianese people because they are too preoccupied with making others suffer (Juminer 1961, 205).

Hortense declines Cambier's invitation to live with him. She is comfortable living in the asylum with the holy sisters and knows she would always suffer from a different scourge in the eyes of the townspeople–that of leprosy. She symbolizes the Guianese who have managed to maintain physical and emotional equilibrium through contact with their African cultural roots, but who prefer to live apart from a rejecting world. Both sisters are lost to Cambier.

Juminer's "fluid" is the author's vestigial belief in occult forces related to the non-specific feminine psychological and physical power over the human body. French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray also associates "fluid" with the feminine,[27] since woman's body experiences the flow of milk, of blood, of amniotic fluid, or of moonlight in her monthly cycles. Both physically and

psychologically, the phallus is completely foreign to woman's self-perception. Irigaray finds psychoanalytic discourse phallocentric and equally alien since it attests to the values of patriarchal society and culture–the values of "property, production, order, form, unity, visibility... and erection" (Irigaray 1985, 86).

Feminist discourse, by contrast, is diffusive, resistant to logic; it transgresses and confuses boundaries. Since "fluid" may be defined as a physical reality that is impossible to represent in a satisfactory way, and / or that conveys logic's inability to postulate all natural characteristics (Irigaray 1985, 106-07), it aptly pertains to the occult. This may be why women are at the center of the subconscious superstitions and sorcery of the Antilles-Guiana-beliefs predating Christianity and altered by colonial context (Beauvue-Fougeyrollas 1985, 88). Feminine "fluid" can be associated with either disease or health. However, it is men such as Cambier's father and the neocolonial administrators who create the conditions that breed disease. Juminer consistently associates healing with the feminine, such as the return to the native motherland of Guiana; the embracing of one's African heritage, symbolized by the Negro grandmother; the exhilarating celebration of carnival; and the primitive life close to nature (Juminer 1961, 203).

Juminer's character Caroline can be said to represent the "mad black West Indian (woman), the ultimate Other of Frenchness" (Arnold 1996a, 9). French critics have applied this "crazy black woman" stereotype somewhat indiscriminately to those who diverge from historically dominant French culture. An example is Jeanne Hyvrard, a metropolitan French woman with a doctorate in economics who was institutionalized for a nervous breakdown while posted in Martinique. Identifying with the black West Indian female subject, she writes from the position of madness in her acclaimed novels *Les prunes de Cythère* (1975) and *Mère la mort* (1975). Since her publishers initially had little information about her, critics such as Jacques Corzani located within her texts the cultural identity of an insane black Antillean woman and published statements equating this identity with the author.

Hyvrard reverses the traditional colonial terminology defining France as "mère" and the countries of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guiana as "ses filles." In *Les prunes de Cythère*, the exploited and dependent island itself is depicted as a mother carrying a stillborn child. The community's cultural specificity is represented by slaves chanting to the dance rhythm drums, but its disappearance is predicted in images of disease and death. The non-specific oppressors are the colonialists or masculinist society in general. The "child" is the island's own future (1975b, 155).

In addition to critiquing French cultural hegemony, Hyvrard's first two novels explore "the 'feminine' heterosexual woman's isolation and nurturance deprivation" (Chesler 1972, 191) by her mother within the context of patriarchal

society. “Third World” women may clash with their mothers over the issues of skin color (not being “white” enough), marriage, social status, and sexual behavior (Chesler 1972, 221).

The mother in both *Les prunes de Cythère* and *Mère la mort* recalls the Greek goddess Demeter, the Earth Mother. The daughter represents Persephone, the Divine Maiden raped by Hades. Hyvrard posits an original, unified world ruled by the feminine but invaded and disrupted by men (1975a, 89), just as the New World was invaded, divided, and its women violated by the conquerors. This split of the original mother / daughter union prefigures eventual mother / daughter conflict. Demeter “rescues and reincorporates [Persephone] into her own biological-maternal destiny... Their single fate symbolizes the inevitable, endless breaking of each individual woman on the wheel of culturally devalued biological reproduction” (Chesler 1972, 264). The heroine / daughter can be seen as the defeated revolutionary, struggling against her mother’s efforts to assimilate her into masculinist institutions, and seeking refuge in insanity, in “assumed” dementia (Corzani 1978, 6:254). In both novels, the heroine, incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital, has almost no identity: she is simultaneously herself, her mother, the child she didn’t have, all Antillean women–Caribbeans, Negresses, mulattos–whose destiny is always in the image of her people and their martyrdom (Corzani 1978, 6:264).

The protagonist of *Mère la mort* Conly later identified as “Jeanne La Folle”–is told she can leave the asylum if she finds the “missing piece.”[29] Referred to as “je” (the first person singular pronoun “I”), it is described as the maddening piece between power and identity. But she cannot find it, since her self-image is fragmented. Masculinist power tries to impose an identity on women who resist this categorization, since identity allows the individual to be named and appropriated. The protagonist feels imprisoned in a chess game, in which she is the queen and the object is to destroy “the Other.” The author plays on the words “jeu d’échecs” (chessboard), and “je d’échecs” (“I of failures”) (1975a, 96). Luce Irigaray believes that women and fluid are either in an association of superfluity or deficiency, never united in a whole. They are impossible to identify (Irigaray 1988, 117).

The nameless heroine of *Les prunes de Cythère* is traumatized by physical violence–depicted variously as rape, incest with the mother, enforced head shaving, the amputation of her hands, or an imposed abortion. In other passages she smothers her own child, as slave mothers often suffocated their newborns to prevent their oppression. Her mother, sometimes described phallically, also stifles her by forcing her to conform to the norms of a masculinist culture. Mother and daughter transmit illnesses to each other, since they are incapable of turning them against their masters.

Suffering from these afflictions, the protagonist incarnates all of Martinique, violated, tormented, therefore hopelessly steril (Corzani 1978, 6:264). She suffers a living death, pretending that she can be healed, trying to believe that the source of the blood flowing ceaselessly from her vulva did not dry up long before her birth, which is why she cannot give life. Hyvrard is hinting at the centuries of colonial subjugation that have rendered Martinique apathetic to her own future. The nation is dead, if not physically, at least psychologically. The aborted child represents her native culture, her *force vitale*, her hope-anything she could call her own. She retreats into muteness, thereby proclaiming her contempt for the white man, his language, his reason, his authority (Corzani 1978, 6:265).

Jeanne La Folle recognizes that her "illness" is in fact a refusal to submit to her oppressors (Corzani 1978, 6:268). She believes that their efforts to cure her are an attempt to bring her behavior within socially accepted bounds. Telling her she's crazy is an effort to silence her (1975a, 37). The insane represent the Caribbeans and blacks, which makes the entire island an immense psychiatric asylum. Like wild horses, the Martinicans are condemned to be captured. Their revolt is considered nonsensical, a madness (Corzani 1978, 6:269). In fact, the end of *Les prunes de Cythère* equates "healing" with death, with the heroine's capitulation to her abusers.

The Biblical myth of the Garden of Eden, in which Western tradition first assigned sin to woman, reappears in *Les prunes de Cythère*. The protagonist refers to her lost paradise, to being torn from Mother Africa, and to a cobra the color of death. In this Garden of Eden, the plum tree is transposed from a tree of knowledge to a tree of death. Its poisoned fruits symbolize abandoned cultures. An anonymous voice commands the adulterous daughter to hang herself from the Cytherean plum tree, in the middle of her garden. Sexuality is associated with sin and death, and the sinful woman's punishment–here, for adultery rather than for bringing evil into the world–is suicide. The plum tree holds out its branches to the heroine-a metaphorical fruit poisoned by sin–as if tempting her to hang herself. It might be noted that Aphrodite, Greek goddess of Beauty and Love, had a temple on "Cythère" (Cerigo), an Ionian Island in the Aegean Sea. This classical allusion ironically implies women's self-sacrifice to these ideals. The word is also a French cultural icon, from Watteau's "Embarquement pour Cythère" to the "courtisan de Cythère" in Baudelaire's "Le Couvercle" from *Les Fleurs du mal* (1989, 181).

The only future left to Hyvrard's characters is suicide–physical, moral (acceptance of the colonial order), or intellectual. Refuge in "insanity" is only the slow death of an impossible refusal, of an impossible struggle (Corzani 1978, 6:269). American translator Laurie Edson believes that the heroine of *Mère la mort* escapes repression "by retreating into silence and, ultimately, into 'mother

death'" (Hyvrard 1988, 112). However, unlike *Les prunes de Cythère*, the end of *Mère la mort* can be interpreted as the heroine's giving birth to herself. Early in *Les prunes de Cythère*, the main character complains to her mother of her inability to be born in words recalling the same suspended existence suffered by Juminer's "vierge suspendue par les pieds au mât de l'éternité" or by Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*: "Je ne parviens pas à naître... Je reste suspendue hors du temps dans ce boyau étroit entre la vie et la mort" (1975b, 73) ("I can't succeed in being born... I remain suspended outside of time in this narrow casing between life and death").

This birth at the close of *Mère la mort* is actually a rebirth through death. By recalling "the association of the powers of life and death with woman" (Eisler 1988, 2), it indicates a reunification with the cosmos, the one mother of all, source of all life and death. It also implies the return to "[a] generally unstratified and basically equalitarian society with no marked distinctions based on either class or sex" for which Riane Eisler presents historical evidence in both Neolithic goddess-worshipping and Old European non-patriarchal societies (Eisler 1988, 14). *Les prunes de Cythère* implies this sexless, classless domain in a passage the female narrator addresses to males. Although the metaphors for life and death are ambivalent, she promises to unite men and women, since the two sexes together form the matrix of the world (1975b, 189).

Hyvrard also alludes to a more individual rebirth through writing, much like the one Hélène Cixous affirms in "Le rire de la Méduse:" "Écrire pour guérir. Ecrire pour réconcilier deux mondes... Pour achever de naître à moi-même... (Hyvrard 1975b, 200) (To write in order to heal. To write to reconcile two worlds... To finish being born to myself).

Similarly, toward the end of *Mère la mort*, a new world is envisioned, like the original, unified world, where there is no separation. Mother and daughter finally reunite as one. Jeanne La Folle finds herself where she always was: paradoxically within her mother, and simultaneously in the deepest part of her own self.

Images of fluids close the novel–the flowing waters of rebirth, the tears of release, the bodily fluids of orgasm. The heroine and her lover are crossing a river reminiscent of the River Styx into a new dimension of existence. The flowing waters represent cleansing, renewal, rebirth. If the lover is gendered as female, she would represent the protagonist's reunion with the mother, the sister-self, or the feminized universe.

During the crossing, Jeanne La Folle asks her beloved to hold her tight, so that she can reach the other shore. "C'est ton arbre qui me donne la vie" (Hyvrard 1975a, 155) ("It's your tree that gives me life"). The assimilation of the (female) body with a life-giving tree partakes of the Western literary tradition. Jeanne struggles to remember the "other word" which means both deadbolt and

flight, death and rebirth. In the last line, the fluid of tears suffused with the starlight represent suffering and joy, release from the cage of individual existence into the orgasmic ecstasy of reunion with the cosmos. Like the flowing of blood from the heroine's infertile womb, the starlight continues to stream even when its source has been extinguished for a longtime. The source is the ancient human society of peace and harmony in which women and men lived in partnership.

Daniel Maximin's Response to Negative Feminine Stereotypes

Daniel Maximin's *L'isolé soleil*[30] (1981) is a response to these works by Jeanne Hyvrard, Jacqueline Manicom, Bertène Juminer, and other novelists of the 1960s and 70s who illustrate the Antillean people's refuge in stagnation, mental disorder, and suicide. Maximin addresses the dilemma of interracial unions when Siméa is forced by her mulatto mother to submit to the abortion of the child conceived with her French lover Ariel. Ariel, like Manicom's Xavier, is free-thinking enough to love a woman of color, but unwilling to defy social conventions by marrying her. He conspires with Siméa's mother to drug the mulatto girl, then leaves her to her fate. Having lost her unborn child, her lover, and her faith in her mother, Siméa can be seen as another personification of her Guadeloupean homeland (Murdoch 1994, 93).

Yet for Maximin, healing is possible. Siméa reconciles with Ariel and says good-bye as they dance to the jazz composition "Body and Soul." The title relates to the African concept that body and soul are one in that sensuality, a basis for Caribbean cosmology, is important in physical healing (Brown 1994). Through the gentle swaying of their embracing bodies Siméa and Ariel express their sorrow and love for one another. The music itself, a part of Siméa's Afro-American tradition, soothes her by reaffirming her cultural identity.

An "indépendantiste" when he wrote *L'isolé soleil*, Maximin suggests Siméa's and Ariel's separation as a model for the political disengagement of Guadeloupe from France. The aborted child represents France's expropriation of the island's economic and cultural productivity. "Body and Soul" reappears as the music an Antillean jazz ensemble is playing when Siméa meets the saxophonist Louis-Gabriel. Through her love for him and the birth of their daughter Marie-Gabriel, Siméa is healed of the psychological wounds caused by the imposed abortion and her subsequent alienation from her mother and Ariel.

In *L'isolé soleil*, "muteness" is personified in the character Angela, a seven-year-old inmate in the mental hospital where Siméa is a teacher during the Vichy government's occupation of Guadeloupe. Angela regains her voice through the comfort derived from Siméa's nightly reading of creole folktales. The importance of cultural identity is once again emphasized for the productivity and empowerment of the Antillean people in their island-asylum. As a counterpart to the child Angela, the Black Power advocate Angela Davis appears in the novel

as Maximin retells her encounter with his aunt, Guadeloupean Communist leader Gerty Archimède. Angela Davis's refusal to be politically silenced pitted her against then-Governor Ronald Reagan and the Board of Regents of the state of California. She was temporarily dismissed her from her assistant professorship at the University of California-Berkeley for "political speeches outside the classroom unbefitting a university professor" (Davis 1988, 272).

Marie-Gabriel is a contemporary Guadeloupean psychiatric nurse and the narrator of much of the novel. She no longer practices vaudou as did her ancestor Miss Béa, for her healing is of a different nature. As a form of healing through "the word," she writes her own and Guadeloupe's history from a native perspective as a means of giving identity and power to herself and her people.

The "missing piece" or "je"–the piece between power and identity (Hyvrard 1975a, 94)–is also absent in the first entries Marie-Gabriel makes in her journal. It is the speaker's "je" that serves as a pivot to interpersonal relations in the moment of discourse and thereby founds subjectivity in language (Adam 1976, 297). In the post-colonial context, the "tu" can assume an alienating identity, implied in Sartre's quote "autrui me vole mon monde" ("the Other steals my world from me") (qtd. in Scharfman 1980, 65). The "tu" here is the colonizer, the one who confiscates the history of the colonized and renders the subjective "je" impossible. In this case, the normal relationship is subverted and the "tu" transcends the "je". When the "je" is absent, it is the "non-named" of mythical syncretism according to which the unmentioned person is left for dead (Grübel 1987, 154). Only by inventing her mother's journal can Marie-Gabriel find the voice of the mother she never knew and recover her own voice. Toward the end of her mother's journal, after having told the story of the consummation of her parents' love, Marie-Gabriel can differentiate herself from her mother and reappropriate the "je" for herself (Scharfman 1992, 244). Marie-Gabriel's family tree is a matriarchy, founded by the vaudou healer and visionary Miss Béa, and attesting to the feminine as healer and as source of cultural authority and political action. Through these roles, Maximin attempts to correct the historically negative attitudes toward Antillean women and, through the power of cultural creation, heal the social and political wounds of his native Guadeloupe.

End Notes

1. See Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America 1492–93*, trans. Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr. (Norman: UP Oklahoma, 1989). The adjectives Columbus most often attributes to the islands are "beautiful" and "fertile."

2. See Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1942), 404-420. Casas states that Columbus named islands Santa Maria de la Concepción, Fernandina (the feminine of King Ferdinand's name, designating Cuba), Isabela (the Queen's name), Islas de Arena, Isla de la Tortuga, Hispaniola, and La Amiga. However, he gave the first island he discovered the masculine name San Salvador and another one Santo Tomás (Saint

Thomas). On his second voyage, Columbus conferred the names Dominica, Santa Maria la Galante (Marie-Galante), Santa Maria de la Guadalupe (Guadeloupe), Santa Maria de Monserrate (Monserrat), Santa Maria La Antigua (Antigua), Santa Maria la Redonda (Redonda), and the Virgin Islands. Seven of these names refer to the Virgin Mary or virgins. The masculine names have often been subsequently feminized: Deseado (La Désirade), Todos los Santos (Les Saintes), San Martin (soon known as Nuestra Senora de las Nueves), San Jorge (nicknamed St. Kitts, for Columbus), San Cristóbal (after Columbus, later called Saba), Santa Cruz (Saint Croix), Monte Cristi, and San Juan de Puerto Rico. Other islands, like Cibao, retained their Indian names.

3. See Edouard Glissant, "Les Indes" in *Poèmes: Un champ d'îles, La terre inquiète, Les Indes* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), 13–14. The *conquistadores* are portrayed as replacing the Indians as lovers of the islands.

4. Casas, *Diario*, 143. During the first voyage the natives originally worshipped neither God nor idols. They were mild and ignorant of wickedness; they did not harm others or steal; and they were shy and without military arms. Believing that the *conquistadors* were supernatural, they quickly trusted them, learned to pray, and made the sign of the cross.

5. "Les Iles Fortunées" is the title of a 268-line ode by Pierre de Ronsard. It was first published in 1553 as an appendix to *Les amours* (Paris: Maurice de la Porte) and reappeared in the 1557 edition of that work. In 1560 it was published in the fourth book of *Les odes* and it appears as such in all later editions.

6. See Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP., 1992), 132-51.

7. See Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

8. See Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House-Vintage, 1979; reprint 1978), 137-38: A[a]s scholarly attitude the picture of a learned Westerner surveying as if from a peculiarly suited vantage point the passive, seminal, feminine, even silent and supine East, then going on to *articulate* the East, making the Orient deliver up its secrets under the learned authority of a philologist... " Saïd expands the concept of "the Orient" to the colonial world on pages 116-117.

9. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

10. Of 1.3 billion people in poverty, 70 percent are women. "Women face `global glass ceiling,' U.N. report says," *The News & Observer* Raleigh, N. C., 18 August, 1995:19A.

11. See Jacques Corzani, *La littérature des Antilles-Guyane françaises*. (Fort-de-France: Désormeaux, 1978), 5:77. Corzani writes "Fanon (lui-même marié à une Française métropolitaine, comme le rappelle A[lbert] Memmi)... "

12. See Morison, *Admiral*, 417. During a skirmish with the Caribs at the time of the second voyage, the Spaniard Michele de Cuneo captured a "very beautiful Carib girl" and received Columbus's permission to keep her as a slave. Naked according to the Amer-Indian custom, she resisted his advances. Cuneo beat her with a rope until she succumbed in such a manner, he later reported, that "she seemed to have been brought up in a school of harlots." Such stories reinforce the myth of the libidinous primitive woman who pretends to resist the colonizer's rape but who secretly "wants it". The woman is depicted as a consumable object, destined to satisfy the needs of the most dominant or aggressive male, who may use physical force to meet his ends.

13. Translated as baby talk for "security blanket" by the *Oxford Hachette French Dictionary, doudou* connotes a "sweet feminine `thing' [woman] of color."

14. Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*, by Aimé Césaire (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983).

15. The expression is from Arnold, *Erotics*, 9.

16. The Amer-Indian name for Martinique.

17. I first heard this expression in July 1986 as a student at the Centre International d'Études Pédagogiques in Sèvres, France. During a dinner conversation, a French-speaking Tunisian, when told I was from Virginia, responded with "Elle est belle comme une feuille de tabac!" Since I pictured

a brown, drying tobacco leaf, I found it a dubious compliment, although a female table companion later stated that it was probably a sincere comparison to the flourishing green tobacco leaf.
18. Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, *Aimé Césaire,* 147.
19. Born of the union of a "racially pure" black and a mulatto (masc.: Câpre).
20. See Richard de Tussac, *Cri des colons contre un ouvrage de M. l'éveque et sénateur Grégoire, ayant pour titre `De la littérature des nègres*,' *ou Réfutation des inculpations calomnieuses faites aux Colons par l'auteur, et par les autres philosophes négrophiles, tels que Raynal, Valmont de Bomare, etc.* (Paris: Marchands de nouveautés, 1810), 5. Tussac was appealing to the Directory and to the French people to preserve the colonists' rights, which had been threatened by the emancipation of the slaves in 1797, the independence of Haiti in 1800, and article XV of the Declaration of the Rights of Man giving the entire black population of the colonies citizenship in the new republic of France. By supporting the human rights of re-enslaved blacks, liberal-minded colonials such as Grégoire cast doubt on the superiority of white Europeans and endangered the economic and political power of the plantation system.
21. Jean-Louis Baghio'o, *Les jeux du soleil* (Paris: Coop-Art Graphique, [1960]). Family history maintains that Baghio'o's ancestor, who arrived in the Antilles in the hold of a slave ship, was a Sultan of Tombouctou.
22. Antillean songs or dances.
23. See A. James Arnold, "The Essay and/in History," *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 1 of *Hispanic and Francophone Regions*, ed. A. James Arnold (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1994), 446.
24. *Djobeurs* are freelance porters who compete for small jobs among the women of the marketplace.
25. Régis Antoine, *Les écrivains français et les Antilles: Des premiers pères blancs au surréalistes noirs* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1978), 302. Antoine observes that the poet Francis Jammes also uses the full palette to describe the young women of the islands, excluding the color white.
26. Athena is also the personification of southern white womanhood in W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf., 1941), 86: "She was the South's Palladium, the southern woman-shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in the face of the foe... the lily-pure maid of Astolat... the hunting goddess... And-she was the pitiful Mother of God."
27. A poor white who has remained on the island, not a member of the *Béké* class of high economic standing.
28. C.R.S. (compagnie républicaine de sécurité) or State security police.
29. Evelyne Wilwerth, "Préface: Femmes dans leur élément," *L'eau: Source d'une écriture dans les litératures féminines francophones*, Francophone Cultures and Literatures, vol. 4, ed. Tamara Alvarez-Detrell and Michael G: Paulson (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), ix. Wilwerth also connects women with liquid, and men with solid.
30. Hyvrard, Jeanne, *Mother Death*, trans. Laurie Edson (Lincoln: UP of Nebraska, 1988).
31. Daniel Maximin, *Lone Sun*, trans. Nidra Poller, intro. Clarisse Zimra, CARAF Books (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1989).

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