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Review

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Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean. RENÉE LARRIER. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. x + 186 pp. (Cloth US\$ 59.95)

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Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean utilizes *Danmyé*, the Martiniquan tradition of dance combat, as a leitmotif structuring a discussion on Caribbean subjectivity in novels by Joseph Zobel, Patrick Chamoiseau, Gisèle Pineau, Edwidge Danticat, and Maryse Condé. Renée Larrier reproduces the aesthetics of this simulated fight between two men as she wrestles with the role of advocacy in the genre of Caribbean autobiographical fiction she calls “autofiction,” following on work by Serge Doubrovsky. Bridging the gap between literary and dance criticism, she studies how the careful discursive choreography of these Caribbean novels can be understood through “the combat dance’s principles of narration, initiation, resistance, confrontation, interaction, surprise, anticipation, improvisation, resistance, positionality, displacement, balance, and negotiation” (p. 6). The two combatants and the ring of clapping and drumming spectators that surround them provide Larrier with a rich metanarrative to understand the vigorous and often contestatory nature of cultural production and reception in the Caribbean.

Chapter 1 looks at the way in which the character of José in Zobel’s *La Rue Cases-Nègres* challenges the silences of master narratives that refuse to acknowledge the brutality of French colonization in the Antilles. Like a *Danmyé* master, José – as author and protagonist of the text – “lands on his feet” as he succeeds at establishing this counter-discourse. Larrier then moves on, in Chapter 2, to explore the collective ethos of the *Danmyé* through the interaction of author, narrators, and protagonists in seven novels by Patrick Chamoiseau. Here, she studies how the role of the encircling chanting chorus of the fight, the *répondé*, help to advance and define the course of the narration in *Chronique des sept misères*, *Antan d’enfance*, *Chemin-d’école*, *Solibo Magnifique*, *Texaco*, *A bout d’enfance*, and *Biblique des derniers gestes*.

The remaining three chapters explore novels by women from Guadeloupe and Haiti. The role of female resistance to patriarchal oppression in Gisèle Pineau’s autofiction is the subject of Chapter 3. Larrier interprets the role of the encircling spectators of the fight as the community of characters surrounding the main protagonists in *Délivrance*, *L’Exil selon Julia*, and *L’Espérance-*

macadam. In this last novel, the tragedy engendered by Rosette's inability to believe that her husband abused their teenage daughter Angela speaks to the need of those surrounding the colonial and gendered struggle to support the oppressed warrior. In Chapter 4, Larrier analyzes the character of Amabelle Désir in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of the Bones* as a *Danmyé* fighter who overcomes obstacles, crosses borders, and builds new communities, reinscribing the diasporic odysseys of many Caribbean writers. As refreshing as it is to see Haitian literature studied as Francophone, one wonders how this paradigm limits the possibilities of analyzing relevant works written in Haitian Creole. With respect to Martiniquan Creole, Larrier displays great inconsistency and frequently defers to French terminology. For example, she chooses *répondeurs* over *répondé* and *Laghia de la Mort* over *Ladjialamò*. Chapter 5 deploys the metaphor of the *Danmyé* to understand the multiple narrative positionalities in the work of Maryse Condé. By cataloguing Condé's novels as first-person novels (*Moi, Tituba* and *La Vie sclérelate*), third-person novels (*Ségou* and *La Belle Créole*), and multivoiced texts (*Traversée de la mangrove*, *Histoire de la femme cannibale*), Larrier constructs a shifting meta-critical narrator in the midst of an entourage of onlookers who provide competing, and often questionable, interpretations of the narrative struggle.

Throughout the elegantly interlaced chapters, Larrier stitches the provocative, yet ultimately undeveloped notion of *Collages text[iles]* in an attempt to present how the reappraisal of Caribbean identity in the novels she examines is founded on the deep commitment and advocacy that their authors have for their respective Caribbean homelands. While Larrier successfully underscores several of the authors' activist roles in favor of education, freedom of expression, and other social justice causes, the full deployment of *Collages Text[iles]* remains unexplored. As a term borrowed from Guadeloupean painter Franceline Dawkins, whose work graces the cover of Gisèle Pineau's *L'Espérance-macadam*, *Collages Text[iles]* embodies a strong sense of female solidarity across artistic media that could redefine traditional women's work into a form of gendered agency capable of effectively overcoming patriarchal oppression in the literary realm. More importantly, Larrier misses the opportunity to deploy the Caribbean feminist discursive needlework of *Collages Text[iles]* to counterbalance the strong masculinism of the *Danmyé* fight.

Larrier's broad knowledge of Caribbean popular culture and critical theory enables her to foresee how projecting First World theoretical paradigms onto the area would add to an already long list of political, military, and cultural impositions. Believing that Caribbean cultural products can break open their own shell from within, she re-interprets performativity as a creolized Caribbean aesthetic. This exempts her from the need to cite the work of Judith Butler, Joseph Roach, Victor Turner, and Richard Schechner, leading North American academics in the field of performance studies. Her critical boldness brilliantly re-enacts the very resistance of the Martiniquan dance combat leitmotif.

While Larrier's critical understanding of Francophone Caribbean autobiographical fiction is superb and ensures a well-focused argument, one wonders how the argument could have been strengthened through a sustained engagement with literary, choreographical, and pugilistic traditions in other territories and linguistic traditions of the greater Caribbean. As it is, Larrier's newest work marks a bold step in the development of a truly interdisciplinary and comparative understanding of life-narration and performance in the Caribbean.

Patrick Chamoiseau: Espaces d'une écriture antillaise. LORNA MILNE. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006. 226 pp. (Paper US\$ 62.00)

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Martiniquan writer and essayist Patrick Chamoiseau gained international recognition with the bilingual edition of *Eloge de la Créolité/ In Praise of Creoleness*, cowritten with Jean Bernabé and Raphaël Confiant. This essay gave a prominent place to the Creole language of the French Antilles in the construction and definition of the islands' cultural identity and made two of its authors, Confiant and Chamoiseau, figureheads of the Créolité movement. Given the strong emphasis placed on Creole by the *créolistes* writers (which also includes Gisèle Pineau), critical assessments of Chamoiseau's work have interpreted his writing in the light of his own essays on language and identity. Lorna Milne's monograph seeks to redress the balance and rests on the valid observation that the geographic and topographic elements understood to both symbolize and contribute to the formation of Antillean identity have so far been overlooked. Milne's study is then an exploration of the symbolic value of space in the development of identity and history in Chamoiseau's narrative fiction. The monograph looks at how imagined representations of real, tangible spaces are transformed into imaginary literary spaces, a process through which, she argues, aesthetic representation and lived experience can converge.

Three main strands – space, history, and identity – run through Milne's analysis, and these are linked ultimately to a fourth idea: the question of the role of the writer and of the creative process in the construction of identity in