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Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean
(review)

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unavoidable, the character being *per se* elusive, and most of the documentation (even the newspaper articles and interviews of the LWP) on Marie Laveau's Voodoo practice often relying on hearsay, being largely personal, and thus essentially subjective and prone to mythmaking. This is probably why so few historians have tackled the topic. Even after Long's book, Marie Laveau still is, to a certain extent, "a blank state, a receptacle for our prejudices, our fantasies, and our desires" (p. xx). Part of the legend remains, maybe all for the better, and this makes Long's extremely informative book a very pleasant read.

Renée Larrier. 2006. *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 185 pp. ISBN 0-8130-3005-6.

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Renée Larrier's latest book, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean* is centered around a very interesting and original argument in favor of "*danmyé*, a combat dance tradition in Martinique, [as] a framework for reading Francophone Caribbean texts" (p. 2). Careful to educate her reader and get her point across, Larrier explains at length the particulars of *danmyé* insisting specifically on its performance aspect, linking it in so doing to the Caribbean tradition of oral storytelling, and its modern incarnation —the printed narrative.

The author then focuses on the representation and evolution of *Identity* in autofictional texts, underlining its "complexity and fluidity [...], rejecting the binaries" (p. 10), and highlighting by her choice of typography —the "I" is italicized—the importance of the active subject standing in stark contrast with the historically negated or unacknowledged colonial subject. The importance Larrier gives to narratives with an active subject enables her to stress the testimonial aspect of her texts while at the same time paying attention to their eclectic nature, what she calls "collages Text[ile]s" (p. 26), thus playing on the island depicted by texts 'glued' to each other in no particular order as well as on the French word "textile" (fabric), a generic word which does not disclose the fiber with which the fabric is made.

Renée Larrier's critical study is divided in five chapters, each developing a narrative aspect of autofiction as found in the Francophone Caribbean corpus and using a set of different texts by one author. The first chapter focuses on José Hassam's "approach to life" (p. 31) in Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres*. This novel lends itself particularly well to the trope of *danmyé* as there are many instances where various characters play a role and have to adapt to different audiences. Renée Larrier's clever analysis of José's ability to bond with people in the world of the plantation (such as Médouze) as well as to find positive role models in the French school (such as Monsieur Roc) is enlightened by her reading of it as *danmyé*, and truly bringing a new perspective to this now classic novel.

The second chapter centers on Patrick Chamoiseau as curator (of words) and identifies the many different narrative levels to be found in his works as well as the role played by each narrator. The insistence on the oral dimension used by Chamoiseau's narrators enables Larrier to link the performances of those delivering the words to the performance of *danmyé*: "Overall, in his work, Chamoiseau choreographs the interplay among author, narrators, protagonists, characters, and marqueurs de paroles, who negotiate voice and space in contemporary Fort-de-France" (p. 77).

The third chapter offers a reading of Gisèle Pineau's works as examples of narratives "profoundly marked by the rupture and alienation brought on by displacement" (p. 80). Her close readings of *L'Espérance-macadam* are especially insightful since very few critical articles have been written on that novel, and the themes of rupture, alienation and displacement are central to the plot. The fourth and fifth chapters deal with the theme of exile, but from opposite perspectives. The former focuses on the relationship with the mother(is)land as exemplified by Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*, while the latter centers on the wandering Caribbean subject illustrated by the many characters and voices found in Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove*, where *danmyé* is used nicely to tie the main argument: "Part mourning and part celebration, the wake is more than a vigil. It is a site of individual, collective, and reciprocal performance, that is, oral storytelling, music, and dance, the kind of interaction that also resonate in *danmyé*" (p. 136).

Even if the metaphor of *danmyé* becomes less convincing as one reads the study (especially when linked to the last two chapters), Larrier's book should be praised for its interdisciplinary focus. The author shows remarkable mastery of the various sources she has investigated (in history, sociology, anthropology, and the arts), and she weaves for her lay reader a fascinating, learned and extremely detailed context. The literary aspect of her study is not short-changed however, and she comes across

as a very well-read Caribbean scholar: not only does she replace the novels she studies within a greater Caribbean literature context (and by this I mean its Francophone, Anglophone and Hispanophone context), but she also sometimes contrasts and links her thoughts to the African or African-American literature tradition.

Overall, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean* offers excellent close-text studies of contemporary novels, the strength of the study being reinforced by a thoroughly researched context. However, while certain novels were judiciously chosen and fit the overall argument well (Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres* and Gisèle Pineau's *L'Espérance-macadam* come to mind), other studies of more recent novels would have benefited from Larrier's enlightened analysis (*La Femme cannibale* by Maryse Condé instead of *La Traversée de la Mangrove* for example). Nevertheless, it is clear that every good library should have this study in its collection, and it should also be on every serious Caribbean scholar's shelves.

Kenneth M. Bilby. 2005. *True-Born Maroons*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 515 pp. ISBN: 0-8130-2873-6.

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In *True-Born Maroons*, Kenneth M. Bilby sets out to produce a study of cultural memory. More specifically, Bilby is interested in how the Jamaican Maroons have produced, preserved and used knowledge of their past. This is more complicated than it sounds. Since the Maroons inhabit a largely secret world, gaining access to them and to their stories is difficult: the Maroons look like other Jamaicans, and it is easy for them to remain anonymous and to hide their Maroon identity and their narratives to outsiders.

Bilby's approach has been to use the Maroons' narratives to tell their history. As an anthropologist who has been doing research on the Maroons for thirty years, Bilby has enormous admiration for their oral traditions; moreover, he argues that it is as vital to respect their oral statements as it is to accept written evidence from the archives. For Bilby, Maroon oral narratives can be used "not only to provide independent