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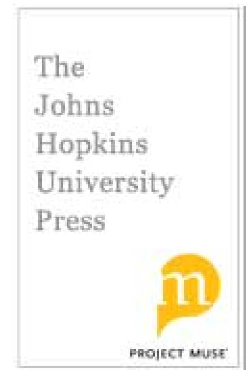

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TRAGIC NARRATIVES
The Novels of Haitian Tradition

by Jean Jonassaint

For Haitian critics, the "true Haitian novel" is born in 1901 with the publication by Ollendorff in Paris of Frédéric Marcelin's *Thémistocle-Epaminondas Labasterre*, subtitled "petit récit hatien" (short Haitian narrative). Marcelin's novel breaks with the "exoticism" of Haitian novelists of the 19th century (Bergeaud, Delorme, Janvier) to impose a text which wants to be "national," in other words a "realistic portrayal of mores, customs, family traditions and political habits common to the Haitian milieu" written in a French "which includes [. . .] a wealth of words, expressions and proverbs from [Haitian] soil" (Berrou and Pompilus 515–16).[1] However, in the wake of Marcelin's realist and nationalist aesthetics, the hundred or so novels published between 1901 and 1961,[2]—which I call "novels of Haitian tradition" since both their authors and their critics consider them the "authentic national Haitian novels,"—endlessly repeat the same story of *fatal loss*, that recalls Greek tragedy as the very history of that Haiti which Jean Métellus calls a *pathetic nation*. My objective here is not so much to discuss the reasons for the presence of these tragic stories, whether in fiction or in Haitian society. Rather, I would like to show how this Haitian narrative model (which finds its roots, at least in part, in voodoo tradition) that we can trace from Fernand Hibbert's *Séna* (1903) to Jacques Stephen Alexis' *Compère Général Soleil* (1957) through Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la Rosée* (1944), to recall some best known Haitian novels of this period,[3] reactualizes the Attic theatre and also at the same time allows a better understanding of this ancient form, highlighting their common grammar.

To underline that the novels of Haitian tradition relate or peddle first of all tragic stories is not without interest, since there is an obvious analogy between one of the objectives of Haitian works, exemplarity (as stated in their paratexts), and that of the Greek tragedy. Indeed, as E. Chambry explains in his "Notice sur les Eumenides," an author like Aeschylus "was so highly ranked among the Athenian tragic poets [. . .] perhaps less because of his poetic genius than because of his noble teachings as a moralist" (208). Moreover, the very syntax or grammar of tragic Haitian narratives evokes those of various Greek tragedies like *Agamemnon, Antigone, Oedipus the King*, or *Medea*.

Like the novels of Haitian tradition, these Greek tragedies are narratives of *fatal loss* (Aristotle's "change of fortune from good to bad") linked to a quest or a practice of jouissance and/or power organized around two key compulsory sequences: the initial one, which is a prospective narrative or discourse (*caution* or *warning*), and the final one, which is a retrospective narrative or discourse (*clarification* or *explanation*).

The terms *"caution "* or *"warning"* and *"clarification"* or *"explanation"* are used here not in their literal or current sense, but in a very specific way that expresses more adequately perhaps my original French concepts, *"mise en garde"* and *"mise au point."*[4] They translate a certain pragmatic relationship between text and reader or text and spectator. Therefore, every narrative or discursive segment that allows the reader or spectator to apprehend the denouement to come is a *warning* just as every narrative or discursive segment that in one way or another informs the reader or spectator about the outcome of the crisis—resulting from the drama that has been played out off-stage—is an *explanation* that allows an evaluation, interpretation or understanding of the denouement.

These textual segments—which can be motifs, as they are in the narrative of the imposed priesthood of Boss-Brutal in *L'Héritage sacré* by Cinéas (1945)—are initial or final primarily according to the order of the story (its fictional chronology) rather than according to the order of the narration itself. *The Women of Trachis* by Sophocles is a good example of how *warning* (anticipatory narrative or discourse) and *explanation* (retrospective narrative or discourse) can occupy different positions in the performance. Indeed, in this play these sequences are not found in the *prologus* and the *exodos*, or in the episodes immediately following or preceding them. Hence, it is not towards the end of the play, when Heracles is already poisoned by the potion from the Centaur Nessus, that the Oracle of Zeus's prediction of his death by "an inhabitant of Hell" is reported (Sophocles, *The Women of Trachis* 1161, 326). Of course, since the prologue, Deianira's forebodings, expressed in various ways, cause fear that a misfortune will befall her family. And only a few hours after sending the tunic saturated with the supposed love potion from the Centaur Nessus to Heracles, she already dreads having involuntarily poisoned her husband and vows to die if this happens (Sophocles, *The Women of Trachis* 663–722, 308–10). The *explanatios* on the poisoning of Heracles and the suicide of Deianira intervene as well before the end of the play, in the fourth and fifth episodes. Moreover, even though it comes at the very end of the tragedy, the account of the death of Heracles remains anticipatory. In fact, in the play's production, only the instructions given by Heracles to his son, Hyllus, concerning his immolation are intradiegetic (Sophocles, *The Women of Trachis* 1193–1202, 327–28). This death is announced, but it is not a part in the play; it is entirely off stage, to occur after the end of the performance.

In any case, *The Women of Trachis* does take up the syntactic model of tragedy proposed above: [*warning*] anticipatory narrative or discourse // retrospective narrative or discourse [*explanation*]. In fact, the afterthought reminder about the Oracle of Zeus is only one element of the *explanation*, one part of the interpretation of facts already known (or past)—the accidental poisoning of Heracles by Deianira, who thought she could hold onto her husband forever by using a love potion. This tragic irony linked to the Centaur's fallacious promise—"you will have a charm over the heart of Heracles, so he will never look at another woman and love her more than you" (Sophocles, *The Women of Trachis* 575–77, 305), which has been the subject of so many commentaries, rightly illustrates the requirement for interpretation that operates in tragedy both at the level of *warnings* (oracles, forebodings, premonitory dreams, threats, promises, etc.) and at the level of *explanations* (accounts, exchanges, lamenta-

tions, debates, arguments, etc.). Thus, schematically, this drama is structured as two parallel and symmetrical series of *warnings* (ANTICIPATION, APPREHENSION) and *explanations* (INTERPRETATION, RETROSPECTION), each fitting within the other. In other words:
A1. [*WARNING*: FOREBODINGS, ORACLES]: anticipatory discourse about the death of Heracles
— A2. [*WARNING*: FOREBODINGS, REINTERPRETATION OF THE PROMISE (ORACLE) OF THE CENTAUR]: anticipatory discourse about the poisoning of Heracles and the death of Deianira
— Z2. [*EXPLANATION*]: retrospective narratives on the poisoning of Heracles and the suicide of Deianira
Z1. [*EXPLANATION*: (RE)INTERPRETATION OF AN ANCIENT ORACLE]: anticipatory narratives of the immolation of Heracles.
If this schematic description does not retain all the nuances of Sophocles's drama, it accounts well for its syntax. This intertwining of narratives grafted onto discursive fragments (debates in particular) which the schematic model does not specifically integrate for the sake of the presentation is a double actualization of this structure of the Greek tragedy, which could be called the *tragic narrative model.*

I. Tragedy: Deferred Narratives

The so-called tragic narrative model is also the model of novels of Haitian tradition, which in fact allowed us to bring it to light. Indeed, criticism up to now has more or less overshadowed one aspect of Aristotle's description/definition of tragedy in Chapter 6 of his *Poetics*, and has taken little notice of the narrative and discursive aspects of the genre, even though these are an integral part of the Aristotelian concept of tragedy. However, it is generally recognized today that tragedy derives, in part at least, from the epic (see, among others, Baldry 74–79 and de Romilly 11–23) and that it has retained at least two of the epic's characteristics: its stories or motifs derived from mythology; and its systematic use of the "prophetic future," to use Todorov's term (63–65), which is an anticipatory narrative or discourse. On the other hand, contemporary Hellenists, reversing or reinterpreting traditional readings of Aristotle's statements, although without systematizing or asserting it directly, now perceive tragedy more and more as an account (or narrative) and discussion of events (*diegesis*) rather than their representation or simulation (*mimésis*).[5] It is in this way that Devereux, commenting on Aristotelian notions of "on stage" and "off stage" as they relate to the Greek philosopher's remark that "tragedy is about great deeds which, in contradiction to the epic, are not narrated but performed," emphasizes that the "great deeds" of a tragedy like *Oedipus Tyrannus* occur off stage and only relate on stage. He then goes on immediately to indicate that this remark is also applicable to other tragedies, such as Euripides' *Hecuba* or *Iphegenia in Taurus*. Thus, he draws the conclusion that "the great deeds (raw acting out) reach the audience in an already purified and even intellectualized form" (Devereux 61–62).

In *The Tragic Theatre of the Greeks* Baldry goes even further. His remarkable analyses of *Perses* and *Seven Against Thebes* by Aeschylus show convincingly that these plays

are, above all, narratives of the echoes of wars rather than their representation or simulation. First of all, speaking of *Perses*, he reminds us that war is never represented on stage. It is through "the magic of words"—the Chorus narratives of the expedition and the messenger's story of the Battle of Salamine—that the feats of arms, the actions, are reconstructed in the imagination of the spectator or reader. On the other hand, Baldry shows as well, without for all that emphasizing the structural aspect of his description, that Aeschylus uses the same strategy in *Seven Against Thebes* (75, 88–89). Furthermore, starting from a reading of *Oedipus the King*, he comes to a description or definition of tragedy that is not much different from the one formulated above. Indeed, he writes, "the most remarkable feature of the play is one that makes it a distinctive product of the Greek theatre: it seems full of incident and action, but in fact is built out of a narrative and argument" (Baldry 92).

In fact, up to a certain point, tragedy is perceived (defined or described) by these authors as a staging of certain stories, or fragments of mythic or epic stories, into recitation and confrontation within its own particular philosophical perspective—the perspective of tragic consciousness, of the tragic hero. Therefore, it should be necessary, even urgent, to study it from a narratological point of view, since one should finally know, at least, what kinds of narratives it produces or reproduces, and how. Such research is all the more desirable given that today one can use Burian's excellent synthesis of the inventory of the motifs of tragic theatre. Indeed, it would be interesting to rewrite Burian's analysis in the way that Greimas, among others, did with Propp's analysis of Russian tales in order to show, at a hierarchically superior level, the syntax common to all these motifs, as well as a general grammar governing their organization or reorganization within Greek tragedy. Such a study would certainly contribute to the overall knowledge of the genre.

Of course, this new hypothesis for approaching tragedy does not invalidate in any way the already important and well known analyses of the genre. It is more a matter of enriching the understanding of this form with new perspectives and new propositions. For, although not explicitly inscribed within a project for the redefinition of tragedy as a *diegetic* rather than a *mimetic* text, several studies of these works (globally or partially) using semiotic or narratological approaches already exist—for example, "Tragedy and the Mask: To Stage the Self and Confront the Differentiated" by Claude Calame in *The Recit in Ancient Greece. Enunciations and Representations of Poets* (1986); the thesis of S. N. Philippides, *A Grammar of Dramatic Techniques: The Dramatic Structure of the Carpet Scene in Aeschylus' Agamemnon* (1984), and especially *La Syntaxe narrative des tragédies de Corneille* by Thomas Pavel (1976), even though this last work does not deal with Greek tragedy.

In order to illustrate this tragic narrative model, a few texts could suffice—the *Orestia* by Aeschylus, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King* and *The Women of Trachis* by Sophocles, *The Medea* and *The Suppliants* of Euripides. This choice of texts can be justified in a variety of ways, one of the most convincing doubtlessly conveyed by A. J. Festugière in his book, *De l'essence de la tragédie grecque* :

> There is only one tragedy in the world and that is Greek tragedy, the one of the three Greek writers, Aeschylus, Sophocles

> and Euripides. It is the only one which preserved the tragic sense of life because it manages to retain two elements. On the one hand, the human catastrophes, which are constant, in all times and in all nations. On the other hand, the feeling that these catastrophes are due to supernatural powers, which are hidden in mystery, whose decisions are unintelligible to us, so that the miserable human insect feels himself crushed under the weight of a pitiless Fatality of which he searches in vain to penetrate the meaning. (11)

Although they are not as categorical as Festugière, Hellenists when speaking about Greek tragedy tend in general to refer to the works of these three classics of the 5th century BC, and always with the sense that this corpus is the canon of tragedy (see, for example, Baldry 5–13 and Easterling XV, 355–58). It is therefore understandable that the choice of these works by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides allows us to establish the results of our analysis of tragedy based on a corpus generally considered to be exemplary.

The descriptive model proposed here would benefit, without any doubt, from being compared to the entire body of Greek tragedies in order to be more specific or accurate, but such an exhaustive study of Greek tragedy is not really appropriate for this study of the novels of Haitian tradition. We should remember that this detour through tragedy has really but one objective: a contrastive analysis to allow for a better description of the Haitian corpus. Hence, what we mean here by *tragic narrative model* or by *tragedy* are above all the works of the 5th century BC that form the counter-corpus.

In fact, what is at stake is to show that, as in the novel of Haitian tradition, it is a narrative structure that facilitates the expression of tragic feeling. A text that juxtaposes or contrasts two anachronistic narratives of a single story (or its variants) so as to better interpret it, to make an example out of it: one is an anticipatory (dreaded) account of the denouement while the other is a retrospective one. Thus we have a total interplay of deferred narratives that confront each other, intersect each other, insert within each other, and reproduce themselves[6]: this process allows the text to attain its exemplarity, its ultimate goal. Tragedy is born out of this confrontation between an anticipatory (prophetic) discourse and another retrospective (interpretive) one, both of them based on the subject of an inescapable loss. And it is the confrontation of the anticipatory (prophetic) discourse with the retrospective (interpretive) one concerning this fatality that is tragic. Thus, the tragic stage is, in a very real sense, the scene of a trial. And it is therefore not surprising that the final play of the *Orestia* trilogy (at least the last one accessible to us today, *The Eumenides*) presents a trial—the trial of Orestes by the gods before the wise men of Athens.

If this last work of Aeschylus taken in isolation does not completely take up the syntax of tragic narrative, in the context of the trilogy it is nonetheless an exemplary *explanation* illustrating how in tragedy disastrous or fatal action is always deferred. Announced, sensed, anticipated, told or explained, it is never present *in vivo*—it is always off stage. Thus, Aeschylus' entire play is nothing but a debate, an exposé about past murders: Clytemnestra's murder of her husband, Agamemnon, as foretold by the

Oracle of Artemis (*Agamemnon*); and Orestes's murder of his mother, Clytemnestra, as commanded by the Oracle of Apollo (*The Libation Bearers*). This deferred narration of the murders, as well as their anticipation, is found in the other two tragedies as well. In *Agamemnon*, for example, it is not until after Cassandra's prophecy of her murder and Agamemnon's murder (Aeschyclus *Agamemnon* 1214–1330, 73–78) that Clytemnestra comes on stage to report and justify her action in a long *explanation*, ending with the memorable lines: "That man is Agamemnon, my husband; he is dead; the work of this right hand that struck in strength of righteousness. And that is that" (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1404–6, 81).

Aeschylus uses the same structure in *The Libation Bearers*. The murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra by Orestes are first announced—by the Oracle of Apollo and in the premonitory dream of Clytemnestra (Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers* 1–41, 93–94)—and then reported (first by the Servant, then by Orestes himself). Thus, the entire play turns on these two Oracles, which are taken up again and/or reinterpreted at different times, creating a certain suspense until Orestes, after the murder of Aegisthus, takes care to "*lead his mother to the palace*" in order to murder her (Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers* 930, 126). Then, after the event, at the end of the play, like his mother in *Agamemnon*, Orestes comes back on stage to report and justify his matricide, even using an opening phrase reminiscent, in its tone at least, of Clytemnestra's *explanation*. The last lines by the Chorus that conclude the play are clearly an *explanation* as well. The summing up of the history of the House of Atreus, in spite of its interrogatory form, is a statement of accounts, a lesson. It translates the desire for interpretation (of the story) that transforms tragedy into an exemplary text (Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers* 973–1006, 128–29 and 1063–76, 131).

Overall the sequential order of the two plays can be presented as follows:

a. *Agamemnon* : Recall (by the Chorus) of the Oracle of Artemis foretelling the immolation of a virgin and the murder of a husband—> Forebodings (by the Chorus) that Clytemnestra is planning some evil deed—> *Warning* (by the Chorus) to Agamemnon—> Cassandra's prophecy announcing her murder and Agamemnon's murder [ANTICIPATORY NARRATIVE OR DISCOURSE ON THE DENOUEMENT: *WARNING*] // Reported account of the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra (by Clytemnestra)—> debate between Clytemnestra (Aegisthus) and the Chorus on the validity of the murders [RETROSPECTIVE NARRATIVE OR DISCOURSE ABOUT THE DENOUEMENT: *EXPLANATION*].

b. *The Libation-Bearers* : Recall of the Oracle of Apollo ordering Orestes to avenge his father's death—> (Recall of Clytemnestra's premonitory dream making her fear the vengeance of Agamemnon—> [ANTICIPATORY NARRATIVE OR DISCOURSE ABOUT THE DENOUEMENT: *WARNING*] // Reported accounts of the murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (by the Servant and by Orestes)—> Orestes' debate with himself and the Chorus about his action [RETROSPECTIVE NARRATIVE OR DISCOURSE ABOUT THE DENOUEMENT: *EXPLANATION*].

It is clear that the formula [PROSPECTIVE NARRATIVE OR DISCOURSE // RETROSPECTIVE NARRATIVE OR DISCOURSE] translates rightly the syntax (or grammar) of these Greek tragedies. And it is also the grammar of Sophocles' *Antigone* or *Oedipus the King* as well as of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* or *The Medea*. Moreover, *Medea* is exemplary on this point. Its first speech is a *warning*: "Poor creature, she has discovered by her sufferings

What it means to one not to have lost one's own country [. . .] I know and fear her Lest she may sharpen as word and thrust to the heart, [. . .] Or even kill the king and the new-wedded groom"; and the last one is an explanation: "And so it happens in this story" (Euripides *The Medea*, 34–42, 64, and 1419, 112); and each of them is presented both as a text to be interpreted and/or an interpretation. In addition, Euripides goes so far as to inscribe the use of exemplary story or narrative within his text. This inserted narrative (at one and the same time different from yet similar to the principal story) acts as an interpretive marker, as much for the spectators (or readers) as for the actors, as is emphasized by the unforgettable cry of the Chorus, after Medea has murdered her children, recalling the gesture of "Ino, sent mad by heaven when the wife of Zeus Drove her out from her home and made her wander" (Euripides, *The Medea* 1284–85, 106).[7]

II. Counter-Exemplary Narratives

The syntax of the tragic narrative, like the use of the inserted story that sets an example, is actualized by the novels of Haitian tradition in such an obvious and conscious manner that it allows us to uncover a structure that until now has seemingly escaped the notice of specialists of tragedy; or, at least, it allows us to bring to light a grammar they have not been able to fully systematize.

In fact, this obsession of Haitian novels for repeatedly taking up "tragic" stories and for calling themselves "dramas," "tragedies" so as to better be exemplary—the counter-example as example, the example not to follow[8]—leads us to Greek tragedy, then to this critical question: why do Haitian novelists insist on continually trotting out misfortunes? What is their purpose in presenting so many dramas? And there is a second, more fundamental question as well: what is the necessary connection between the dramatic (or tragic) and exemplarity (or didacticism)? For there certainly is one. Otherwise, how are we to understand the insistence by the narrators of Lhérisson's *La Famille des Pitite-Caille* on emphasizing (in various ways) the instructive value of the audience that Golimin ("the best documented man in the Republic," he says) finally agrees to report on after being overwhelmed by the "lamentable vision" that he has just had of "poor Etienne," one of the offspring of the Pitite-Caille family (Lhérisson 13–14).

The reading of the first and last pages of this novel that simulate an audience—(re)actualizing through an insertion of narratives a conversation between friends in order to better make real—allows us to grasp the ultimate goals of this popular Haitian narrative. This is particularly true for Lhérisson's text, which, by appropriating the audience style, diverts it from the space of the street (where it is seen as a necessary process of face-to-face personal interaction or exchange) to the space of the fixed printed page, where it appears as a simulacrum of orality, a simulacrum of oral communication or, more precisely, of dialogue.

Here, it is not a question of the *audience* in the old archaic sense of *Presidential audience*—the custom, which disappeared along with American occupation, whereby

on Sundays the head of the Haitian government would receive high-ranking bureaucrats and even ordinary citizens at the national palace in order to talk with them—nor is it a question of the "narration of an event or occurrence, true or fictitious but always pleasant"—as Pompilus describes in *La Langue française en Haïti* (179). Instead, here we are refering to the *audience* that informs and is engaged with a piece of history, be it large or small, national or local. Thus, we are speaking of an audience that is instructive (transmission of a knowledge) and compromising (subversive or even political) although it remains *amusing* or *consoling*. Golimin's preliminary remarks in which he defines the scope and outline of his account, his final *warning* to his interlocutor, are unambiguous. He explicitly asks, in case his story—which will be "amusing," "consoling," "thought provoking"—is repeated, that his name not be revealed. He does not want to be *involved* (Lhérisson 14–15). And he takes every precaution to avoid being overheard by indiscrete ears, for like Boutenègre, he fears all *maliciousness* (Lhérisson 119).

In fact, the "amusing," "pleasant," or "whimsical" aspect of the audience stressed by several commentators, notably Pompilus (179), Laroche (*L'Image* 21–22), and Shelton (213), is only a (blinding) mask, a snare that allows the narrator-narratee(s) pair, or better yet, the speaker-listener(s) pair to avoid censure and to exorcise their fear. It must be emphasized that all of Golimin's *warnings* translate an (obvious) fear of getting into trouble with power or authority. This is what his words clearly express, at the end of the novel, when he again repeats the word used by Boutenègre, former political organizer for the late Eliézer Pitite-Caille, when he leaves prison—*maliciousness* (Lhérisson 75)—in order to expressly encourage his friend to keep silent about his secret concerning the liaison between the Widow Pitite-Caille and General Pheuil Lamboy.

Thus, the inevitable laughter that the audience encourages—which makes it seem "amusing" or "whimsical"—is nothing other than a laugh of "terror" or "distress," as Jacques Gourgue illustrates in his essay, "Un rire terrifié." And this laughter, he writes, is not "simple" laughter—even less so is it "simply laughter," it should be noted. It is ambiguous laughter, open to various interpretations.

> It is "joyous" laughter for the foreign tourist who will seek (and find) *joie de vivre* on faces ravaged by despair. It is "destructive" laughter for the General, who sees in it that his power has been called into question [. . .] It is "critical" laughter from the storytellers/ listeners [. . .], who go on about their work in any case, that is to say, continuing to spread laughter. (13)

Unfortunately, until now the polyvalence of the audience, like its subversive (political) nature, even though stated or displayed very clearly from the outset in Lhérisson's novel, has not been noticed, still less studied. Being too wedded to the definitions of Pompilus and Raymond, which he quotes moreover, Laroche sees in it instead a form of whimsical expression clashing with the serious aspect of the tale, forgetting that laughter here is above all *subversion*. Furthermore, he misses the political conflict that is working within the audience. For him the tensions running

through this type of expression are between "narrator and listeners" (Laroche, *L'Image* 21–25).[9] However, the possible confrontations—true antagonisms—are actually between the speaker/ listener(s) pair and certain actors (characters) within the story or "history," notably the figures of the power, as Jacques Gourgue explains in his essay.

If there is humor in this kind of expression, it is rather black—black humor in the sense of a "serious and despaired expression in a funny form" (Demougin 736). This definition sends us back to the old French expression, "*Vaut mieux en rire qu'en pleurer*" [*Better to laugh about it than cry*], which Haitians translate by the expression, "*Bagay pou ta fe nou krie, nap ri*"—almost literally translated as *what ought to make us cry forces us to laugh*—an expression often repeated after an audience. Tragedy is not far off, nor is its lesson. For this afterthought—this "after-laughter" repentance—aptly expresses at once both the tragic nature of the situation and its exemplarity, as Jacques Gourgue emphasizes:

> Thus the narratives about the unfortunate consequences of the last sudden change of mood of the local Tonton Macoute [. . .] are not necessarily "funny stories" and nothing more. Over and above the fact that their narration [. . .] encourages a social bringing together, they give rise to reflection as well. And this is precisely what is revealed to us by repentance, when through a critical suspension of laughter, exactly the opposite is called for—tears. (11)

Of course, these reflections concern the horror narratives of the Duvalier dictatorship, but the fact remains nonetheless that it applies to any political audience—more specifically the audience that puts political power on stage (or into play). Now the difficulties of the Pitite-Caille family are above all political. Politics ruin Eliézer (even cause his death). And it is to avoid reprisals (political reprisals especially) that Golimin warns his friend never to repeat his secret about the relationship between the Widow Pitite-Caille and General Pheuil Lamboy. There is thus an obligatory relationship between this (black) humor—this laughter of "distress" or "terror"—and the essential afterwards reflection that is repentance. And it is not unreasonable that the narrator of Lhérisson's novel, who is also the narratee of the audience, emphasizes Golimin's knowledge again and again—"He knows everything. He's the most knowledgeable man in the Republic." It is significant that the narrator particularly emphasizes the instructive value of Golimin's audiences—"[. . .] everything he says is interesting; [. . .] stories as instructive as the story of the *Pitite-Caille* family" (13, 120). These words confirming the apprenticeship structure that the audience implies, are expressed by Lhérisson, in the voice of Golimin, in these words:

> [. . .] If you want [. . .], I'll teach you astonishing things about the *Pitite-Caille* family.
>
> It will be neither a caricature nor a novel; it will simply be an *audience* in the old Haitian style [. . .] It will amuse you, it will make you think, and [. . .] it will console you about many things. (14)

In fact, the great interest of this process of hawking/tale-telling (which is also commentary) is in the knowledge transmitted, and especially the lessons that one draws (or can draw) from it in order to understand the present or better master the future. It is thus understandable that in the Marcelin brothers' *The Pencil of God*, Diogène Cyprien, bewildered, distraught, rejected by everyone, and all alone facing the drama that is weaving its web around him, on the eve of his suicide uses a story from his childhood in order to better grasp what is happening to him and, in his own words, to summon up "the courage to face this last ordeal" (Thoby-Marcelin and Marcelin 196). The analysis of this story (the tale of a woodcutter made rich and damned through his pact with an adder—the devil) and the fragments that surround (or re-contextualize) it show that this apparently singular action is nothing but a common mode of storytelling in novels of Haitian tradition. Indeed, just as in *La Famille des Pitite-Caille* by Lhérisson, THE NEED FOR STORYTELLING (funny story, tale or *audience*) IS (A) RESPONSE TO DISTRESS. A drama that is played out off stage beyond the main story—the story that encloses one or more other stories *en abyme*. It is because he cannot escape (or can no longer escape) suffering, the hold of "the pencil of God"—in other words, the Fate—that Diogène asks M. Bouton to be "good" and to "tell [him], just once more, the story of that woodcutter? You remember! The one that resembles mine a little" (Thoby-Marcelin and Marcelin 196).

In addition, in both novels, *La Famille des Pitite-Caille* and *The Pencil of God*, we find the same perception of fate or destiny as tragedy, and the relationship between the humorous and the dramatic. M. Bouton is "funny" and "so unhappy" (Thoby-Marcelin and Marcelin 201), just as "the sad and mournful story of the Pitite-Caille family" which *amuses, comforts, leads to meditation.* For the crisis that engenders storytelling (dramatization) is defused (subverted) by (black) humor that works on the narrative and/ or its context of enunciation, then it is reactivated by the repentance of the after-laughter, which is a lesson or an example. Thus, THE STORY IS DRAMA (almost a reply to the drama that motivates its narration)—(RE)ACTUALIZATION OF THE TRAGIC FABLE "of jouissance and power as fatality." The woodcutter and his wife, like Diogène and his wife, "unhappy end" because of their recently acquired fortune and a woman's story. There is an example, a lesson, here—both for Diogène (who looks to it for comfort) and for the reader (who learns doubly what any violation of the prohibition will cost). Thus, like Lhérisson's *audience*, THE TALE IS AN EXEMPLARY TEXT, once again, repeating the tragic fable: the story of a *fatal loss* organized around two important sequences: the first one is a *warning* (expression of a prohibition); and the last one is an *explanation* (interpretation or evaluation of the prohibition's violation).

In fact, the adder had sealed his pact with Vandiélou, the woodcutter, with a formal prohibition: "After that you'll have loads of luck, and you'll win lots and lots of money. But I warn you, if you ever let a woman see me, disaster will strike you and your whole family" (Thoby-Marcelin and Marcelin 198). And as soon as the woodcutter's wife sees the adder, thus violating the prohibition, the adder, in an evocative song, recalls his *warning*, as if to justify (explain) his vengeful gesture.

> Vandiélou, Vandiélou, a woman has seen me!—I told you no woman should see me—But now a woman has seen me!—I told

> you no woman should see me but now a woman has seen me!—
> Vandiélou, Vandiélou, a woman has seen me! (Thoby-Marcelin and Marcelin 200)

The adder repeats the same song, or most of it, before killing poor Vandiélou (201), the ultimate *explanation* clearly signifying that any violation of a prohibition is fatal. THE TALE IS A TRAGIC NARRATIVE. It intervenes within the novel in order to emphasize the exemplary nature of Diogène Cyprien's drama: the fatality of any transgression.

Again it appears that the tragic is only put on stage (is only narrated) in order to present an example: the counter-example as example. Thus for the narrator of the *Simulacres* by Hibbert, the principal interest of the misadventures of Héllenus Caton and his wife Céphise lies in the lesson (or the moral) it allows (or demands) after the event. The magisterial harangue to Haitian mothers (Hibbert, *Simulacres* 101–2) can only be seen as a "lesson" or a "moral." Although Hibbert does not call his last chapter "Epilogue," as he does in *Sena*, and although he does not establish a direct relationship between the failures of the Caton couple and his cry of alarm, it remains nonetheless clear that the reader does. And this is what matters—the lesson is not addressed to the characters at all, but rather through them to the readers who must interpret the narrative (fable, tale, *audience* or novel) in order to justify or draw from it a course of conduct.

Another novel of Haitian tradition, *L'Héritage sacré* by Cinéas, illustrates the logic underpinning tragic storytelling very well: the logic of the tragic narrative itself—its syntax—, and the context of its performance: its representation or narration. As Boss-Brutal, who has been abandoned by the *loas* (gods) for having many times abused women in their temple, faces imminent death, his story is reported: his priesthood ordered by the spirits (against his wishes and his father's wishes), then his ever-growing influence without equal, all the way to the exemplary punishment that finally struck him down—his poisoning in prison. Once again, storytelling (the representation or narration of the tragic) is the answer to a crisis—a drama that is reminiscent of another one that is playing out (is played out or will be played out) throughout the novel: the drama of Aiza Cédieu, the ex-student Lazare Solon, who will become, whether he wants to or not, Lion Mille-Griffes, "servant of the *loas*."

However, unlike the story of the woodcutter in *The Pencil of God*, the legend of Boss-Brutal, which precedes the story of Aiza Cédieu,[10] is not an *explanation* but rather a *warning*. It intervenes both to evaluate one way of acting and to guard against another. It sets out the prohibition—here, the impossibility of avoiding one's destiny, the impossibility of going against the will of the gods—which is always a text to be interpreted. In this sense, like the tale of Vandiélou, it has an instructive value, it is transmission of knowledge. Besides, this is the main reason Aiza asks to hear it, he says explicitly, "Frè Osiris [. . .] You're really the one who never taught me anything about grand-Pè and my ancestors. I'm only asking to learn about our ancestors and their tutelary gods" (Cinéas 31). And it's in order to fill the gap of Aiza's ignorance and that of the other young people, and to counter it as well, that Brother Osiris consents to telling the story of Frè Accélon. His preamble, dotted here and there with expressions reminiscent of Biblical parables, is rather eloquent on this point:

> [. . .]"The olders" are wrong not to let you know anything about the past or about the ancestors. That is why only Frè Accélon knows the great secret of the "Three Miracles" revealed to him by Frè Anga Doku before his death. Will he have time to "pass it on"? And who will be the depository of the sacred tradition? But I know the story of Frè Accélon. So listen, Cédieu, and you young ones, too. All of you, listen carefully to my revelation. (Cinéas 31)

Thus the story of Boss-Brutal (Frè Accélon) is reported only as a guide for Aiza, who will soon have to live through a similar adventure. In the same way the story of Lion Mille-Griffes is only a pretext for the investigation by the American anthropologist, Professor Benfield, which is supposedly an attempt at interpretation, an attempt to understand voodoo scientifically, and to refute the numerous calumnies about Haiti that are being spread about. In fact, after Aiza has been chosen by the *loas* as the spiritual heir of his grandfather, confronted with his hesitations, one of his uncles, Télus, in the form of a parable or prophecy (the narrator makes it clear that Télus is possessed), reminds Aiza that like his ancestor, Accélon, he will not escape the will of the gods:

> " [. . .] Whatever the spirits predict will happen. The spirits announce what must occur. [. . .] The spirits of his ancestors entered him so that he could become clairvoyant . . . What spirit possesses him? He is possessed by the spirit of his grandfather."
>
> [. . .] "The spirit chose him to become his high priest; and he did not understand and he had contempt for this mark of honor. And the spirit unleashed every misfortune on him. And his tongue was paralyzed. And his face was paralyzed. And all his relatives abandoned him.
>
> "Then in his heart he submitted to the law of the spirit. At once the spirit gave him Health. He recovered his speech and the use of his arms and legs. Then he behaved as a priest of the spirit; and his life was long and filled with blessings and he gave thanks to the spirit." . . .
>
> [. . .] "And he, too, refused, this other high priest; he, too, in his youth believed he could scorn the spirit. Between the law of the spirit and death, he said he would choose death. Worms devoured his flesh, his body was nothing but raw wounds and sores; death would have been a deliverance for him; but in order to punish him, the spirits did not send death. He suffered like this for many more years and years, always unyielding . . . One day, he disappeared . . . When he came back, he was handsome and radiant as Ogou-Balindjo! The spirits had taken him to *la Ville au Camp* (the City in the Camp)! He, too, became the honor of the Corporation! . . . (Cinéas 113–14)

These words and their tone are almost the same as those of the narrator and of Professor Benfield's or Dr. Melfort's in their different interpretive versions of the development of Aiza Cédieu, notably towards the end of the novel (cf. Cinéas 178,

185). In addition, at all the decisive stages of Aiza's spiritual development in his priestly calling—beginning with his first possession by Agoun Tonnerre at the ceremony of "transmission" up to the great celebration of reconciliation with the gods, including his immense confusion at the wedding of the "veiled client" that set in motion his revolt against the *loas* of his fathers—Professor Benfield and/or his informant, Dr. Melfort, have a ringside seat in order to interpret his behavior and explain it to the reader. Thus, we learn that Professor Benfield, "not being able to console himself for having missed the grandiose *dégradation*[11] of the "servant" Accélon, promised himself a spectacular revenge of the imposing "transmission, [and] was already prepared to understand the Christian ceremonies of All Saints and the Feast of the Dead." And in fact he had a "reserved apartment" with Dr. Melfort where "they could, at their leisure, study the attitude of each group." Since on the occasion of the great ceremony of June 24 that concludes the novel they are the pampered guests of Lion Mille-Griffes (Cinéas 81, 97, 189), they can again have a free hand at interpreting this important moment in Aiza's life. It is in analytical (interpretive) terms that Dr. Melfort ends his conversation with Professor Benfield after their final meeting with the "servant":

> [. . .] Such is the sense of the grandiose celebration that is being readied: the end of a drama of awareness or consciousness, a drama of the heart—perhaps; faith rediscovered, peace returned, reconciliation with the spirits, the solemn commitment to devote oneself to one's priestly calling, to perpetuate the cult of the ancestors, to humbly submit to the spirit of the fathers that had entered him, making him a Clairvoyant. (Cinéas 193–94)

This *explanation* (which repeats the general outlines of the *warning* of Télus) is an expression of the will to interpret voodoo that is at work from the first to the last page of this novel. Moreover, it is clearly stated that Professor Benfield's "ambition" is "to understand and explain the voodoo phenomenon"—it's the main reason for his presence in Haiti (Cinéas 72). And his conversations, especially those with Dr. Melfort, as well as his actions, end almost always in draft interpretations of the deeds and actions of Aiza-Cédieu-Lion-Mille-Griffes. This is obvious, for example, in his first interview with Dr. Melfort after his return to Haiti (Cinéas 179–80). Some of their statements deserve quotation, for they clearly emphasize the completely exemplary nature that Aiza Cédieu's story holds for both of them. First of all, there is the American anthropologist's questioning about the possibility of using Lion Mille-Griffes as an informant: "Ah, to manage to get a friend in the place! To ensure the complicity and cooperation of an Aiza Cédieu Accélon! Through him, to find out about the secrets all around us! Have you ever thought about that, dear Doctor?" And then there is Dr. Melfort's wish: "He has the most prodigious *houngan* career that I know of. His life could inspire an artist. What a living work could be made of it!" (Cinéas 184, 185–86). In fact, for both Professor Benfield and Dr. Melfort the life of Aiza-Cédieu-Lion-Mille-Griffes is only a story open to various treatments or interpretations: *discover the secrets of voodoo* or *write an excellent work*. At one level or another

in the novel, storytelling takes on the value of example—it is both instructive and a response to a crisis.

Thus, in summary, the logic of the production/reception of novels (or narratives) of Haitian tradition can be outlined as follows:

[CRISIS, DISTRESS] DRAMA—> STORY (STORYTELLING, DRAMATIZATION)—> LESSON [INTERPRETATION, RESOLUTION].

And this logic—that so adequately serves both the intentions of Haitian novelists (as they are formulated in various paratexts) and the wishes of Haitian readers who want a Haitian novel to be first and foremost a testimony or account (cf. Fleischmann)—is also the logic of exemplary narratives or stories. Of course, this exemplarity is supported and nourished by counter examples; indeed this exemplarity is counter-example: what is given to read or listen to is not what must be done, but what must not be done—the prohibition and its transgression. But this exemplarity is all the more efficient in that it plays on fear. Thus, the syntax of narratives can be outlined as follows:

do not (*PROHIBITION*)—> or else [*WARNING*] /
HAVE DONE (*TRANSGRESSION*)—> THAT IS [*EXPLANATION*];
Or its variant:
do this (*PRESCRIPTION*)—> or else [*WARNING*] /
NOT HAVE DONE THIS (*TRANSGRESSION*)—> THAT IS [*EXPLANATION*].

This syntax is particularly appropriate for giving rise to anxiety or anguish through the dread of a fatal denouement (which every *warning* implies) and to (moralizing) repetition through duplication or diegetic redoubling—a *mise en abyme* that each *explanation* imposes since there is always a *reprise*, a return to the events. This process which makes of these counter-exemplary narratives some exemplary and efficient (moral) lessons is also the syntax of the novels of Haitian tradition, their *grammar*.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated, all English translations are mine, since no published English translation exists of the works cited.
2. On the parameters of the establishment of this corpus and its chronological markers, see the first chapter of my book, *Des romans de tradition haïtienne. Sur un récit tragique.* This article is an abridged version of the 4th chapter of which a first English draft translation was made by my colleague, Professor Lynn Penrod, that I would like to thank.
3. For those two last works are very well-known and so often studied they are not commented on in this article.
4. Even though one can use indifferently "caution" or "warning" to translate more or less *"mise en garde,"* and "clarification" or "explanation" for *"mise au point,"* I prefer *warning* and *explanation*.
5. It should be noted that theatre is, of course, simulation insofar as it is nothing but "scene" in the sense which Genette gives to this term in *Narrative Discourse* (66–88 and 94–95). However, this simulation is above all simulation of a dialogue or of an exchange of words (dialogues) and only rarely simulation of events (of acts or of actions).
6. It should be noted that *mises en abyme* are common in tragedy. Moreover, several commentators have emphasized the use Shakespeare makes of them in *Hamlet*, although they have not, however, drawn analytical conclusions from such a remark. See, for example, Dällenbach 12–13, and Landré 249–52.
7. This *mise en abyme* is reminiscent of the play within a play that is the hallmark of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as well as the story of the woodcutter in *The Pencil of God* by the Marcelin brothers—see infra.

8. There are two major types of exemplary narratives: those that prescribe a way of acting (the "positive [version] of exemplary apprenticeship") and those that condemn a way of acting (the "negative [version] of exemplary apprenticeship"), as Susan Rubin Suleiman has pointed out in *Authoritarian Fictions* (63–100).
9. It is important to note that in a previous work, *Le Miracle et la Métamorphose. Essai sur les littératures du Québec et d'Haïti*, Laroche proposes a somewhat different definition of "audience" from Lhérisson's, which is that of a "genre straddling the short story, the novel and the conversation in its specifically Haitian form and made up of a combination of history and stories, political propaganda and legend, humor and skeptical and fatalistic wisdom" (68).
10. It should be noted that this rather theoretical break (or this "before and after") between the two stories is diegetic in nature. In fact the two stories overlap since the narration of the story of Boss-Brutal is told to Aiza and is thus an integral part of the story of Aiza's priesthood.
11. There is no English term for this voodoo ritual, also named *desounen,* which is according to Hurbon a "rite that separates the 'spirit' attached to an initiate, just before or after his or her death" (168).

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