POETRY OF RELATION

ÉDOUARD GLISSANT, FRENCH MODERNISM, AND THE POETICS OF OPACITY

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Neal Alfred Allar

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Neal Alfred Allar, Ph. D.

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This dissertation explores how contemporary francophone Antillean poetics serves as a paradigm for "creolizing" the canon of French modernist poetry. The central figure is the Martinican writer Édouard Glissant, whose vision of global interconnection called the "poetics of Relation" has become a key category in postcolonial thought. Although he considered himself "a poet, foremost," he remains known for his critical texts and his novels. This project argues that Glissant's notion of Relation arises from his process of writing and reading poetry. Ultimately, it demonstrates that the poetics of Relation suggests a new way of reading modern French poetry in the postcolonial global context.

Glissant's poetry and its intertexts share a fundamental quality: resistance to transparent comprehension, or what Glissant calls "opacity." Existing scholarship on Glissant has generally understood opacity as a purely political category—a militant assertion of the postcolonial subject's irreducibility to Western rationality. However, the question remains how opacity fosters the connective ontology of Relation. My reading of Glissant's early texts in Chapter One demonstrates that opacity achieves its political force through, first and foremost, poetic activity. An opaque text affirms that meaning is not singular and fixed but rather gets created in an ongoing relational process. The reader of opacity must participate actively in the creation of meaning. This

process-oriented poetics, emphasizing multiplicity and collectivity, presages the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, which Glissant would explicitly embrace later in his career.

Chapters Two and Three return to the French modernist poets whom Glissant read as a young man, including Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, Victor Segalen, and Saint-John Perse. Opacity and Relation now develop into critical categories that open the way for a postcolonial reading of these poets. Through “relational readings” of these four poets, these two chapters locate a Caribbean poetics in French modernism, with the important distinction that this poetics remains virtual until Glissant’s notion of Relation actualizes it. The dissertation concludes with a brief theoretical reflection on the relationship between poetic opacity and poetic influence, emphasizing how opacity creates multidirectional, anachronistic flows of literary influence that disrupt the traditional, filial logic of literary canons.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Neal A. Allar did his undergraduate studies at Amherst College in French and English literature and his doctoral studies in the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University. His research focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century French and francophone poetry. In September of 2016, he will begin a postdoctoral fellowship in the Tsinghua-Michigan Society of Fellows, housed at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN PARENTHETICAL CITATIONS

Édouard Glissant's works:

DA = *Le discours antillais*

FM = *Faulkner, Mississippi*

IL = *L'imaginaire des langues*

IP = *L'intention poétique*

PC = *Poèmes complets*

PR = *Poétique de la Relation*

PhR = *Philosophie de la Relation*

SC = *Soleil de la conscience*

SR = *Le sang rivé.*

TTM = *Traité du Tout-Monde*

Gilles Deleuze's works (including those written with Félix Guattari)

DR = *Différence et répétition*

LP = *Le pli*

LS = *Logique du sens*

MP = *Mille plateaux*

NP = *Nietzsche et la philosophie*

QL = *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*

PREFACE

In 2014, with unintended irony, the French Ministry of Culture and Communication declared Édouard Glissant's manuscripts a "national treasure," thenceforth to be kept in the National Library in Paris.[1] France, in a throwback to the colonial days, had found "treasure" in the Caribbean and had, without qualification, incorporated the recently deceased Martinican writer into *la nation française*. "Cette figure de lutte anticoloniale," as the press release describes him, dedicated much of his work to creating a notion of Caribbean identity, *antillanité*, that cannot be reduced to *francité*. Glissant makes a sustained critique of the Western epistemological tendency toward the Same, *le Même*, the powerful assimilating drive of republican universalism, and it seems a case in point to see him considered a French poet *de même que* Valéry, Éluard, or Bonnefoy. Glissant's chief ontological concept, Relation, overturns the logic of the same with an affinity for the other: rather than the assimilation of identities into a monumental whole, the multiplication of identities through an ongoing process by which "toute identité s'étend dans un rapport à l'Autre" (PR 23). Relation arises precisely in opposition to the universalist claims and the colonial modes of thought that could make a "national treasure" of a Martinican writer descended from enslaved Africans.

It runs strikingly counter to Glissant's thought to affiliate him with French "national" literature because, for him, the Caribbean is defined not by its affiliations but by its a-filiation. Its lines of ancestry were severed centuries ago by the decimation of the indigenous Carib populations and by the family-sundering slave trade. Valérie Loichot's aptly-titled *Orphan Narratives* shows the extent to which this destruction of parentage has affected literature in the Caribbean and the circum-Caribbean, since narratives themselves are so often tied to genealogy, that is, to affiliations through time. Loichot further notes that "[t]he dialectical dance between author, parent, and time"

must get complicated in the orphaned cultures of the Caribbean (1). In other words, literary genealogy and literary influence cannot follow a straight line from past to present nor, I would argue, can they be limited to a geographical region.

Yet, as much as Glissant critiques the logic of lineages and filiations, he takes great care to identify the writers who have influence his thought and his poetics. It happens that most of these writers—and certainly the ones evoked in his essays, in contrast to his diverse personal relationships with francophone writers—share three qualities: they are poets; they are white; and they would generally be associated with French modernism. Additionally, the New World writers most important in his essays are of the post-plantation white elite, both of them Nobel Prize-winning modernists: William Faulkner and Saint-John Perse. Glissant thus, quite deliberately, traces a literary genealogy for himself that, on the surface, replicates the colonizer-colonized, center-periphery, past-present hierarchies that he so incisively critiques throughout his career. I will argue that, in fact, Glissant disrupts the temporality and geography of literary influence by demanding that we engage in a *relational reading*, open to unpredictable flows of influence between poetic texts that violate chronological progression and geographical limitation. Glissant thus offers an alternative to a practice of modernist literary studies that, in its effort to include works beyond Europe and North America, has used a literary historiography that reproduces the image of metropolitan ingenuity and innovation radiating outward to the peripheries and the colonies. Natalie Melas also locates a temporal problem in this trend:

> The effort to expand the purview of modernist studies beyond the borders of Europe has picked up steam in recent years. The driving intention of these approaches is to address the consistent and manifold exclusion of non-Western works from the studies of modernism. Exclusion is corrected with inclusion, and that inclusion,

> more often than not, takes the form of tracing the influence of European modernism or modernists on non-European writers and the analysis of the "indigenization" of modernist forms into local idioms. The emphasis on influence and indigenization operates on and reinforces a linear, unidirectional, and implicitly progressive temporality in which priority matters most and for which derivativeness seems the inescapable result. ("Untimeliness" 566)

If Glissant largely implicates himself with a group of modernists from not just the same continent but the same nation, it is to disrupt what Melas, reading Homi Bhabha, has called the "unified temporality presumed for the nation" (ibid. 569). This disruption of the time and space of literary studies follows Glissant's logic of creolization, conceived in opposition to the logic of filiation and transcendental "roots" that grant political, social, cultural, or racial legitimacy to some and refuse it to others. I will suggest that by creolizing the practice of reading both individual texts and texts together, we can better address the complicated relationship between francophone Caribbean literature and the French literary canon.

* * *

This study began as an attempt to read a single poem: Glissant's *Les grands chaos*, his final poem, published in 1994. The attempt failed. The poem was too opaque. Its opacity rendered it illegible as a "single" piece of writing. The New Critical training that I received in college has never fully left me, and the formalist approach did not compute with *Les grands chaos*: it made no sense as a self-contained "well-wrought urn" that should be approached, as Cleanth Brooks insists, "by making the closest possible examination of what the poem says as a poem" (vii). The poem itself requires a relational reading in the Glissantian sense of Relation: it cannot simply *be*; it *becomes* legible through dialogues with other texts and through processes, such as oral

performance or musical adaptation (as in the splendid jazz album by Jacques Coursil, *Clameurs*), that extend the text beyond the confined space of the page. This is quite different, however, from using the "theoretical" concepts in Glissant's essays or historical paratexts to illuminate the poetry. One purpose of this project, in fact, is to show that the poetry, both Glissant's and that to which he alludes in his essays and poems, forms a crucial and even privileged part of the his oeuvre. The poetry uses the opacity of language to inspire a practice of reading in Relation. The poem thus participates in the creolized ontology that Glissant develops and implicates the reader into Relation through the reading experience.

Relational reading thus, in my case, grew out of a failed attempt at close reading. The more I attempted to penetrate to a deeper meaning and the more I tried to unfold or "explicate" (in Chapter Two I attend extensively to the *pli*, the "fold," in this word's etymology) the thickly woven textual material, the more I got pushed sideways. The quest for the depths somehow got turned towards the horizon. Glissant's notion of *détour*, by which the Caribbean subject finds it necessary to "chercher *ailleurs*" rather than attempting a return (*retour*) to an ideal origin, becomes necessary in reading opaque poetry (DA 47–48). This kind of reading might appear similar, in some ways, to the practice of "surface reading" recently proposed by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, who "have been drawn to modes of reading that attend to the surfaces of texts rather than plumb their depths" (1–2). However, although they list various versions of surface reading that may intersect in some measure with the relational reading that Glissant necessitates ("surface as materiality" (9), "surface as an affective and ethical stance" (10), "surface as literal meaning [or] 'depthless hermeneutic'" (12)), Glissant's work promotes a coming-into-Relation between reader, text, and intertexts such that the "surface" is not simply the material page or the work's affective platform but rather the trajectory of the reader propelled towards unpredictable encounters with other texts.

Moreover, this poetic itinerary cannot be reduced to another of the versions that Best and Marcus propose—"the location of patterns that exist in and across texts" in which "the critic becomes an anatomist breaking down texts or discourses into their components, or a taxonomist arranging and categorizing texts into larger groups" (11). Such a procedure resembles yet another alternative to close reading, Franco Moretti's "distant reading," which proposes to "focus on units that are much smaller and much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems" by considering so many texts at a time, through digital technology and secondary material, that "reading" must be done "*without a single direct textual reading*" (48–49, Moretti's italics). If relational reading requires a transversal movement, it is the intimate engagement with texts that prompts, and rewards, this transversality. Moreover, relational reading is unpredictable or, to use Glissant's term, *errant*; the itinerary will differ with each new journey into the textual space. I can open to the same Glissant poem for the hundredth time, and two hours later my desk will show a singular, unprecedented constellation (or mess, to the casual observer) of open or dog-eared books: an allusive network specific to that moment of reading.[2]

Moretti's critique of close reading—"that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon" (48)—also applies to my method, except that I would first problematize the word "canon." My study relates Glissant with four "canonical" French poets, with the precise purpose of questioning the formation of canons, especially their spatio-temporal cartography. By placing himself alongside these poets and by exerting a kind of reverse influence upon them (in a similar gesture to what Loichot calls an "anti-genealogy" (*Orphan* 36)), Glissant begins the process of decolonizing or, better, creolizing the canon. This is in fact a process of opening and enlarging the canon. However, it requires going beyond simply including or "making space" for postcolonial literature, for if such literature occupies a wholly separate space—a "postcolonial canon" distinct

from a Western canon—then colonial hierarchies will continue to plague literary studies. To creolize the canon means to recognize the haphazard encounters that occur between texts across distances and times, while still affirming each text's cultural, idiomatic, and political particularity. I am convinced that this key balancing act of Glissantian Relation—conceiving of an ever-expanding totality that embraces the minutest particularities—should inform the methodology of literary studies. Thus, my study is necessarily, and happily, incomplete, limiting itself to only a few Glissantian intertexts, with the hope that the methodology allows for further work across further distances in time and space.

My analysis may also contribute to the understanding of Glissant's biography—whom exactly he may have been reading and perhaps why. Although I hope such conjectures and deductions would be valuable to those interested in Glissant's intellectual life (the scholarship on which has been exceedingly concerned about the arc or progression of his thought over his career), the primary concern here is to theorize a reading practice in Relation. To read Mallarmé in Relation, for example, is not to read Mallarmé as Glissant might have read him: at best, this would be the most sterile historicist method, without even the advantage of precision. It is, rather, to allow Glissant's poetics of creolization and Mallarmé's poetic dice-throw to mutually inform one another and, in this instance, to allow the notion of chance (*hasard*) to become the connecting matter between the operations of poetic texts and the project of worldwide Relation.

* * *

Is this a productive way to engage with Glissant work and, more broadly speaking, to combat the persistent colonial epistemological structures that plague the "postcolonial" world? Doubtless, some will read this study as the product of Glissant's supposed "turn" towards textuality, aestheticism, or postmodernism in the later part of his career, leading to the

"disengagement" of a thinker who, from the 1940s through the 1970s, had been deeply involved in the anticolonial projects pursued by, among others, his fellow Martinicans Aimé Césaire and Franz Fanon. The words "textuality" and "aestheticism" tacitly point an accusing finger at the structuralist and poststructuralist movements that have so deeply influenced Anglo-American postcolonial studies, with early theorists like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak embracing Jacques Derrida's text-based critique of Western humanism and logocentrism from Plato through the Enlightenment.[3] When Glissant begins adopting the nomadological terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari beginning in the mid- to late 1980s, his turn to a smooth, a-political postmodernism seems complete.[4] Even though he wrote the bulk of his poems and novels earlier on, his essays, according to this account, appear more literary, less factual, and less "specific" to the situation in postcolonial locales. Peter Hallward, for example, situates the later Glissant within a "literary field" begun by Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Mallarmé (favorites of Derrida, Deleuze, and their Anglo-American followers), in which "literature cuts its links with political and economic power, and establishes its own values in terms which transcend all such worldly interests" (15). Although throughout his book Hallward demonstrates a complex and learned understanding of the philosophical positions of certain postcolonial writers, statements like these demonstrate that, in the broadest scheme, he essentially rehashes a well-worn complaint about post-"linguistic turn" thought—that its obsession with language removes it from the specific, material realities of our world.

Before addressing the political ramifications of Glissant's poetics and the poetics of reading that he has prompted me to theorize, I wish to briefly address two major problems with these critiques of Glissant's career because the obsession with the chronology of his thought relates directly to my own concern with literary history. First, the notion of a progression or "turn" in

Glissant's work depends upon an incomplete reading. No matter how much one tries to nuance or complicate this portrayal (as does Hallward: "There is certainly no *sudden* break in Glissant's work, no sharply defined before and after. He continues, occasionally, to decry Martinique's economic dependency" and so on (100)), it does not stand up to the totality of Glissant's oeuvre. Proponents of this idea of a transition have had to ignore massive parts of the early corpus that are intensely textual, self-referential, planetary in scale (including the first two essays, *Soleil de la conscience* and *L'intention poétique*), and even recognizably "postmodern" *avant la lettre* (especially the poetry from 1947 onward). They have had to lean heavily on *Le discours antillais* and on certain biographical details[5] to create the image of an "early Glissant" who was drastically more militant than his later self would become. In fact, it would be more accurate to note that *Le discours antillais* is exceptional in its sustained attention to Martinique's specific political situation, and its exceptionality is largely due to the conditions of its composition: it was originally a *thèse d'État* in philosophy at the université de Paris I–Panthéon Sorbonne, entitled "Le discours antillais. Le passage de l'oral à l'écrit," submitted in advance of Glissant's becoming editor of the UNESCO *Courier*. (Incidentally, proponents of a distinct "early" and "late" Glissant never, to my knowledge, address this politically-engaged post at UNESCO, which occurred in the mid- to late 1980s, precisely when, to Hallward's disdain, Glissant was becoming "the most thoroughly Deleuzian writer in the francophone world" (67). One may be able to argue, probably unconvincingly, that this post reflects the increasing globalism of his thought, but one could hardly go so far as to call this an outright political disengagement).

The second problem with the periodization of Glissant's work is that, often by implication, it wrongly attributes a change in Glissant's career to the effect of language-centered continental philosophy and literary theory from the 1960s through the 1980s. In fact, Glissant was always in

the middle, and simultaneously outside, of the "French Theory" scene, ever since his days in Paris in the 1950s at the journal *Les lettres nouvelles*, where his essays, reviews, and poems appeared alongside the first versions of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*. These articles would end up forming the bulk of *L'intention poétique* (1969), whose notion of "poetic intention" intersects with Barthes's semiotics (and, additionally, Maurice Blanchot's theories of writing) in the now-familiar sense that writing exceeds the ambitions of the writer, whether through the power of language itself or through the "masse inconsciente de données sous-tendues par l'intention" (IP 35–36). This is precisely the time when Chris Bongie claims that Glissant is pursuing the "Fanonesque politics of national identity and anticolonial resistance—an ideological position to which Glissant once seemed wholeheartedly committed" (*Islands* 138). The Sartrean word "committed" is not incidental, for Sartre is among the first theorizers of how literature, particularly poetry, could further the anticolonial political project. In "Orphée noir," Sartre equates anticolonial poetry to labor, to the ability, through *poiesis*, to intentionally create something in the world and thereby to come into consciousness (Melas, "Untimeliness" 577–578); this iteration of engaged literature runs counter to the notion of an unpredictable "poetic intention" that Glissant was developing in his essays for *Les lettres nouvelles*, precisely during his supposedly militant phase. Indeed, at this time, there were already complaints the political inefficacy of his writing. Without really remarking upon how it violates his periodization of Glissant's career, Bongie reports upon—and seems generally to subscribe to—the early commentaries on Glissant's work that would give him

> the reputation of being a difficult writer whose emphasis on style (the frequent rupturing of traditional syntax, the insistent creolizing of standard French, the baroque convolution of personal and historical narratives, and so on) at times seemed intrusively to conflict with the readability—and hence for some readers,

> political efficacy—of his novels, which were often viewed as being "so hermetic that one has to question the social value of what he has produced." (*Islands* 138)

As I have begun to suggest and will argue more fully in Chapter One, Glissant's opacity is decidedly not a self-enclosed hermetism. As for the question of periodizing Glissant's work, Melas is right to say that, in the essays specifically (an important detail), the "development" that Bongie and Hallward, among others, have attempted to trace "inheres only in the historical form of the argument, not in its content […and] is most readily locatable in the rhetoric, whose affect seems to run counter to its manifest, expository sense" (*All the Difference* 110). I would ascribe this "affect" largely to the general movement from a Hegelian to a Deleuzian vocabulary in the essays—a transition that Nick Nesbitt accurately notes in *Voicing Memory*. Yet, as I will show in Chapter One, Glissant's poetry in particular carries a strongly Deleuzian sense before Deleuze even writes his first book. With Laurent Dubreuil, we might say that the poetry has a peculiar ability to "anachronize" his development as a theorist, and this is not a simple curiosity; his self-anachronizing oeuvre disrupts the causal order of past, present, and future, and thereby promises the possibility for poetry to give rise, unpredictably, to events and effects both pro- and retroactively.[6] The Caribbean subject, Glissant explains in the preface to his play *Monsieur Toussaint* (1961), confronts a "histoire obscurcie ou oblitérée" and therefore experiences a present that has no "enracinement dans le temps"; he must therefore develop a paradoxical "vision prophétique du passé" outside of the causal logic of chronological history.[7] Chapter One of this study attends quite closely to certain chronological aspects of Glissant's oeuvre—the resonances and dissonances between the earliest and latest poems, for example—in order, ultimately, to complicate the apparent progression of his poetics.

Glissant asserts that the vision he proposes in *Monsieur Toussaint* "n'est pourtant pas tout

droit d'inspiration politique" but that it must influence people's relationship with time, place, and culture on a more fundamental level: "C'est là une ambition poétique" (9–10). It happens that this play is not the most powerful demonstration of this ambition, largely due to an awkward, fact-loaded narrative style that interferes with the chief trope, which is of having two places and times intermingle on stage—Toussaint Louverture's final days in his prison in the Jura Mountains and his earlier days as a general during the Haitian Revolution.[8] However, by addressing the watershed historical moment of anticolonial politics, the play does allow Glissant to formulate his idea of the relationship between poetics and politics. If he prioritizes the former over the latter in his writing, it is because he believes that poetry has a singular bearing on humanity's *vision* or, to use the word he would later favor, *imaginaire*, which underlies all political action.

Despite the difference between Césaire's Negritude poetics and Glissant's poetics of Relation, the two poets share an essential hope, reminiscent of the Rimbaldian *voyant*, that poetry can liberate the mind and body from the epistemological confines into which they were born. If politics arises from the interaction of minds and bodies in the world, then poetry provides the hope of radically reconfiguring politics. This is quite different from topical verse that addresses, and thus often limits itself to, specific political situations. Glissant says as much in his interviews with Alexandre Leupin:

> si l'on consacrait l'écriture au seul parachèvement d'une lutte populaire, de la lutte d'une communauté ou d'une nation, si, dans le travail d'écriture, on oubliait ce qu'il y a derrière les luttes, c'est-à-dire les assises les plus discrètes d'une culture, les opacités de l'être, les tremblements du savoir, on n'accomplissait pas le travail de l'écrivain, mais celui, nécessaire tout autant, du pamphlétaire ou du journaliste engagé ou du militant pressé d'obtenir des résultats. (*Entretiens* 60)

Poetry speaks to the level of existence that underlies politics, but it cannot be reduced to political action pure and simple. Compare this to Césaire's early essay "Poésie et connaissance," in which he describes the poem as the instantiation of an immanent totality, mixing past and future, and charged with an amalgam of intelligibility, sensibility, and sensation—all of this in a dynamic, whirling *Tout* that prefigures Glissant's poetics of the Tout-Monde:

> Ce n'est pas de toute son âme, c'est de tout son être que le poète va au poème. Ce qui préside au poème, ce n'est pas l'intelligence la plus lucide, ou la sensibilité la plus aiguë, ou la sensation la plus délicate, mais l'expérience tout entière, toutes les femmes aimées, tous les désirs éprouvés, tous les rêves rêvés, toutes les images reçues ou saisies, tout le poids du corps, tout le poids de l'esprit. Tout le vécu. Tout le possible. Autour du poème qui va se faire, le tourbillon précieux : le moi, le soi, le monde. Et les plus insolites coudoiements, tous les passés, tous les avenirs […]. Tous les flux, tous les rayons. Le corps n'est plus sourd ou aveugle. Tout a droit à la vie. Tout est appelé. Tout attend. Je dis tout. (162)

Glissant would restructure this reflection to emphasize a more collective totality, not centered upon "le poète" so much as diffracted out through "identités" or "humanités" (IL 85), but the affinities here are stronger than the discrepancies. Poetry, for both of these poets, is the language of "the possible." Its opacity, I will argue, charges it with a kind of potential energy that becomes kinetic, active, and connective in the event of reading. Césaire's spiraling image of poetic totality, which Glissant adopts in the memorable final paragraph of *Les grands chaos*, serves as an image of simultaneous destruction and creation, a hurricane and a mixing pot, a productive chaos that reshapes the image of the world. If language is a crucial prism through which we imagine the world and our place in it, then poetry, by radically shifting the dynamics of language and reshaping its

contours, creates discursive spaces for reimagining the world: “La langue ne grandit que par le langage, cette frappe du poète, et le langage a besoin de toutes les langues, qui sont l’imaginaire du monde” (TTM 163).

* * *

Poetry of Relation shares with both Césaire and Glissant the hope that the poetics of decolonization obtains outside of the times and places associated with anticolonial uprising: prior to it and after it, in the provinces, the peripheries, and the metropolises. Only in this way can this poetics have an incidence on a world whose geography, politics, cultures, and societies have been crucially shaped by the continuing legacy of colonialism. If this particular project cannot include the rich body of modern and contemporary Caribbean poets whose work must, like Glissant’s, ramify into the world—from Daniel Maximin to Nathaniel Mackey to M. NourbeSe Philip to Frankétienne to Martín Espada, to name only a few—it hopes to assure that when this greater inclusion does occur, that it not amount to assimilation into a one-way literary lineage, nor balkanization into a recognized but untouchable regional particularism. *Poetry of Relation* examines a specific transatlantic cross-current in nineteenth- and twentieth-century French-language poetry—an interflow of influence upon the waters that have been both the abyss and the womb, the “gouffre-matrice,” of Afro-Caribbean culture (PR 20). It thereby hopes to show that, if Caribbean poetry can teach us anything, it is that seemingly distant texts nonetheless engage, by the force of chance and history, in the most intimate of conversations and produce something new: that the dynamics of creolization occur in the reading of poetry.

The execution of such a project depends upon attention to the particularities and the details of each of the texts that get put into conversation. Just as the immanence of Relation must embrace the innumerable particularities that mobilize it, a relational reading must attend to the particular

minutiae of the texts being related. This is the irony of the most common critiques of, to take a recent article by Carrie Noland as an example, "the blind spots in Glissant's relational ontology, his habit—especially later in life—of privileging a transcendent unity over an earthly dissensus, rhizomes over roots" ("Césaire" 119). But the Glissantian rhizome is composed of roots, unlike the Deleuzian rhizome to which Noland seems to refer; Glissant makes an important misreading of Deleuze that precisely reinstates an attention to the particular within a broader, unbounded totality. This oversight signals a bigger problem in Noland's appraisal of the Caribbean "legacy" that Patrick Chamoiseau, Glissant's protégé, sets up for himself in his book *Césaire, Perse, Glissant: Les liaisons magnétiques* (discussed here in Chapter Three). Noland makes a sophisticated reading of Chamoiseau's book but, when it comes to evaluating the most fraught part of this lineage—the connection with the white *béké*, Perse—she gives no evidence that she has read Perse's poetry beyond the three or so lines that always seem to get quoted in postcolonial Caribbean studies (in which Perse remembers the black servants from his childhood, in a very poignant and problematic phrase, as "astres morts"). Noland, it turns out, is a scholar of the Caribbean who also has deep knowledge of French modernist poetry and thus probably *has* read much of Perse; however, it is significant that, when relating Perse to Glissant and Chamoiseau, even she (whose *Voices of Negritude in Modernist Print* admirably and rigorously crosses the very boundaries I have been describing, albeit in a Negritude context) adheres to the tradition of ignoring the vast resources of texts like *Exil* and *Vents*, to which Glissant and Chamoiseau both explicitly refer. If postcolonial criticism wishes to critique the flattening of particularity or "specificity" in Glissant's ontology, then postcolonial critics had better not smooth out or reduce the particularities of the oeuvres they invoke.

My reading is necessarily unfinished, just as the totality of Relation is untotalizable. It

envisions a political and literary scope that exceeds the space of any one essay or even any imaginable number of essays. At the same time, it seeks awareness, without the pretense of mastery or summation, of the countless syntactic, semantic, sonic, visual, and geographic details of individual texts, with the hope of recognizing these particularities and creating connections between them. In a relational reading, closeness and distance are not opposed; they motivate each other.

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[1] Press release, September 2014, France, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication.

[2] Laurent Dubreuil's notion of literature's "now" forms the temporal foundation of this theory of reading. See "What Is Literature's Now?" In the conclusion, I extensively discuss Dubreuil's work, including the notion of anachronism that arises at the end of this preface.

[3] For a trenchant critique of Bhabha and Spivak along these lines, see Hallward 24–35.

[4] See Hallward; Bongie, *Islands*.

[5] For an example of this, see Nesbitt, "Early Glissant." Nesbitt does the important work of recovering documentation of Glissant's involvement in founding the militant anticolonial Front Antillo-Guayanais pour l'Autonomie in 1959. He is careful to assert that a novel like *La lézarde*, published the year before, already undermines Glissant's apparent militancy, but he adds that the novel is only a harbinger of the more explicit turn later to come: "*La Lézarde* substitutes in 1958, at the height of the Algerian war and the drive toward the African independences, a universalist *poétique* for militant *politics*, a line of argument that will, however, only become over-determinant in his thought after the publication in 1990 of *Poétique de la Relation*" (933). Nesbitt's article seems to walk a narrow line between wishing to recover a "early Glissant" who participates in the drive toward "universal emancipation" (see his book of this title) while still taking into account how Glissant already showed signs of breaking with the revolutionary project begun in Haiti in the 1790s.

[6] See Dubreuil, "Anachronisme et événement." In a similar vein, Melas locates a potential for "untimeliness" in Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, which evokes "not the 'now' of something existing in actuality but rather the hope of a projected present capable of redeeming and transforming the past" ("Untimeliness" 576).

[7] *Monsieur Toussaint* 9–10. Philip Kaisary is right to point out that this play disrupts the periodization that Hallward and Bongie, among others, have imposed upon Glissant's career. However, Kaisary otherwise simply adopts Hallward's problematic critique of the later Glissant for all of Glissant, perplexingly labeling him (along with Derek Walcott, Alejo Carpentier, and René Depestre) as a "conservative."

[8] For analyses of this temporality, see Dash, “The Theatre,” and Forsdick, “‘The Focal Point’” 957–960.

Chapter One

Édouard Glissant

A Poet

> *Le poème est en effet la seule dimension de vérité ou de permanence ou de déviance qui relie les présences du monde, conquérants et peuples ravagés, savants et communautés élémentaires, chants et hèlements, paisibles dialogues avec les bois et les eaux et les feux de l'étendue et poussées sauvages dans l'inconnu des ombres...*
>
> – Glissant, 2005 (IL 85)

To disrupt chronology, choose first a beginning. This study begins where Glissant began: in poetry. "Je suis un poète, avant tout," he insisted throughout his career. In point of fact, he was a poet first—his first published writings were poems. More importantly, he was a poet *foremost*. Even as he gained renown as a prize-winning novelist and as the eminent cultural theorist of the postcolonial Antilles, he considered poetry the primary discursive mode that was suited to his thinking and to the world he envisioned. His notion of Relation—the chief term in his Antillean-inspired system of thought—is at heart a *poetic* modality: "Toutes les cultures ont besoin de la Relation […] cela passera toujours par un poème" (IL 117). Those are his last published words, printed some three months before his death. Glissant, *poète, avant tout*—and *poète, après tout*. This chapter's purpose is to reassert the primacy of poetry in Glissant's work, by examining both the "poetic" as the privileged mode of Glissant's thinking and by turning to what is, oddly, the least studied portion of Glissant's oeuvre: his poems.

Undoubtedly, his essays have been the most recognized part of his work. *Le discours antillais* (1981) and *Poétique de la Relation* (1990) have taken a firm place in the increasingly inclusive French literature canon taught in the contemporary Anglo-American academy, as a cursory glance at university syllabi and reading lists will attest. According to Nick Nesbitt, *Le discours antillais* "stands today, beside Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1953) and Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), as the outstanding critique of French colonialism in the Caribbean" ("The Postcolonial Event" 103). A small library's worth of scholarly studies on Glissant have appeared since the early success of the mid-1990s monographs by J. Michael Dash and Celia Britton, almost all of them prioritizing Glissant's essays—or, at the most, mixing in some analyses of Glissant's novels but always in the overall context of the "theory." *Theorizing Glissant,* an excellent recent volume edited by John E. Drabinski and Marisa Parham, is explicit about its purpose to attend to the "philosophical register of Glissant's thought." Peter Hallward's maddening polemic against Glissant in *Absolutely Postcolonial* also inscribes Glissant into a political philosophical discourse, even as it accuses Glissant of participating in a postcolonial "literary field" that at a certain moment "cuts its links with political and economic power and establishes its own values in terms which transcend all such worldly interests" (15). Hallward finds it inconvenient to consider the corpus of poetry from 1947 to 1994, which would disrupt the periodization he attempts to impose upon Glissant's thinking. Part of my purpose, then, is to show that Glissant's poetic practice—both his writing of poetry and his writing *about* poetry—can enrich, complicate and inform our understanding of the terms that have thus far largely been treated as Caribbean or postcolonial "theory." If Glissant teaches us one thing throughout his career, it is that theories only achieve their fullest expression as poetics.

I choose to privilege the poems as such not because they contain the only, or even the best, expression of Glissant's poetic sensibility. The poetic pervades his most important series of essays, extending from *Soleil de la Conscience* (1956) to *La Cohée du Lamentin* (2005), which bills itself as "Poétique." His final essay, *Philosophie de la Relation*, appears to embrace philosophy—a term he had so far skirted—but just as soon contaminates the term with the subtitle *Poésie en étendue*. In this way, Glissant always insists on the disruption of generic boundaries, both as a way to decolonize writing and as a way to allow the poetic to flourish in all writing:

> La poésie est jusqu'ici le seul art qui peut aller réellement derrière les apparences. Je crois que c'est là une de ses vocations. C'est la volonté de défaire les genres, cette partition qui a été si profitable, si fructueuse dans le cas des littératures occidentales. Je crois que nous pouvons écrire des poèmes qui sont des essais, des essais qui sont des romans, des romans qui sont des poèmes. (IL 29–30)

The essays contain an unmistakable poetic quality: the first chapter of *Poétique de la Relation*, "La barque ouverte," could easily be read as an extended prose poem, given its rhythmic, metaphorical and imagistic richness. The novels, moreover, flout narratological norms—order of events, character development, perspective, etc.—to the point that the reader often must immerse herself into a highly compressed moment, much more akin to a lyrical experience than to a story. Consequently, Glissant's readers have the sense of being well acquainted with Glissant the *poète, avant tout* without having read a single poem. In a way, this is as it should be. Glissant's success as a *poète, avant tout* could be measured by the degree to which he appears as a poet even when not writing poems. And yet, it is worth engaging with the poems themselves, not only because such a large portion of his body of work (nine volumes) deserves attention but also because they play a special role in this work. The poems are simultaneously the fertile ground that gives birth

to Glissant's notion of Relation, along with its ancillary concepts, and the exemplary space that invites the reader to actively participate in Relation. By engaging with the poems, we gain a fuller sense of Glissant's overall thought and we allow this thought to challenge our methods of "studying" it, for Relation calls for the questioning of the hierarchies not only between Center and Periphery, First World and Third World, but also between author and reader, poem and scholar. Whereas the essays and novels have prompted studies in styles and registers familiar to critical scholarship, the poems force us to enter into Relation with the text in a more participatory way.

The poems are, above all, opaque. Quite probably, this fact accounts for their marginalization by Glissant scholarship so far. They rarely provide "useful" illustrations of Glissant's larger political, cultural or philosophical arguments. Yet Glissant's readers will also note the importance of the term *opacité*. If scholarship does not know what to do with Glissant's poems—if they resist illumination, explication or exhibition in the service of theoretical arguments—then they have succeeded, if we take seriously Glissant's assertion of the "right to opacity" at the beginning of *Le discours antillais* (14). Yet the function of the poems' opacity is not simply repellent, as I will argue in a later section, in the same way that the function of Glissant's broader notion of opacity is not simply as "self-defense" or "armature," as it has largely been understood (Headley 92, Murdoch 21). If the poems' opacity renders impossible the systematic explication of meanings and contexts, it also opens the poems to a more participatory reading, one that embraces the movement of their textual dynamics while accepting uncertainty about the particular content. Indeed, if we can speak of their "content" at all, it consists not so much of ideas or images but primarily of this ceaseless movement. Glissant says—and demonstrates—as much in the introduction to his earliest poems:

> *Poèmes — au long du travail de poésie* […] *premiers cris, rumeurs naïves, formes lassées — témoins, incommodes pourtant, de ce projet — qui, de se rencontrer*

> *imparfaits se trouvent solidaires parfaitement — et peuvent ici convaincre de s'arrêter à l'incertain — cela qui tremble, vacille et sans cesse redevient* (SR 9)

The poem's pulsation gets rhythmically punctuated by the long dashes. There is a sense of duration and endless movement: "*au long du travail de poésie* […] *sans cesse redevient*." The ontology of becoming that Glissant would later adopt more explicitly via Nietzsche and Deleuze is already present in this early text. Opacity is the motor of this becoming, for it arrests the penetration to a deeper meaning and forces the reader to move along the surface of the text, making connections between the disparate and unstable presences that populate it.

As a reader, then, my method must be speculative. I must patiently immerse myself in these texts without the expectation of mastering them. If I find myself turning to the theoretical texts, particularly *L'intention poétique* and *Poétique de la Relation*, it is not to illuminate the poems' content but to provide me with the vocabulary with which to speculate upon the reading experience. It would be possible to argue that Glissant's theoretical work is, at heart, a long rereading of his poetry—that his poems demand a kind of Relation from the beginning—but such periodization is not the primary focus of this study; indeed, this study seeks to disrupt any neat periodization. That said, it will be useful to begin in the historical context of Glissant's relationship with the poetry of Aimé Césaire, in order to demonstrate how the young poet distinguishes his work from Césaire's, even during a period—the late 1940s—when the latter is at the height of his power as an anticolonial poet and political activist. The difference with Césaire's poetry—which is not a sharp disagreement but rather a distinction of style and emphasis—will bring into view Glissant's poetic "project," that is, what he might hope to *do* with his poetry. This distinction will then open onto a discussion of the particularly Antillean poetics that Glissant develops first in his poetry and later in his essays, and my particular task is to emphasize the literary texture of this poetics. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an extended study of the category of opacity,

which, I will argue, is the chief poetic modality of Relation and which achieves its most radical practice in the poems themselves.

INTERSECTIONS AND DETOURS: CÉSAIRE AND GLISSANT

Aimé Césaire was hired to teach philosophy at Fort-de-France's Lycée Schoelcher in 1940, when Glissant was a young student there. Césaire never had Glissant in class, but undoubtedly Césaire's effect was felt around the school. The effect was not confined to Césaire, in fact: his wife Suzanne, whom he had met in Paris and married in 1937, had already begun teaching there, immediately upon the couple's return to Martinique. Dash asserts that the Césaires' only-tangential influence on Glissant partly accounts for the difference in tenor between Glissant's writing and that of his near-contemporary, Franz Fanon (*Édouard* 8). Fanon, a few years older than Glissant, did have Césaire as a teacher, and his early work bears an especially Césairean mark, whereas Glissant was only "indirectly exposed to a number of radically new ideas on poetry and poetic theory introduced by Césaire and disseminated in his review *Tropiques*" (ibid.). Yet even if Glissant did not receive direct instruction from the Césaires, he did have at least one direct connection to *Tropiques* during his time at the school. His philosophy teacher was Aristide Maugée, who had collaborated with Césaire in Paris for the review *L'étudiant noir* and would become a regular contributor to *Tropiques*, which was not only Aimé Césaire's review but also Suzanne's and René Ménil's, another Schoelcher philosophy teacher.[1] Maugée's first piece for *Tropiques*, as it happens, was an essay entitled "Poésie et obscurité," which develops a theory of poetic obscurity that might be seen as a precursor to Glissant's notion of "opacity." Thus, the Lycée Schoelcher was the center of gravity at that time not only of Césaire's thinking but of the entire

team of *Tropiques*, and it is beyond question that this environment had a profound effect on Glissant's poetic development.

Early readers of Glissant assumed that he sought to become a part of this group. Commentaries in the 1960s and 70s by Jacques Nantet, Léonard Sainville, and Jacques Chévrier assimilated Glissant to the "late surrealism" familiar to the poetics of *Tropiques*, essentially granting Glissant the status of "Aimé Césaire's successor in French Caribbean negritude" (ibid. 2). This is not entirely false—there is some evidence of Glissant's embrace during his youth of the Negritude-surrealist alliance against colonialism. In particular, Manuel Norvat has unearthed a speech from 1946, given the day before he left to study in Paris, in which the eighteen-year-old Glissant declares,

> Et notre culture sera révolutionnaire. C'est-à-dire que nous adhérons pleinement et entièrement à la théorie moderne de poésie surréaliste, dans les limites toutefois ou [sic] cette théorie, purifiée et régénérée, nous permet une intensification de notre action. (qtd. in Dash, "Ni réel," 34)

Yet, even if there are occasional surrealistic formulations and also some recuperations of Negritude's chief images (particularly the vegetal images of trees and brush), Glissant's earliest published poetry and literary criticism, written in Paris, quickly depart from the paradigms developed by his teachers from the Lycée Schoelcher.

To begin with, although Glissant shares with Césaire a close attention to the poetics of verticality and horizontality, he uses these orientations very differently. Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, in both its formal and metaphorical structures, depicts a movement from horizontal prostration to upright, vertical triumph. The path is not smooth—in fact, Nick Nesbitt makes a convincing argument that the seemingly triumphant ending also carries in its ambiguities

a prophecy of the postcolonial plight that would later afflict the Antilles (*Voicing* 78–79)—but the broader thrust is undeniably that of the anticolonial "Get up, stand up," decades before Bob Marley's own articulation of the same idea. The *Cahier* begins in long-breathed prose paragraphs, depicting a "flat," exhausted town on the speaker's native island: "Au bout du petit matin, cette ville plate étalée, trébuchée de son bon sens, inerte, essoufflée […]" (34).[2] Gradually, as signs of anticolonial self-determination begin to become stronger, the flat prose gives way to more and more short-lined, vertical verse, until a striking moment of overcoming in the final portion of the poem:

> La négraille aux senteurs d'oignon frit retrouve dans son sang répandu le goût amer de la liberté
>
> Et elle est debout la négraille
>
> la négraille assise
> inattendument debout
> debout dans la cale
> debout dans les cabines
> debout sur le pont
> debout dans le vent
> debout sous le soleil
> debout dans le sang
>
> debout
> et
> libre
>
> (80)

The effect is powerful, especially because of how the *Cahier*'s typographical and rhythmic structure sets up this sudden, staccato expression of uprightness to occur as a violent rupture in the overwhelmingly horizontal poetics of the poem's first half. With the *Cahier*, Césaire definitively establishes the trope of spatial orientation as one of the key metaphors in the poetics of decolonization.

Glissant picks up on this trope from his earliest poetry, but he reverses the priority. The 1947 collection *Terre à terre* and the 1948 *Laves* (both published later in *Le sang rivé*) are mostly written in either long-lined versets or blocks of prose. The long breath no longer implies, as it does in the *Cahier*, a culture "ésoufflée" or "muette" but rather a new ontology of proliferation, extension, and interconnection: a striking precursor to Deleuze and Guattari's modality of the rhizome, which Glissant would embrace, with modification, almost a half-century later. In "Train lent," the versets flow almost entirely without punctuation, the clauses winding their way across the page much like the thick vegetation that they describe. The inseparability of "parole" from geological and organic matter will become a chief theme in Glissant's poetry, and foretells the ontology of immanence, an all-accepting yet incomprehensible realm of being, that he would develop more explicitly from the 1980s onward:

> La parole que j'avais dite nourrie du feu de l'ambroisie que l'on prépare avec de la chair d'homme et des lianes de forêt brousse
> parole de brousse qui pousse dans les chairs exposées au soleil des clairières, voici
> j'ai ouvert la gousse enflammée du louvre y mettant mes prunelles d'orang glacé (SR 19)

The suggestion of cannibalism—part of a poetry-nourishing ambrosia made from "forest brush" and "man-flesh"—recalls Césaire, who polemically embraces cannibalism as a force of anti-rationalism in the *Cahier* ("Parce que nous vous haïssons vous / et votre raison, nous nous réclamons / de la démence précoce de la folie flambante / du cannibalisme tenace") and then, in the *Discourse on Colonialism*, asserts that Western "civilization" is more cannibalistic than any of the "primitive" cultures that it colonized (*Discourse* 48). Glissant, in "Train lent," maintains this double sense of cannibalism: on the one hand, he almost flaunts the anti-rationalism of a poetry that would valorize the spirituality of the deep bush and the rituals of man-eating; on the other, he

implies that, writing in the context of colonial violence, his poetry has no choice but to confront the more insidious economic and cultural cannibalism of Western colonialism. Western cannibalism, tragically, fuels his poetry. In contrast with Césaire's work, though, this poem emphasizes the movement of extension onward and outward, and this movement is driven as much by the vegetal images of the viny liana plant and the forest brush as by the proliferating clauses moving across the page.

The structural contrast between Césaire's and Glissant's poetry also happens on the level of syntax. As Césaire's English translators Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith have correctly argued, his poetry is highly hypotactic, "each clause introducing a dependent clause, the sequence building up to the last clause which usually brings a climactic opening or an ironical juxtaposition" (25). Hypotaxis is a vertical structure—*hypo-* ("under), *taxis* ("order, array")—and hypotactic grammar comprises sets of subordinate clauses in a hierarchical structure descending from or leading to a central idea in the main clause. Césaire uses this form to stunning effect in the *Cahier*, especially as his lines grow shorter and the anaphoric structure becomes denser and faster-paced. The verse erupts at times like a geyser and at other times expands more deliberately, like the growth of a great tree, simultaneously pushing deeper into the soil and expanding upward, transcending the flattened colonial landscape. Césaire's affirmation of the colonized subject gets strengthened by this vertical movement:

> Ceux qui n'ont inventé ni la poudre ni la boussole
> ceux qui n'ont jamais su dompter la vapeur ni l'électricité
> ceux qui n'ont exploré ni les mers ni le ciel mais ceux
> sans qui la terre ne serait pas la terre (66)

The downward path of the "ceux qui" reinforces the connection with "la terre" over and against the horizontal exploration of the seas and sky (here expanding across the page) that Césaire associates here with colonialism. The "retour au pays natal," then, creates in the speaker a

recognition for the importance of a *retour à la terre* or, as Nesbitt puts it, "a becoming-animal, a becoming-vegetal as an escape from Reason" (*Voicing* 88). Glissant, in one of his earliest articles of literary criticism, puts it this way: "L'œuvre poétique d'Aimé Césaire accomplit un projet dont nous observerons le double mouvement : se vouloir terre et arbre pour gagner sa liberté ; être libre pour s'identifier souverainement à la terre et à l'arbre" ("Aimé" 44). The vertical structure of his verse, ushered on by the hypotactic grammar, reinforces this effort to break both from the colonized position of prostration and from the logic of outward expansion inherent in modern European policy and thought.

At the end of that early article, however, Glissant avows his necessary break from Césaire. "Ainsi, poète nègre de la génération qui a suivi immédiatement celle de Césaire, je puis dire n'avoir pas connu les déchirements qui ont marqué l'apparition d'une littérature nègre de langue française" (ibid. 54). Even in his earliest poetry, Glissant is compelled to choose a different approach, and the differing poetic structure ultimately reflects his departure from Negritude thought. In contrast to Césaire's pervasively hypotactic poetry, Glissant's poetry is largely paratactic. It is purposefully chaotic, eschewing the kind of vertical ordering so prevalent in Césaire's verse in favor of a more messy amalgam of words, sounds, images and actions. The versets are not punctuated by commas, periods or subordinating conjunctions—every sentence is a run-on—but rather by unexpected repetitions that seem to be the only thing regulating the poem's errant movement across bodies and geographies. The emphasis on *terre* here becomes less about an affirmation of roots and more about the connection between the diverse material presences across the surface of the land:

> La terre c'est quand les paons dans la débauche du sous-bois entre les boas les ronces géantes n'osent plus faire la roue
> à force de penser terre j'éclate et la terre c'est quand vous ramassez les cervelles éclaboussées dans la poubelle de l'océan nouveau
> et les fleuves imaginent des jeux nouveaux où mes veines tiennent lieu de marelle d'eaux douce pour la fontaine à tarir (SR 19)

Spatial and temporal markers mix together—"la terre c'est quand"—as illogically as such seemingly incompatible images as a game of hopscotch (*marelle*) arising from the speaker's veins. Doubtless, there is a feeling of automatic writing here, related to the surrealist techniques that Glissant endorsed in his 1946 speech, a year before the composition of this poem. Yet unlike Césaire's surrealism in the version of the *Cahier*, prefaced by Breton, that appeared in France the following year, which juxtaposes often-incongruent images within a complex but regular structural and rhythmic framework, Glissant achieves a dreamlike effect by flouting the connective function of such basic grammatical elements as prepositions and conjunctions. It becomes the reader's responsibility to make the connection. Rimbaud pioneered this technique of the slippery preposition—the ungraspable but compelling refrain to "Barbare," for example, is "Le pavillon en viande saignante sur la soie des mers et des fleurs arctiques." This poetry creates a radically different world from the one we have been conditioned to perceive, and it thereby challenges the perceptive faculties' ability to seize anything that could be called "real." The poetics of decolonization needs to question perceived reality in such a fundamental way because this reality contains the seemingly irreversible onto-epistemological norms of colonialism. Yet, in addition to questioning perceived reality, Glissant's poetry includes broader modalities that suggest a specific alternative to these norms. In this instance, the images of the "giant bramble," the rivers, and the veins work together with the paratactic, horizontal, errant poetics to create a sense of haphazard expansion, splitting and forking. Meanwhile, at the end of the passage, the fountain—a vertical pillar of water—"dries up." If Césaire's poetry has been often called "volcanic," a site of eruptive uprising, then Glissant's poetry quite self-consciously addresses the longer period following the eruption, when the lava flows horizontally outward, joining rivers and streams and fusing with the

landscape. This image underlies his poetry from the beginning, from *Terre à terre* all the way to the aptly-titled final poem in 1994, "L'eau du volcan."

Glissant thus became conscious of how his poetics differed from Césaire's early on, and he implicitly elaborates on this difference in his major theoretical texts of the 1980s and 1990s when he distinguishes between a *poétique de la durée* and a *poétique de l'instant*. Glissant maintained throughout his career an appreciation for the verset or the "plainsong." In this poetic form, he saw the intermingling of the long-breathed creole *conteur* and the French modernists whom he so admired, especially Claudel, Perse and Char (PR 52–53). Their "poetics of duration" nurtures the slow development and accumulation of poetic elements, whereas the "poetics of the instant," associated with the Romantic and post-Romantic priority on the sudden epiphany, sees everything revealed in a flash, a *fulgurance*.

It is important not to exaggerate such differences between Césaire and Glissant, as has often been done, most famously perhaps in the *Éloge de la créolité* of Raphaël Confiant, Jean Bernabé, and Patrick Chamoiseau. In fact, Souleymane Bachir Diagne has recently argued, with some success, that the supposed rootedness or "essentialism" of Negritude is largely due to Sartre's presumptive definition of the movement in "Orphée noir," when the stakes of Negritude had not yet been fully articulated by its "founders," Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon-Gontran Damas (123). Diagne argues that, even when Negritude is essentialist, "its essentialism is also permanently self-deconstructing" inasmuch as its poetics, to use Césaire's phrase, "pirates" the French language and is therefore "not about essence but about continuous hybridization and, yes, creolization" (124, 128). Diagne is right to complicate the supposed rupture between Negritude and creolization, but, to be a little more specific, important differences still remain between Césaire and Glissant, especially in the spatial and temporal orientations of their poetics.

The earliest example of the contrast between Césaire's and Glissant's reflections on these orientations occurs in their differing readings of the early-twentieth-century poet Charles Péguy. Both heap praise upon Péguy's work for its way of envisioning political liberation in vast images of landscape and the peasantry, but their sense of his poetics could not be more different. [3] For Césaire, Péguy was an "homme de choc" ("Charles" 39). The notion of the epiphany (in the etymological sense of a sudden manifestation or "coming into view") is strong in Césaire reading of Péguy: "Homme d'action, mais soldat de l'idée. Homme du temporel, mais paladin du spirituel. Dégageant de toute chose l'esprit et la faisant passer à l'éternité" (ibid. 40). Glissant, on the other hand, speaks of Péguy in a distinctly Mallarméan register, praising the "pur pouvoir des mots, qui semble ne prendre sa source nulle part, et ne devoir finir sur rien de saisissable, d'accordé" (Rev. 916). The words' refusal to return to a fixable or graspable "source" makes for a poetics quite opposite from the instantaneous "choc" that Césaire describes. Glissant goes on, "Une infinie procession d'adjectifs, lesquels se reprennent, s'embrasent, s'écrasent, pour continuer encore, dans leur flamboiement monotone" (ibid.). Frankly, Glissant's reading feels much more faithful to the experience of Péguy's texts, most of which are a massive sequence of quatrains containing the kind of grand historical sweep reminiscent of Hugo's *La légende des siècles*, except more richly muddled. Glissant's reading, beyond being faithful to the experience of Péguy's text, also expresses his own poetic and ontological sensibility. Presaging his explicit embrace decades later of "baroque" thinking, Glissant's considers Péguy's extended, repetitive, durational verse to put him in a class "avec les grands travailleurs baroques" (ibid.). If, for Césaire, Péguy exemplifies an epiphanic transcendence of colonial or bourgeois norms by returning to the land, then for Glissant, Péguy joins a group of French modernists who began reviving the kind of verse of duration that would be necessary for a post-Negritude poetics.

Glissant's earliest poetry also reflects this priority. Reading the 1947 poem "Les yeux la voix" (the first of all of Glissant's collected poems) alongside the 1981 *Discours antillais*, one can see that Glissant already had a sense of the poetics that he would espouse and elaborate in his articles and essays in the decades to come. If, in 1947, the first words of his first poem describe how the torchlight only reveals the thickness and darkness of the atmosphere around it—"Les flambeaux s'accusaient de la couleur noir étang de la nuit"—then the theorization of the poetics of duration in 1981 appears as a rereading of this early work: "*poétique de la durée* […] elle n'invective pas l'auditeur, elle fait appel à lui, elle l'investit, elle le mène à travers des épaisseurs accumulées où peu à peu se dessine le projet" (DA 423). The sense of patience and of invitation or "appeal" is already a strong quality of the early work. Here, we are far from the volcanic eruption of Césaire's *Cahier*. Writing one year after Martinique's "departmentalization" by France, and very much in the moment of other anticolonial movements across the Global South,[4] Glissant seeks an alternative poetics of decolonization, less conscious of reaffirming or recuperating a subjugated cultural identity than of envisioning a new mode of identity creation: as he would express it later, no longer an *identité-racine* but an *identité-rhizome*. The horizontality of his verse—the versets, the plainsong rhythms—emphasizes this shift in emphasis away from the penetration to the unconscious depths (as in the proto-surrealism developed by the Césaires and Ménil in *Tropiques*) and towards an extension of the poetic subject across the surface of the world, in interaction with others.

Before leaving behind the contrast with Césaire for a focused exploration of how Glissant's poetry provides the ground in which his theoretical concepts germinate, it is crucial to explore the different ways in which the two poets make their writing "difficult." By difficult, I mean defiant of "reading comprehension" conceived as the collection of information that a text communicates.

The information in these poems, if that word is even operative, is not packaged into accessible, recognizable or digestible units. One always has the sense of not "getting it" in any complete way when reading Césaire or Glissant. The difficulties are different, however. A large part of Césaire's difficulty, as has been well documented,[5] comes from his selection or crafting of individual words. A lexical esoterism is at work in Césaire's poems, and this gesture has often been interpreted as a form of anticolonial violence against the French language. Carrie Noland convincingly argues that Césaire's rare words and neologisms are not so much due to the need to "cannibalize," appropriate, or disrupt the colonizer's French, but rather to create a more "expansive" textual language that welcomes polyglossia and multiplicity:

> Thus, instead of "cannibalizing" French, I would speculate that Césaire was developing—even globalizing—its morphological and lexical possibilities. Along with Latin and Greek terms, Césaire incorporates into his poems words specific to Martiniquan experience—"*morne*," "*marigot*," "*baliser*," "*piton*," "*fer de lance*," "*cassave*," and many more—in effect creolizing the text as well as the mouth that pronounces it. His poetry makes as full a use as possible within French orthography of the entire grapho-phonemic repertoire of his Creole/French/Greek/Latin larynx, registering creolizations, regionalisms, expletives, and erudite vocabularies in order to increase the physical, gesticular, and choreographic range of the poem's potential actualizations. His expansive diction could be seen as an effort to break through the boundaries of French phonetics in order to express a body afforded more than one linguistic habitus. There is indeed something violent in his expansiveness, as if he wanted to explode the limits of French not to do damage to French per se, or

> exorcise it from his mouth, but rather to realize the full multiplicity of lingual movements available to his Franco-Creole-Greco-Latin tongue. (44)

Compelling and accurate as this argument is, Noland is also "creolizing" Césaire in the sense that *créolisation* is a specifically Glissantian notion.[6] The Deleuzoguattaro-Glissantian terminology of "expansiveness," "multiplicity," "potential actualizations," as well as the implication of linguistic schizophrenia ("Creole/French/Greek/Latin"), is not native to Césaire's lexicon but rather implies that Césaire's work presages the immanent, baroque ontology that Glissant's poetics much later would develop more fully. Even if this rapprochement is only by implication, it does foretell Diagne's argument that the separation between Césaire and Glissant is neither neat nor absolute. Yet, to be even more specific, it is just as important to distinguish between the two kinds of "expansiveness" promoted by Césairean Negritude and Glissantian Relation, each of which are an important factor in the difficulty of the poetry. Césaire, like Senghor, did conceive of Negritude as a universal, all-accepting system, born of the shared condition of black peoples but available to all of humanity: "ce que je veux / c'est pour la faim universelle / pour la soif universelle / la sommer libre enfin" (*Collected* 70). However, if Césaire's poetics affirms multiplicities and expansion, it does not quite lead to the kind of *relation* celebrated in Glissant's poetics. Césaire's esoterism feels more idiosyncratic, rooted in the poet's singular ability to collect and collage words from his diverse worldly and textual experiences. In this respect, Negritude's universalism is a "concrete universal," to borrow a Hegelian term that Césaire openly espoused.[7] That is, Césaire's lexical idiosyncrasy, individual as it is, crystallizes the universal values of Negritude by demonstrating them in a particular, concrete instance.

The difficulty of Glissant's poetry, on the other hand, is its "opacity." Glissant does not share Césaire's taste for the rare word; in fact, when he uses a rare word or Creolism, he often

provides a definition either in the text itself or in an appended glossary—virtual blasphemy for both surrealism and High Modernism. The next section of this chapter will detail the development of opacity as one of Glissant's crucial poetico-political concepts, intimately related to the horizontal, errant poetics that this section has located in the early poetry. By way of transition, then, it is worth examining the *sensation* of opacity present in his poems from the very beginning—strongly present in the first line of the 1947 "Les yeux la voix," which begins *Le sang rivé*: "Les flambeaux s'accusaient de la couleur noir étang de la nuit." The torchlight does not cut through the darkness but simply reveals the night in all of its thickness. An extraordinary viscosity characterizes the atmosphere of Glissant's poetry, to the point where the "je" verges on dissolving into the thick substances of fog, brush, mud, sea or ice that make up his world:

> Nos mains solubles nos airs de rapine boiseuse la paille flambée de nos yeux !
> Mers, mon silence à travers vous patiemment renaît
> À travers vous orées à travers vous la boue
> La brume, et la conjonction du gel et du dégel. (SR 13)

The atmospheric thickness corresponds to the experience of reading this text, for the strange combination of substantives and prepositions, along with the scarcity of verbs, seems to slow the progression of images and impart to them an unusual density. And yet the largely unpunctuated verse encourages the reading eye to continue moving, to continue experiencing the textual world and making tentative connections between its elements. This is the experience of Glissant's opacity, which is not sheer impenetrability nor unfathomable obscurity but rather an invitation to experience the world at its densest and richest. Glissant intuits the value of such an experience very early on in his poetic writings, and he discovers the political and philosophical fecundity of opacity as he begins to theorize this experience decades later in his essays.

GLISSANT'S POETICS OF OPACITY

> *...nous voyons les corbeaux et nous disons : ils parlent une langue étrangère... mais non, les corbeaux ne parlent pas une langue étrangère, les corbeaux parlent leur propre langue et nous ne la comprenons pas...*
>
> -Simone Schwartz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*

Glissant's poetry challenges the value of "understanding," a term that gets bandied about unproblematically across a range of disciplines and discourses, and this critique of a way of reading and experiencing texts then develops into a broader critique of Western rationalism. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, two years after Glissant left Martinique for Paris, resolves that education should, first of all, develop intercultural understanding: "Education […] shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" ("Universal"). Understanding, it is supposed, fosters respect for human dignity, connects people across lines of difference, and counters the dehumanizing impulse of genocide and colonialism. It was decades later that Glissant began explicitly to assert a very different human right, namely, the right *not* to be understood: "Nous réclamons le droit à l'opacité" (DA 14). This assertion brought *opacité* squarely into the discourse of the multidisciplinary realm of postcolonial theory, wherein literary critics, anthropologists, historians and sociologists investigate how subjects and cultures maintain their specificity against the universalizing tendencies of globalization and neocolonialism (Dash, *Édouard* 1). A person exercises the right to opacity by refusing to conform to rationalist modes of understanding; he or she resists any epistemology that would "construct the Other as an *object* of knowledge" (Britton, *Édouard* 19). However, as I have begun to show, Glissant conceived of opacity first and foremost in his poetry and also in his readings of earlier writers, from Mallarmé to Saint-John Perse to

William Faulkner, whose moments of complication or incomprehensibility he found productive. By examining the literary valence of this concept of Caribbean philosophy, I will claim that opacity not only protects the subject from the invasive grasp of (neo)colonial thought but also, more affirmatively, invites the reader to join the poet on equal footing in the process of sense-making. It is this kind of collective poetics, a collectivity created in opacity, that Glissant imagines in his broader world vision of Relation and the Tout-Monde.

Glissant's vast corpus of poems, novels, theatre and critical essays begins in the late 1940s and ends just before his death in 2011. The notion of opacity gets developed throughout the entirety of this long career, including in the earliest poetry collections *Le sang rivé* and *Un champ d'îles*, but Caribbean and postcolonial studies tend to focus on Glissant's assertion of the *droit à l'opacité* at the beginning of the seminal critical work *Le discours antillais* (1981). It is here that the term's political, militant valence appears most fully. Opacity becomes a mode of survival for "les peuples néantisés qui opposent aujourd'hui à l'universel de la transparence, imposé par l'Occident" (DA 14). This call for epistemological resistance has fit well into a postcolonial discourse that emphasizes the subaltern's power to "write back," as Helen Tiffin puts it, not only to a Western audience but also "to the whole of the discursive field" that mediates and hierarchizes the reading of texts (98). The right to opacity could be seen as a kind of radical "writing back" that challenges, at the most basic level, the idea of reading comprehension. Additionally, Michael Dash notes that this resistance can take form in the radical cultural impenetrability of the Maroons—the descendants of escaped slaves still living in isolated communities in Caribbean islands' mountainous interior—or as a "more anonymous and pedestrian form of resistance" in everyday language (Dash, *Édouard* 137, 156). Celia Britton provides a compelling account of the political stakes of this militancy:

> Relation and opacity work together to resist the reductiveness of humanism [...] In this sense opacity becomes a *militant* position [...] opacity is also a defense against *understanding*, at least in the hierarchical, objectifying way in which this usually operates between the West and the Third World [...] The right to opacity [...] is a right not to be *understood*. (*Édouard* 19)

Glissant's etymological critique of "comprehension" as a possessive seizure (*com-prehendere*) confirms Britton's sense that opacity applies to both the subject and his or her speech. More recently, in the 2013 issue of *Callaloo* dedicated to Glissant soon after his death, H. Adlai Murdoch describes how this mode of resistance fits, ontologically and epistemologically, into the philosophy of the Tout-Monde that Glissant develops in his later work: "*Opacité*, then, serves to posit an unknowable otherness that, in its turn, mediates a new groundwork for being-in-the-world. At bottom, it is an epistemologically-grounded world vision that allows each subject the right to her or his own unknowability" ("Édouard" 885). For Murdoch, moreover, opacity is a cultural phenomenon as much as an individual one: "Such an interpretation of opacity inscribes an implicit recognition that each subject maintains cultural patterns and artifacts that will remain incomprehensible to other subjects who are not inscribed in, or have not been formed by, the same culture" (ibid.). The upshot of Murdoch's argument is, quite crucially, that the category of opacity must necessarily arise from a situation of colonial domination, in which one group requires this form of epistemological resistance in order to preserve its subjective agency, in order to survive as a culture. In the postcolonial global age, the right to opacity would mediate the relationship between the local and the global by guaranteeing cultural specificity against the homogenizing forces of neoliberal economics and dominant cultural trends.

However, these accounts' inattention to the poetic, that is, creative or productive power of opacity reflects the simplification that the term has undergone in discussions of Glissant's oeuvre. Few scholars remember how Glissant develops opacity in the work of the 1950s and 1960s, including the poems in *Un champ d'îles* and *Le sang rivé* and the essays in *Soleil de la conscience* and *L'intention poétique*. Opacity, especially at that time, was tied deeply to Glissant's experience of reading and writing literature. The eventual militancy of the claim to the right to opacity grew out of Glissant's experience of language as the medium through which all political activity must occur. To read the right to opacity as a poetic claim as much as a political one is not to reduce its political purchase, nor to exaggerate poetry's importance to specific political action. Rather, it is to recognize the fundamental importance of poetry to the vision of human interaction that Glissant calls Relation, whose activity he calls, quite deliberately, the "poetics" of Relation. It is to reintroduce complexity into a term that, despite its critique of reductive understandings, has itself been reduced to a simple understanding. Opacity, in its fullest sense, provides not simply a protective shield for the postcolonial subject but rather an affirmative modality for reading, writing and interacting in the postcolonial world. In the same way, Glissant's poetry, some of the most opaque work written in French in the twentieth century, does not seek to preserve local cultural artifacts from the influence of outside forces; on the contrary, it entrusts itself to the world, embracing, as Glissant repeatedly affirms, the unforeseeable (*imprévisible*) possibilities of the enunciation.

Philosophy, Poetry, Opacity

Opacity is Relation's epistemology and poetic modality. It conditions the apprehension of knowledge and the experience of self-expression in a system of thought opposed to the colonial

order. Glissant spends his entire career conceptualizing Relation, and opacity remains closely tied to Relation throughout its development. Glissant's thought, then, rests on a chief paradox: a notion of intercultural and inter-subjective relationality that depends, strangely, on incomprehension. His championing of opacity in his later essays (after 1980), I have suggested, occurs as a tacit rereading of the poetic works and the literary criticism he published earlier in his career. As he shifts between and mixes philosophical frameworks and methodologies throughout his essays, Glissant continually renews his reflection on the potential for poetic language to create Relation precisely by remaining dense, difficult or opaque. My aim in this section, then, is to highlight how opacity's development as a poetic concept was implicated in the development of Glissant's philosophical thought, particularly the different ontological and epistemological concepts that inform his articulation of Relation across his career.

The shifts in Glissant's thought have been much debated in recent years. Peter Hallward's polemical *Absolutely Postcolonial* challenges the widely held notion that Glissant's oeuvre is a long elaboration of a set of key concepts and that "his major preoccupations are apparent from the earliest writing" (Dash, *Édouard* 27). Hallward argues instead that the "late Glissant" (after the publication of *Le discours antillais* in 1981) shifts radically away from specific political concerns of national liberation towards an over-aestheticized, apolitical poetics. In Hallward's critique, this shift is symptomatic of postcolonial studies in general, which, under the influence of such theorists as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the postmodern philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, has moved away from an examination of "specific" anti-colonial action, toward celebrations of abstract, generalized "singularity." Nick Nesbitt and Chris Bongie, though more generous towards Glissant, also identify an "aesthetic turn" in the later work (Nesbitt, "Early Glissant" 934; Bongie, *Friends* 328–329). Celia Britton and Charles Forsdick, on the other

hand, have argued that this shift does not signify a turn away from politics but rather a different way of approaching the set of political questions with which Glissant has always been concerned (Britton, "Philosophy" 846; Forsdick, "Late" 124). My interest, for the moment, in this debate lies in how it has largely located Glissant's "shift" in his adoption of Deleuze in *Poétique de la Relation* and, moreover, the assertion (by Nesbitt and Hallward in particular) of Glissant's latent Hegelianism earlier in his career. Although I ultimately argue that Glissant's poems and poetic prose disrupt this periodization—it is quite Deleuzian before Deleuze even wrote his first book—Glissant's mixing and moving between the seemingly disparate philosophical frameworks of Hegel and Deleuze fundamentally inform his conceptualization of opacity throughout his essays.

It is strange to speak of a Hegelian Glissant, for, as Glissant himself points out, Hegel's racism and Eurocentrism is stark.[8] Nonetheless, Nick Nesbitt's work in *Voicing Memory* successfully demonstrates the degree to which Glissant's notion of Relation is in fact a "dialectical relation"—a system built upon the interaction of opposing terms. Alexandre Kojève's revival of Hegel in the 1930s and 1940s, indeed, had a great influence on Glissant's predecessors in the Negritude movement, as did the dialectical thought of Jean-Paul Sartre. As Nesbitt argues, Hegel provided the anti-colonial Negritude movement with both a language of resistance, which Sartre famously summed up in his phrase "anti-racist racism," and a hope that by negating the colonized self in their writing, the Negritude poets could enter into history as liberated subjects (*Voicing* 25). Arriving at the tail-end of this movement, Glissant sought to imagine dialectical resistance as an affirmative mode of expression. From the beginning of *L'intention poétique* (1969), opacity becomes an integral condition for the concept of relation,[9] and the influence of Hegelian dialectics looms large. The negation of comprehension by opacity, the tension between the self's desire to understand and the other's *densité* or impenetrability, gives way to a higher mode of self-

expression: “la poétique de la relation suppose qu’à chacun soit proposée la densité (l’opacité) de l’autre. Plus l’autre résiste dans son épaisseur ou sa fluidité (sans s’y limiter), plus sa réalité devient expressive, et plus la relation féconde” (IP 23). Relation here occurs as a dialectical synthesis between the drive to understand and the opacity that resists this understanding; the greater the tension that this resistance creates, the richer the experience of relation that follows.

Even a cursory glance at Glissant’s early musings shows that this dialectic movement pervades Glissant’s world. *Soleil de la conscience* (1956) is the first volume in the essay series called “Poétiques” that spans Glissant’s career and renders his philosophical notions into a distinctly poetic language. In its more imagistic moments, *Soleil*, like Glissant’s early poetry, is full of contrasts between light and dark, ethereal and dense, fluid and solid, opaque and transparent. Speaking of his preference for working in the hours before dawn, the young Glissant reveals his taste for such opposites:

> *J’ai peur de hâter cette nuit. D’épuiser déjà cette nuit où l’obscurité monte comme un amour défunt. Je m’obstine à cette ultime clarté d’avant le matin : elle est sauvage et drue, quelque splendeur qui de soi-même s’affame*. (SC 14)

The “ultimate clarity” occurs in the dark, in the *petit matin*, recalling Aimé Césaire’s famous refrain in the *Cahier*. This clarity is, oddly, “*drue*”—one of Glissant’s favorite adjectives at this stage in his career, uniting the sense of vigor and proliferation with a feeling of impenetrable density, like a thick plant. The word is prominent in the poetry collection *Un champ d’îles*, published four years earlier, where it is also associated with the contrast between night and day, clarity and obscurity:

> Mais lui ne touche plus que les bâtisses de ce bruit autour des rues où l’herbe pousse. Elle pousse ! *drue* et sanglante dans son cœur (est-ce la rue, ou bien son

> cœur ?)—*drue* et blessée, l'herbe a gravi la nuit ! Maintenant sur la prairie les beaux pluviers réapparus font des réverbères, non, des étoiles. Qu'est-ce l'étoile sinon la chose très obscure […] ? (PC 69, my italics)

On the one hand, *drue*, which refers most literally to a plant whose multiple stems result in a dense mass, foreshadows Glissant's later adoption of Deleuze's ontology of proliferating multiplicity, the rhizome. On the other hand, *drue* is inscribed into these passages' play of productive contradictions: clarity can only come about via an engagement with obscurity ("Qu'est-ce l'étoile sinon la chose très obscure"), and darkness provides the ground for the "*splendeur*" of Glissantian poetics.

Just as the adjective *dru* both expresses the dialectical movement of Glissant's early writing and hints at his future adoption of Deleuzian nomadology, so does the explicit mention of dialectics in *Soleil de la conscience* coincide with a language of chaos that presages Glissant's much later category of the *chaos-monde*. Indeed, it is only in retrospect that these two systems might seem separate, for in Glissant's paragraphs the "synthesis" of cultures in the Antilles occurs in a state of productive chaos. Of the Antilles, Glissant affirms, "voici une synthèse de races, de mœurs, de savoirs, mais qui tend vers son unité propre" (SC 15). This "unity," though, is always in question due to the disorganizing forces of Antillean multiplicity, as he asserts only a page later. Here, Glissant's challenge to the postcolonial world is to embrace this synthetic chaos as a poetics that inevitably reverberates into politics: "il est un temps d'ouverture chaotique, de pressentiment anarchique de l'histoire, de mâchage furieux des mots, de saisi vertigineuse des clartés" (ibid. 16). Indeed, throughout his oeuvre, Glissant attempts to bring the powerful push-pull movement of binary opposites (opacity and transparency not the least of them) into a system that also recognizes complex, nonlinear, nonhierarchical proliferation as an affirmative challenge to old colonial

hierarchies and rationalist epistemologies. The later works on *Relation* and *Tout-Monde* attempt more formally to theorize this progression toward the Whole, the *Tout*, that nonetheless cannot be expressed as a comprehensive singularity but rather as an incomprehensible mass of proliferating offshoots.

The early poetry enacts this paradoxical system by demonstrating a fascination with dialectical opposites while also, with its ambiguous pronouns and paratactic combinations of diverse images, lending itself to an "ouverture chaotique." Indeed, the great number of dialectical opposites do not resolve into neat syntheses but rather propel the expression into a space of deliberate disorder, for the collision of such elements as light and dark or fluid and solid calls into question the very epistemology that separated them in the first place. To return to an early passage from *Le sang rivé*, for example, the "moi" encapsulates qualities of impenetrability and density and, at the same time, radical transparency and permeability—a celebration of the oxymoron's ability to disrupt the compartmentalizing tendency of conventional language:

> Les fleuves passent à travers moi vers la transparence des terres me voilà […]
> Dans ce foisonnement de soleils que distribuent l'arrosoir des arbres C'est moi la rivière la roche impassible et dans son sein l'ardeur de la terre
> La foudre la main qui caresse l'éclair la main qui offre c'est nous […] (PC 25)

The contrast between the flowing transparency of the river and the hard impassibility of the boulder is reflected in the tension between the unpunctuated, fluid syntax and the impenetrable collection of words which do not cohere into a comprehensive message. Similar meditations, both formal and conceptual, on the tension between these contrasting perceptions of the world crop up throughout Glissant's early literature. This literature's distinctive opacity, its resistance to easy comprehension or explication, reinforces the sense that the most productive and enlightening vision of the world arises from experiences of abysmal darkness. Similarly, the wisdom of the

Caribbean, as he later says in "La barque ouverte," is derived from the collective memory of the "expérience du gouffre"—the bowels of the slave ship, the graveyard of the Atlantic (PR 20).

Whereas the poetic writing, including parts of *Soleil de la conscience* as well as the first two collections of poetry, complicates this dialectic relationality with a proto-Deleuzian movement of chaotic proliferation, Glissant's earlier literary criticism bears more exclusively the signs of Hegelian influence. Glissant's first formal analysis of opacity comes in *L'intention poétique*. The chapter entitled "Sur l'opacité" is an examination of William Faulkner's novels, especially *Absalom, Absalom!* Glissant asserts, in an overt dialectic, that Faulkner's failure to enter into his black characters' psyches is, in fact, one of the most positive elements of his examination of racial politics in the American South. The Black American, in this fiction, can only be known by his opacity, which renders his character all the more expressive:

> L'opacité du Nègre pour Faulkner est, bien entendu, son impénétrabilité : autant que la peau noire, l'âme obscure […] Le monologue intérieur ne sera jamais propre au personnage noir, et ce qu'on surprendra le plus souvent de celui-ci ce sera un grommellement […] Pourquoi donc ces personnages […] nous retiennent-ils ? Précisément pour leur négativité révélatrice : pour l'impossibilité où se trouve l'auteur, qui les a créés, d'aller au fond de leurs motivations. Ils opposent ainsi à Faulkner lui-même un *non au-delà* qu'il ne franchira jamais. Autrement dit : l'incapacité de Faulkner à cerner ce personnage est *positive*. (IP 176–177)

Faulkner brings his black characters to life precisely by laying bare his own inability to gain access to their inner life.[10] It is not simply a question of respecting the other's impenetrability or irreducibility. In this dialectical logic,[11] incomprehensibility becomes a positive, a "négativité révélatrice," in which the character's opacity signals an overcoming of the reader's reductive grasp

and, moreover, a new way of understanding that relies on a self-conscious critique of the literary and linguistic processes through which knowledge is apprehended. A different version of this logic appears in the prose poetry of *Un champ d'îles*, which contains the paradoxical refrain, "Absente qui êtes présence!" (PC 60). In the context of a Caribbean history defined by the decimation of native populations and the violent uprooting of African populations from their ancestral homes, presence cannot come about without a prior absence. Caribbean knowledge depends upon a confrontation with the obscurity at the heart of its narrative, and Glissant seems to suggest that Caribbean poetics must carry the mark of that obscurity—must acknowledge the contingency or incompleteness of all knowledge. He finds a similar gesture in Faulkner's fiction, which casts a veil over a tragic secret at its core—in *Absalom, Absalom!*, this secret is the miscegenation in the Sutpen family—and the act of reading leads to an avowal of that secret without the complete comprehension of it. The entire narration of *Absalom, Absalom!* is indeed a series of unreliable rereadings by various characters. Layers of storytelling disrupt the access to the original historical facts of the Sutpen family tragedy. The novel thus critiques the possibility of storytelling itself as a form of unveiling, and the object of examination becomes, rather than the truth behind the fiction, the mechanism itself of this necessarily opaque fiction:

> Affirmer en même temps le secret original et exposer un mécanisme de son dévoilement, c'est aviver la conscience collective, l'entretenir dans l'angoisse et l'interrogation. Le roman dévoile un voilé qui ne devient jamais *pur dévoilé* mais *s'expose* dans la mécanique même du dévoilement. (IP 178)

The dizzying oscillations of what Glissant calls "cette suprême dialectique" reenacts the collective "vertige" that he claims Faulkner's novels elicit in their readers, a vertigo rooted in the American historical memory, which relies on an idea of racial and ancestral purity but which is constantly

confronted by the fact of *métissage* or miscegenation at its secret center. America was built on a foundation of racial mixing, but its dominant narrative constantly struggles to recuperate its pure "roots" in the Old World. Faulkner's opaque writing avows this uncomfortable fact precisely by examining the veil that has been cast over the *métissage* at the origins of American history. The motivations of such characters as Charles Bon and Joe Christmas, both of whom "pass" as white until their blackness is discovered, provide the core mystery around which Faulkner's complex and difficult sentences turn.

After *L'intention poétique*, Glissant's next work of critical prose is the seminal *Discours antillais*, in which he first asserts the "droit à l'opacité." The *Discours* probably remains Glissant's most canonical text,[12] and it also speaks most clearly to the specific issues of the departmentalization of the French West Indies. It mentions opacity in the first pages and, later, in its discussion of Martinican Creole, which began, Glissant claims, as a willful inscrutability vis-à-vis the white plantation families. It is in the *Discours* that opacity takes on its most militant valence—"l'élan des peoples néantisés qui opposent aujourd'hui à l'universel de la transparence, imposé par l'Occident" (DA 14)—but, crucially, Glissant also critiques Martinican Creole (as opposed to Haitian Creole) for its insularity, which he calls a "poétique contrainte," because it fails to adapt itself to the needs of a free population and autonomous economy (ibid. 402–403). The failures of Creole, Glissant asserts, are closely tied to Martinique's economic failures: an island that no longer produces its own goods must import everything it needs; its own language therefore cannot be the language of the marketplace (ibid. 410–411). It is beyond the scope of this section to analyze the complex demands that Glissant makes of his island, but suffice it to say that an enclosed, protective form of opacity was never the solution. Even in *Le discours antillais*, opacity's resistant function retains the dialectic impulse to project expression outward, to turn a form of

resistance into a mode of sharing, to open itself via its initial closure. The debate in Martinique between Creole and French, he states, must end in the affirmation of an opacity that is constantly active, constantly renewing its process and diversifying itself:

> D'abord, du point de vue du débat entre ces deux langues, le créole et le français, dont l'une a jusqu'ici subi la transcendance de l'autre, on peut affirmer que la seule pratique possible est de les rendre *opaques* l'une à l'autre. Développer partout, contre un humanisme universalisant et réducteur, la théorie des opacités particulières. Dans le monde de la Relation, qui prend le relais du système unifiant de l'Être, consentir à l'opacité c'est-à-dire la densité irréductible de l'autre, c'est accomplir véritablement, à travers le divers, l'humain. L'humain n'est peut-être pas l'« image de l'homme » mais aujourd'hui la trame sans cesse recommencée de ces opacités consenties. (ibid. 418)

It would be simple enough to read this paragraph as positing a pure opposition, in which French and Creole form opposing terms—"*opaque,* l'une à l'autre"—imagining opacity as a mechanism for relation via mutual self-distinction. However, elements of the Glissant of *Poétique de la Relation*—the first text after the so-called "aesthetic turn" in Glissant's career—are already present in the *Discours*'s account of opacity, in its insistence on a solidarity built in opacity. The language here refers tacitly to the notion of text: etymologically speaking, "la trame"—the weave—creates the text (from the Latin *textus*, "thing woven"). The notion of "opacité consenties," in addition to calling for a mutual acceptance of incomprehension, carries the implication of a broader, collective sense-making (*con-sentir*).

This may seem like etymological quibbling if it were not for the fact that Glissant increases this textual/textile lexicon in his later work. In his chapter in *Poétique de la Relation* entitled "Pour

l'opacité," Glissant uses the metaphor of the text as a "weave" to argue that opacity occurs not in isolation but rather in open solidarity. For him, coexistence is precisely what distinguishes "difference" from "opacity." The textual metaphor is much more explicit here than in the *Discours*, and in the spirit of Glissantian *poétique*, it assumes the fundamental connection between the socio-political and the literary:

> Non pas seulement consentir au droit à la différence mais, plus avant, au droit à l'opacité, qui n'est pas l'enfermement dans une autarcie impénétrable, mais la subsistance dans une singularité non réductible. Des opacités peuvent coexister, confluer, tramant des tissus dont la véritable compréhension porteraient sur la texture de cette trame et non pas sur la nature des composants. (PR 204)

Glissant here conceives of opacity as a textual weave that must be created by collectivities. The refusal to penetrate to the "nature" of the text speaks quite directly to the material image of an opaque text, whose incomprehensibility disrupts the penetration to a "deeper meaning" and rather draws the attention to its corporeal surface, its "texture." Opacity achieves this horizontal, collective signification as part of the quasi-Deleuzian system that Glissant imagines in *Poétique de la Relation*, which borrows from Deleuze such terms as the Baroque, the rhizome, and the *chaos-monde* (from Deleuze's *chaosmos*, in turn borrowed from Joyce) to contest what he calls the rationalist idea of "Nature […] harmonieuse, homogène et connaissable en profondeur" (ibid. 91). Glissant heralds the Baroque as a recognition of the world's chaotic, ever-changing, unpredictable existence—in short, a challenge to the rationalistic mindset that laid the groundwork for colonialism and human objectification. Drawing on Deleuze's analysis of art, architecture and philosophy in *Le pli*, Glissant asserts that Baroque art provided a challenge to the predominant, essentializing epistemology in Europe:

> L'art baroque fut une réaction contre la prétention rationaliste à pénétrer d'un mouvement uniforme et décisif les arcanes du connu. Le frisson baroque vise à signifier par là que toute connaissance est à venir, et que c'est ce qui en fait la valeur. Aussi bien les techniques du baroque vont-elles favoriser l' « extension » au lieu de la « profondeur ». (ibid. 91–92)

If Relation is the dynamic world vision that comes of this Baroque aesthetic, then opacity is its form of expression. The opaque text, such as Glissant encountered in his readings of Mallarmé, Saint-John Perse and Faulkner, refuses a poetics of depth and forces a reading of the surface. The collective reading of the surface, in which meaning is not fixed or determined but rather unpredictable and constantly renewed with every reading, stands in stark contrast to the Erasmian humanist ideal of a single scholar penetrating to the original, underlying truth of a text.[13] The political stakes of such a reading are considerable; the embrace of unknowability not only resists the impulse to subsume subjects into racial or cultural essences but, more affirmatively, provides a modality for producing meaning in a way that recognizes the infinite possibility of the opaque text. A text that cannot be mastered can thus be understood in a multiplicity of ways. This is not to collapse signification into a nihilistic form of moral relativism; it is indeed a *kind* of relativism inasmuch as it places meaning in relation with other possibilities of meaning which could have been realized under other circumstances, but it is not the kind of relativism in which a subject appropriates meaning for his own use. As Deleuze explains in *Le pli*, a baroque relativism demonstrates to the reader or viewer that a variation in meaning had always been possible: "Ce n'est pas une variation de la vérité d'après le sujet, mais la condition sous laquelle apparaît au sujet la vérité d'une variation" (27). The surface reading, the reading of opacity in Relation, includes a consciousness of the collective, multiple activity in which each reading must take part.

Glissant thus increasingly adopts the terms of Deleuze's immanent ontology (even if the earlier texts developed similar ideas with less distinct terms), in which being is a single material plane extending to infinity, as opposed to the separation between material and transcendental, divine, or ideal realms. *Poétique de la Relation* explains Relation as rhizomatic, borrowing the key term from Deleuze's work with Félix Guattari in *Mille plateaux*. As opposed to the "arborescent" system of the root, in which knowledge returns to an idealized, unified and recognizable origin, the rhizome is a stem without a root, an inherently multiple growth proliferating in all directions: "un rhizome ne commence et n'aboutit pas, il est toujours au milieu, entre les choses, inter-être, *intermezzo*" (MP 36). Yet whereas Deleuze and Guattari conceive of the rhizome as wholly different from a binary, Hegelian root system ("un rhizome comme tige souterraine se distingue absolument des racines et radicelles" (ibid. 13)), Glissant maintains the language of the root, conceiving of the rhizome as a multiplied root: "La racine est unique, c'est une souche qui prend tout sur elle et tue alentour ; [Deleuze et Guattari] lui opposent le rhizome qui est une *racine démultipliée*, étendue en réseau dans la terre ou dans l'air, sans qu'aucune souche y intervienne en prédateur irrémédiable" (PR 23, my italics). Glissant's misreading of Deleuze and Guattari here demonstrates his commitment to finding an alternative root system for the Caribbean subject, whom the slave trade and plantation system violently deracinated. Excluded from Western, capital-H *Histoire*, Glissant says, the Caribbean subject must accede to, via a poetic act, a multiplicity of "histoires" (DA 227); Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, firmly oppose any kind of "histoire," which implies a rooted sequence (MP 34).

Thus, despite his enthusiasm for Deleuze's affirmative and proliferating ontology, Glissant maintains the Hegelian privilege of the entry into history: "Of course, Glissant criticizes the erasure of Antillean difference within the putative universalism of classical and late French colonialism,

but he does so within the horizon of a greater totality: that of a self-conscious, globally engaged subject" (Nesbitt, *Voicing* 181). The making of "histoires" as opposed to "Histoire" constitutes the Caribbean form of this becoming-self-conscious. Similarly, if the late version of Relation follows the Deleuzian modality of the rhizome, it still depends upon the Hegelian language of the Other (which Deleuze carefully avoids): "La pensée du rhizome serait au principe de ce que j'appelle une poétique de la Relation, selon laquelle toute identité s'étend dans un rapport à l'Autre" (PR 23). It would be hard to find a more economical coupling of Deleuze and Hegel, a mixing of ontologies of immanent extension and dialectic relation—a coupling unwilled by Deleuze.[14] Nesbitt is thus right to propose that Glissant's work is "divided, somewhat schizophrenically, […] between a Spinozian [and, implicitly, Deleuzian] discourse of unbroken immanence and one of dialectical enlightenment" (*Voicing* 189). Considering Deleuze's and Guattari's adoption of "schizo-analyse" as an alternative to the arborescent, Oedipal discourse of psychoanalysis, Nesbitt's term tacitly suggests that Glissant is more Deleuzoguattarian than Deleuze and Guattari themselves, that is, more willing to bring together disparate concepts in a single system of thought.

Opacity accordingly bears the mark of this schizophrenic ontology. On the one hand, the material presence of incomprehensible language causes sense to ramify extensively and affirmatively rather than to be found through the penetration to a rooted referent. On the other hand, the opaque surface both negates access to a deeper meaning and provides a new form of visibility, namely, the text's material presence. Hallward, in his sharp critique of Glissant, claims that this new visibility becomes yet another mode of counterproductive reduction, a new transparency: "Glissant's famous defence of the 'right to opacity,' then, must be understood […] as a mechanism organized in the interest of its own eventual dissolution […] The specifically opaque will itself become the *means* to a more total becoming-transparent which surpasses it and

includes it" (78). Hallward's rote rehearsal of the Hegelian dialectic, in which every term contains the seeds of its own self-annihilation, is valid inasmuch as it refers to a greater form of understanding that opacity brings about. Glissant even appears to make such a claim, renewing *transparence* as a positive term in a few places in his work, in sharp contrast to the far more numerous moments when he decries transparency as an invasive, essentializing rationalism. In *Poétique de la Relation*, for example, he uses *transparence* to describe the free movement of Relation made possible by the work of opacity:

> Nous appelons donc opacité ce qui protège le Divers. Et désormais nous appelons transparence l'imaginaire de la Relation, qui en pressentait depuis longtemps (depuis les Présocratiques ? Depuis les Mayas ? Dans Tombouctou déjà ? Depuis les poètes pré-islamiques et les conteurs indiens ?) les tourbillons imprévisibles. (75)

In this case, though, in which *transparence* takes on a surprisingly affirmative valence, we must be willing to hear *transparence* not as grasping, comprehending or peering through—transparency—but rather as "trans-pearance," the horizontal movement of presences and meanings in the system of Relation. *Opacité* produces *transparence* not by generating a new fixed and apprehensible object of meaning but rather by motivating the multiple emergence of meanings across a broad spectrum. Such a system of sense-making—a collective, multivalent, horizontal poetics—creates the conditions for the kind of interpersonal and intercultural activity that Glissant envisions in Relation.

In-conclusion

Glissant's poetics in general and his notion of opacity in particular do not tend towards a conclusion, inasmuch as this word implies "closure." I have argued that a text's or a subject's opacity does a great deal more than *close off* points of access; it opens an alternative space of meaning, in which the reader, interlocutor or audience must participate in meaning-making, all the while recognizing the necessary incompleteness of this creative act. Opacity, then, leaves us with a strong sense of *inconclusiveness*, an uncertainty that only increases as the experience of the text becomes more powerful. Glissant says as much in the introductory prose-poem of *Le sang rivé*—the very first page of his *Poèmes complets*. Both stylistically and conceptually, he prepares his reader for a dynamic but fragmented, scattered expression that requires collective reassembly, a reassembly that guarantees that the poem will not seek the static perfection of *being* but rather channel the dynamic energy of endless *becoming*, "sans cesse devient":

> *Non pas l'œuvre tendue, sourde, monotone autant que la mer qu'on sculpte sans fin – mais des éclats, accordés à l'effervescence de la terre –* […] *– toujours demis, toujours repris, et hors d'achèvement –* […]

These unfinished bursts, he continues, lead to a kind of perfection through their own imperfection and to true knowledge via an embrace of the uncertain. The dialectical ear perks up at this play of opposites, but a proto-Deleuzian sensibility also charges the tectonic power of Glissant's scattered, comprehension-resistant mode of expression:

> *premiers cris, rumeurs naïves, formes laissées – témoins, incommodes pourtant, de ce projet – qui, de se rencontrer imparfaits se trouvent solitaires parfaitement – et peuvent ici convaincre de s'arrêter à l'incertain – cela qui tremble, vacille et sans cesse devient – comme une terre qu'on ravage – épars.*

The ambiguous pronouns and accumulating relative clauses—a common feature in Glissant's poetry—testify to his admiration for Faulkner and Mallarmé. However, whereas these two modernist writers both dramatize their own anxiety about the uncertainty inherent in their

expression, Glissant affirms this uncertainty as the crucial quality of his poetics. This affirmation points to the productive quality of opacity, the ability for opacity to ramify senses and meanings out into a collective space. Thus, rather than expressing anxiety about an inaccessible "deeper" meaning concealed beneath the surface of the text, Glissant emphasizes the material text itself: "*non des œuvres mais la matière elle-même dans quoi l'ouvrage chemine*." As the verb *cheminer* implies, Glissant's text can have the feeling of an extended, winding exploration—an always unfinished survey of a vast geography. Glissant's writing is itself, in a sense, as "uncertain" as the reader's own experience of the opaque text. The writing is opaque to itself; it does not know where it is going, for it relies on its readers for propulsion. Conversely, as a reader assumes a role in the text's creation, in its poetics, she must realize that she is turning but one thread in the vast weave of this *totalité-monde* of Glissant's poem. Incomprehensible because too vast to sum up and too dynamic to capture, the opaque work is the textual model of a poetics of Relation: collectively wrought and utterly unmasterable.

GLISSANT'S GEO-POETICS

Geography of Relation: *Fastes*

The text's unmasterability opens onto the Caribbean landscape's resistance to being tamed, cultivated, or brought under control. Glissant compared the Antilles to a laboratory, where the fusions and syntheses of creolization could take place, where cultures and landscapes mix fluidly under the terrible pressure of Western colonialism. In his first essay, he wonders if the Antilles could ever regain a sense of unity. This paragraph, written at the height of the Negritude movement, heralds the Caribbean-specific values of the Antillanité movement that would develop in the decades to follow:

> Or, aux Antilles, d'où je viens, on peut dire qu'un peuple positivement se construit. Né d'un bouillon de cultures, dans ce laboratoire dont chaque table est une île, voici une synthèse de races, de mœurs, de savoirs, mais qui tend vers son unité propre. Cette synthèse, telle est en effet la question, peut-elle réussir une unité ? (SC 15)

He explores this question throughout his novels and essays, elaborating a dialectics of multiplicity and totality in such categories as the *chaos-monde,* the *echo-monde* and the *Tout-Monde,* but the exploration of this dialectic happens most concretely in his poetry, particularly in the 1991 collection *Fastes*. If the Caribbean is a "laboratoire dont chaque table est une île," then *Fastes* is the poetic manifestation of that laboratory, in which each quatrain and each line brings together unpredictable movements and interactions of elements in Relation. In formal terms, it appears as a rewriting of *Un champ d'îles*, whose procession of quatrains creates the image of a "field of islands," but *Fastes* more explicitly puts together different cultures and places. Gaining its opacity from a syntactical complexity even greater than in any of Glissant's other texts, *Fastes* poses the question of unity and diversity by virtue of its very being: "Cette synthèse, telle est en effet la question, peut-elle réussir une unité ?"

Upon first glance, *Fastes* in no way appears inhospitable to Western poetic norms. Published only a year after *Poétique de la Relation*, which provides such rich thought-images for its rhizomatic theory, *Fastes* seems perfectly square. Other Caribbean poets, such as Kamau Brathwaite, were publishing work using typography and spacing in a way that, from reading Glissant's Caribbean theory, one might expect from a Caribbean poet. *Fastes*, on the other hand, looks uncharacteristically precious and finely chiseled, more suited to a nineteenth-century Parnassian than to a contemporary poet of political resistance. The Toronto-based Éditions du GREF, in publishing *Fastes*, opted for quality over quantity, printing only 470 copies, on

expensive Mohawk Superfine paper. Two quatrains appear on each page so that, sitting open, the book shows four four-lined stanzas in an almost perfect square, surrounded by creamy, sumptuous margins. Only the dedication page and the short "présentation" seem suited to the more haphazard, form-defying poetics that Glissant had theretofore practiced and theorized in his other writing. These two pages hint at a poetic project that, upon closer reading of *Fastes*, becomes more obvious: the creation of tension between luminosity and obscurity, rational order and haphazard chaos, writing and speech. These contradictions do not occur as a combat but rather as an occasion of praise and joy, as in the dedication, "aux clairières, qui se réjouiront de telle opacité" (5). The *présentation*, written in familiar Glissantian versets pregnant with potential and ambiguity in their infinitive phrases, also conveys a sense of praise and joy:

> Allouer à l'éloge une géographie souterraine, d'où les ruptures ne s'effacent pas… Rappeler voyants et demeurants, qu'ils se reconnaissent entre eux…
>
> Mon temps s'est pris à leurs images : pays et bois qui me hélèrent, sables où j'ai erré.
>
> Leur offrir un convenir de langage et d'obscurité, par où perdure en un tout l'imprévu de la parole : comme d'une épaille grandissant ses lunes, sur des ombres toujours sculptées. (9)

There appears a desire both to give some context for the *Fastes* and to dispel any hopes for clarification. Themes familiar to Glissant's poetics appear subtly: the fusion of language and land; the valorization of parataxis and juxtaposition ("les ruptures ne s'effacent pas"); the Perse-like errancy, associated with inter-spaces like beaches ("sables où j'ai erré); and the idiosyncratic association of opacity with the "imprévu de la parole." The second verset reinforces the sense (upon turning the page) that each quatrain distills something of Glissant's experience of a distinct place: "Mon temps s'est pris à leurs images: pays et bois qui me hélèrent." The ensuing promise to "leur offrir un convenir de langage et d'obscurité" fits with Glissant's broader use of place, *lieu*, in his work—a place constituted of, as Geneviève Bélugue puts it, "une sorte d'alchimie

interchangeable, l'homme, le paysage ou l'entour, le langage" (45). Finally, Glissant's old question of the "unité propre" of this creolized space gets hinted at amid this talk of language, opacity, and unpredictability: "un convenir de langage et d'obscurité, par où perdure *en un tout* l'imprévu de la parole." The term has slipped from *unité* to *tout* (which gets affirmed with the theorization of the *Tout-Monde*), as if to shed the singularity implied in the *un* of *unité* in favor of the multiplicity and chaos so cherished in *Poétique de la Relation*. However, it is still "*un* tout," one whole. The difference is that the unity of the Caribbean evoked in *Soleil de la Conscience* is localized, presumably one unity among many in the vast world, whereas the *tout* of this poem refers to a single "whole" that, by fostering an ongoing "unforeseeability," resists being reductive or homogenizing. The question of totality in Glissant's theory has been taken up elsewhere,[15] but what interests me here in particular is how the poems, especially the late ones, conceive of themselves as vast, unpredictable totalities, experimental models of the system of Relation. In this way, they are indeed "laboratories" of creolization, geographies of the Tout-Monde.

After the *présentation* come the quatrains, quadruplets of quatrains, squares made of squares, enclosed in the space of an almost-perfect square when the volume of *Fastes* is held open. This seems far from Glissant's sustained praise, in his essays, for the long-form poetics of the plainsong, the verset and the Creole *conte* (DA 473), which he associates with the single-season climate of the tropics, providing space for elaboration, improvisation, participation and a *poétique de la durée*. The four-by-four structure of *Fastes* seems to epitomize the seasonal temporality of Europe and to replicate the social ordering that this climate motivates. *Fastes* thus appears far removed from the Glissant of *Soleil de la Conscience*, first arrived in Europe, marveling at this squared-away society but complaining that "cet infini de terres carrelées m'emprisonne" (17) and that everything is too symmetrical:

> J'aime ces champs, leur ordre, leur patience; cependant, je n'en participe pas. N'ayant jamais disposé de ma terre, je n'ai point cet atavisme d'épargne du sol, d'organisation. Mon paysage est encore emportement; la symétrie du planté me gêne. Mon temps n'est pas une succession d'espérances saisonnières, il est encore de jaillissements et de trouées d'arbres. (19)

With respect to this line of Glissant's thinking in the 1950s, Dash rightly notes "a clear link between poetics and landscape" (*Édouard* 31). This comment rings true for subsequent collections of poetry from *Les Indes* to *Pays rêvé, pays réel*. Forty years later, in *Fastes*, that link only seems stronger, since each quatrain is quite specifically connected to a particular landscape. Yets *Fastes*'s hyper-organized form, on the surface, is perplexing when it comes to Glissant's long-held suspicion for the formalism of Western rationalism.

Of course, the exaggerated formal ordering ultimately sets up the dialectic tensions evoked in the dedication, with its nod to both "clairières" and "opacité." In *Fastes*, Glissant creolizes the quatrain. He cultivates a *jardin créole* amid the "symétrie du planté," a poetics of fecund disorder that operates freely within a fastidiously constrained superstructure bearing the mark of the Western pastoral tradition. In a beautiful review of *Fastes* written shortly after the collection's publication—one of the few serious readings of Glissant's poetry—Lilian Pestre de Almeida sees in the formal tension an analogy to the resistance of the maroon:

> Par ces poèmes, Glissant non seulement explore les ressources du français en tant que langue poétique qu'il déconstruit et reconstruit mais encore il essaie de reconquérir, par le biais de la langue de l'Autre dont il s'approprie avec l'insolence d'un marron, un usage en voie de disparition dans sa langue maternelle (le créole), celui d'un pacte secret, qui a forgé et cimenté la communauté, jadis. (31)

There is doubtless a sense of subversion in these quatrains, a kind of expression gone rogue within the bounds of the form, a new space carved out of the limits of stanza and page, a new music sounding in counterpoint to the prosodic norms of the hymn or the ballad. Perhaps this sense of resistance accounts for the fact that, even within Glissant's corpus of very opaque poetry, *Fastes* is unequivocally the most opaque, the most radically impenetrable collection. At the same time, Almeida's idea of the effort to "reconquérir" the French language seems ultimately counter to the work of *Fastes* and to the poetics of Relation more generally. *Fastes* does not come off as militant or combative. There is little sense of "insolence," as Almeida puts it, in these quatrains, which are instead explicitly framed as a kind of creolized version of the classic lyric genre of the praise song (both in the reference to Ovid's *Fasti* and in the section and poem entitled "Péan," the name for Greek lyrics sung to the gods). They present their diverse landscapes in a tone of affirmation and invitation: "éloge," "offrir," "qu'ils se reconnaissent entre eux." Thus, even in *Fastes*, which is the most radical example of poetic opacity available in Glissant's oeuvre, the opacity is not the "armature of subjective resistance," nor the "strategy of ontological self-defense," as has been so often presumed (Murdoch 21, Headley 92). Opacity creates an unbounded energy such that the *Fastes* are not hermetically sealed but rather charged with the potential to erupt out of their encasement within the quatrain and to "se reconna[ître] entre eux." Their opacity makes a reading of them, *entre eux*, obligatory because they cannot be fathomed as isolated singularities. They must be read relationally.

This relationality does not mean that the *Fastes* clarify each other but rather that they enrich each other through accumulation and counterpoint. Each panel (that is, double-page, as the book lies open) brings into proximity the disparate landscapes and elements of four different quatrains with their four different locales. Geographically, these locales appear incongruent: no particular

logic seems, for example, to connect the warm Cuban imagery in "Habana" with the arctic silence in "Igloolik," just beneath it. On the other side of the panel, "Jeune Campements" apparently set in Martinique, sits above a *Faste* entitled "Skoplje," the Macedonian capital. The layout of the panel, moreover, invites horizontal and diagonal as well as vertical reading, so that relationships exist between each of the four quatrains. *Fastes* thus uses its formatting to maximize the sense of geographic errancy, expressed not only in the diverse place names but also in the rich mixture of nouns associated with these places.

At the same time, these disparate places and elements occur within a greater prosodic unity. Although these are generally free-verse quatrains, the lines remain about twelve syllables long, loosely alexandrine-like, and a rhythmic and sonic patterning creates an implicit connection between places that otherwise would seem to have no contact whatsoever. Thus, the poetics, particularly the oral performance, of *Fastes* creates a link across distances that can only occur in poetry. If, as Glissant says, one action of Relation is to "link" (*relier*), then *Fastes* literally enacts the "poetics" of Relation. For example, in the panel with "Habana," "Igloolik," "Jeunes Campements," and "Skoplje," rich internal rhymes, assonances, alliterations, and repetitions create a sonic structure both within the poems and between them. The first two lines of both "Habana" and "Igloolik" are heavy with the combination of *s* sounds and the nasals *-en* and *-in*:

> De dix en vingt années la jeune fille s'émince
> Ses jardins sont hélés de palmiers aveugles
> […]
> Si loin dans le silence a rencontré sa main
> A secoué sa main dans la glaçure des abats, des peaux

Then, "a secoué" links up with the phrase "au sec ce qui" in the final line of the same quatrain—"A rentré au sec ce qui restait de viande et de petit jour"—which in turn bears a sonic resemblance to the Creole name "Zocli," which is prominent in the next poem. Thus, Glissant provides a point

of sensory access to language that, particularly for readers unfamiliar with Creole or with Caribbean culture, would require a good deal of deciphering. In fact, references to food at the end of "Igloolik" and throughout "Jeune Campements," both in French and Creole, imply that this language should be savored, felt in the mouth. Particularly, the dense combination of vowels and consonants in the Creole invites this kind of oral and olfactory experience of sounding-out, even if (and especially if) the semantic meaning is incomprehensible: "Zocli pété konba épi Térèse / Pou an graté kan'nari ayayaï." These lines translate as "Zocli fought with Therese for the last dregs in the pot" (*Collected* 220), which reinforces a motif of hunger that pervades the entire panel—"la jeune fille s'émince," "ce qui restait de viande," and "Son roman pathétique a consumé la faim." Here occurs a counterpoint between the *Fastes*' rich, almost overripe orality and the undertone of hunger, as if the poetry serves a kind of sustenance replacing a caloric nourishment that is otherwise unavailable.

There is something deeply personal about such sensations of hunger and desire ("Comment revenir à ce sable, comment revenir," concludes "Habana") that stands in contrast to the vast, planetary geography that *Fastes* describes. In a way, this is the classical dialectic of lyric poetry, between an event of idiosyncratic expression and the more global resonance of that event. By foregrounding its relationship to classical lyricism (in the title's reference to Ovid, among other things), *Fastes* invites this consideration of the connection between the personal and the *tout*—how individual actions create the "weave" of Relation.

More than elsewhere, Glissant seems not only to be valorizing a notion of errancy but also to be using his own personal errancy through different landscapes as a starting point for this valorization: "Mon temps s'est pris à leurs images : pays et bois qui me hélèrent, sables où j'ai erré." In many cases, it requires considerable research or even inside information to understand

which *pays* Glissant evokes. This is especially true for the Caribbean locales with which he was most familiar. For example, the "Savane" mentioned in the first line of "Jeune Campements" might, to the typical reader of this expensive volume published in Toronto, appear to be a kind of mythical tropical landscape (given the capital S of this "Savane"), which then gets both confirmed and confused by the place markers that come after: "En Savane, coupez coupez l'Ardenne ébène." Although it is possible to imagine "ebony" in proximity to a savannah, the French region of Ardennes—forested, temperate, northern—seems quite far away. At the same time, the internal rhyme between "Ardenne" and "ébène" creates a sonic proximity suggesting a new poetic geography beyond the measures of maps and globes. This remapping is a chief feature of *Fastes*. However, a bit of knowledge quickly calls this reading into question. With either some awareness of Martinique's geography or a little outside research, the reader might understand that the Savane is in fact one of Fort-de-France's main parks. Additionally, in the English translation of Glissant's poems, the translators (with the extensive guidance of Glissant, who was with them at LSU at the time) note that "Ardennes is an allusion to the novel *Le Village pathétique* by André Dhôtel" (220). This illuminating bit of information yields a vague image of the poet sitting in the Place de la Savane reading Dhôtel's novel: a decidedly more mundane image than those lying potent in the ambiguous, paratactic verse by itself.

Why does Glissant provide this information to his translators—and to others, for that matter, since certain interviews and prose texts cast light on other *Fastes*? Coy as his poetry is, especially *Fastes*, why does the poet not carefully protect this coyness, as so many other poets do, like magicians locking away their bag of tricks? This unexpected openness suggests that *Fastes*'s opacity is not, in fact, a mode of self-protection or militant resistance but rather an invitation for the reader to participate, in various ways, in the kind of errancy that inspired the writing of *Fastes*.

One might say that, with these kinds of "illuminations" of the text, Glissant is not speaking as the author but rather as a fellow reader of these texts. Glissant's poetics ultimately bring the reader into a relationship of equality with the writer: his quarrel with hermeneutics, a quarrel that gives rise to the poetics of opacity, is foremost a criticism of the author-reader hierarchy. The *Fastes*, then, are theoretically as opaque to him as they are to any other reader, and his "translation" of them is just as contingent and uncertain as a reading made by a complete stranger. The "allusion" in "Jeunes Campements" is so obscure that it may seem like a secret that only the poet holds, but Glissant does not master this allusion, nor does he seem to want to. Nothing stops a different reader from hearing in this line the strong resonance of a now-obscure symbolist poet, Saint-Pol-Roux, whose poem "Le Corbeau" contains the following refrain, musically repeated some seven times: "Oiseau d'ébène, corbeau des Ardennes" (196). Any reader of this poem must remember the strange coupling of "ébène" and "Ardennes," and when it recurs in Glissant's poem, a certain potentiality inherent in the language itself becomes actualized—a potentiality specific to the paratactic, haphazard composition of those lines, whose richness lies not in specific referents or allusions but in their ability to forge unforeseeable connections. Glissant seems so confident in this *imprévisibilité*—a word that he constantly associated with *poésie*—that he becomes completely unconcerned with the problem of "giving away the answer" to *Fastes*. Such answers are so beside the point that they can be cheaply given away.

This challenge to the author's control over the text appears to be an iteration of the post-structuralist mantras of polysemy, dissemination, and *destinerrance*, referring in various ways to how language escapes the control of its producer and acts unpredictably in the world. In Glissant's poetics, though, the word does not so much escape or betray the speaker/writer as act as the ultimate collective space where subjects meet in Relation: what he would begin calling a *lieu-*

commun, a commonplace. He thus rescues the term from its modern sense of triteness and reaffirms its older, more capacious sense of both *topos* and "starting point." The notion of *lieu-commun* allows Glissant to evoke the concrete relationship between language and place, so important in *Fastes*, and also to valorize the *unoriginality* of poetic language. The poet, in this spirit, claims no ownership or even comprehension of "his" poems but rather contributes to a broader poetics of commonality. The *lieu-commun* of the poem is thus not rooted in the poet's solid sense of self-identity (as some definitions of opacity might imply) but rather a space of ongoing relation and collaboration: "un lieu où on « donne-avec » en place de « comprendre »" (PR 158).

The notion of *lieu-commun* is related to Glissant's distinction between *territoire* and *terre*.[16] The distinction is both geopolitical and ontological. Underlying *territoire* is the presumption of property or possession based on a claim to legitimacy, an ontological association of oneself with a plot of earth: I am of that land, and that land is of me, is mine. *Territoire* depends on a logic of boundaries and roots, and is therefore the opposite of a *lieu-commun* (ibid. 156). *Terre*, in contrast, refers not to a place of singular, static being but of multifarious, dynamic becoming, of which the Antilles has become the exemplar:

> La terre martiniquaise n'appartient, en absolu raciné, ni au descendants des Africains déportés, ni aux békés, ni aux hindous ni aux mulâtres. Mais ce qui était une conséquence de l'expansion européenne (l'extermination de Précolombiens, l'importation de populations nouvelles) est cela même qui fonde un nouveau rapport à la terre : non pas l'absolu sacralisé d'une possession ontologique, mais la complicité relationnelle. (ibid. 161)

Fastes guides the reader from approaching the poem as *territoire* to viewing it as *terre*, a space of "complicity," by allowing Glissant's private experience to become *lieu-commun*. Several of the

Fastes describe what we might be tempted to call "Glissant's Martinique," a version of his birthplace particular to his experience of it—if not for the fact that Glissant has just made a compelling case for why Martinique should not carry a possessive noun at all.

The best example of this movement from the private to the communal is "Calebassier," whose first two lines are nothing but a list of proper names, apparently a completely private affair. "Calebassier" also initially appears to be one of the few *Fastes* with a title that is not a place name: a *calebassier* is a calabash tree or vine, growing abundantly in the Caribbean and Central America. In fact, it is also a place name: the Place du Calebassier is a central square in Lamentin, Martinique, "a meeting place for the poet and his friends," according to Humphries and Manolas (220). The poem, then, replicates this meeting place: "Apocal Babsapin Totol Atiquiliq / Sonderlo Macaron Prisca Godbi—l'Aimée." As with the allusion to the Dhôtel novel, Glissant has no problem glossing these lines for his readers, but, crucially, his gloss only further demonstrates the unrootedness and purposeful illegitimacy of these names. Here is Glissant in an interview with François Noudelmann, speaking of these childhood friends:

> Quand j'étais jeune, on nous appelait […] de notre nom de baptême, mais qui était des noms très français et très pâles : Édouard, Michel, Henri, etc. Ce sont les noms qu'on nous donnait. Et nous nous donnions des noms complètement abracadabrants : Apocal, Atitilic, Babsapin, Godbi, des noms complètement abracadabrants […] ce noms ne fondaient pas filiations ni transmission. ("La relation" 93)

This apparent "explication" of "Calebassier" is in fact less an explication than a complication, in the positive sense—a comment that only thickens the poem's rich opacity. Even as he provides a backstory for the names listed, Glissant never identifies these individuals, never provides referents

for these nouns. Instead of revealing the characters to whom the names refer, he focuses on the character of the names themselves. These "noms complètement abracadabrants," as the present participle implies, operate continuously and ceaselessly, persistently enchanting and calling forth as if by magic. Read aloud, these lines strike the ear with their alternation between heavy *a* and *o* sounds, which bounce between the throat and the lips before getting expelled by plosive consonants (in fact, all six plosives occur in these two lines). Their incantatory quality arises from the sense that these names, originating from thin air, become sensible, take shape, and eventually assume a body. Visually, they have a specifically Caribbean texture, evoking the *métissage* of indigenous Caribs with the African, European, and Asiatic peoples who over time have come together on the islands. Glissant's seemingly private litany of names thus exceeds the possessive register of "his own" experience and becomes a public space, like the Place du Calebassier itself.

Going further, however, the poem could also be read as a creolization of the geography of the Place du Calebassier. The "town square"—that quintessentially European social center, usually inscribed into the political and religious patriarchy by the twin presence of a cathedral and a government palace—has an urban architecture that represents the rationalist, centered, filial, rooted thinking that Glissant's work so strongly resists. This resistance to centeredness recalls Gilles Deleuze's affirmation of American thought, which he explains in geographical and architectural terms, strikingly similar to Glissant's notion of creolization:

> It is first of all the affirmation of a world in *process*, an *archipelago*. Not even a puzzle, whose pieces when fitted together would constitute a whole, but rather a wall of loose, uncemented stones, where every element has a value in itself but also in relation to others: isolated and floating relations, islands and straits, immobile points and sinuous lines […] an infinite patchwork with multiple joinings.

("Bartleby" 86, Deleuze's italics)

In a similar way, the name "Calebassier" tacitly calls into question the architecture of the static, central town square by providing an image of haphazard, proliferating vines and branches, bearing the calabash gourd on the peripheries rather than drawing the focus to the center. The square, in other words, marks out and exemplifies a *territoire* materially and conceptually affiliated with Western colonialism, but the calabash plant affirms a creolization of this *territoire*—a reemergence of a more capacious *terre* that has always been latent in the *territoire*.

The calabash's creolization of the square provides a geographical way to understand the broader formal project of *Fastes*: the creolization of the quatrain. The quatrain, it could be argued, is the continental form *par excellence* and a primary poetic manifestation of Eurocentric History—as in the great march of quatrains in the *Lyrical Ballads* of Coleridge and Wordsworth or in Péguy's historical *Tapisseries*. The four-by-four form gives these poems a sense of steady progression with an eminently familiar beat, as inevitable as the coming and going of the four seasons. The quatrains of *Fastes,* on the other hand, are both self-constituent and connected. They have their own titles. They are separated from each other by generous white space on the page. They are more like islands than like adjacent plots of land on a continent. And yet, they speak across this space in their rhythms, tones and textures—qualities to which the *Fastes*' semantic opacity forces the attention. They do not form a solid, enclosed architecture but rather an archipelago—a poetic cluster whose geographic diversity implies the "archipelagization" of the entire world: "Ma proposition est qu'aujourd'hui le monde s'archipélise et se créolise" (TTM 194). *Fastes*, then, is geographic in the fullest sense: earth-writing, *écriture-terre*, an interaction between page and planet, a poetic earthquake that opens links between disparate peoples and places: "Toute pensée archipélique est pensée du tremblement, de la non-présomption, mais aussi de l'ouverture

et du partage" (ibid. 231). *Fastes*'s tectonic energy arises from its radical opacity, which, far from closing the quatrains back upon themselves, opens them to the illogical, unexpected connections of archipelagic thought.

Geology of Relation: *Les grands chaos*

In his final poem, "L'eau du volcan," Glissant explores opacity inside of *terre*, in the depths of the earth, and thus makes his most explicit poetic commentary on the notion of opacity. The poem operates wholly within the space of paradox, embodying all at once fire and water, light and dark, surfaces and depths, knowledge and incomprehension. Here, opacity goes well beyond the "armature" of a subject against reductive categorization. The very subject of "L'eau du volcan" is the opacity that pervades all experience of the world: its landscapes, its geology, its flora and fauna, its gods, its people. The poem is set in Martinique, or rather beneath Martinique, for it recounts the poet's descent into the landscape through the opening of the volcanic Mont Pelée. Yet, just as Glissant's Caribbean-inspired theory of Relation extends to a thinking of world-totality, "L'eau du volcan" uses local landmarks to open onto planetary reflections:

> *Depuis l'entraille du volcan, au nord du pays de Martinique, jusqu'aux sables du sud, par les chemins enterrés de mangles et des cohées. Descente aux connaissances. Géographie souterraine, qui donne force à l'étendue du monde.* (455)

Here arises the first of many paradoxes, the notion that by descending into the interior of an island, one gains access to the vast surface, or *étendue*, of the world. Vertical movement creates horizontal breadth, and local interiority opens onto expansive totality. This descent into the increasingly dense "profondeurs" is ultimately a quest for knowledge ("*Descente aux connaissances*") which manifests itself as a kind of subterranean unity, providing a direction while remaining as opaque as the mantle in which it was couched: "*Émergence de la parole, tout au sud de l'imaginaire. Elle*

déroule et oriente" (ibid.) These are the final phrases of the prose "presentation" to the poem, announcing the unity of geology and poetics, of the earth's tectonic dynamics and the potential energy latent in this opaque expression.

Glissant celebrates poetry for its abiding and productive *imprévisibilité*, and opacity, quite literally, creates the unforeseeable. The opaque object obstructs visual access to what lies beyond. Opaque poetry thus creates the need to proceed into the mysteries of the world, without any pretense to knowing what lies in wait. So begins the body text of "L'eau du volcan": "Le poète descend, sans guide ni palan, sans rive ni sextant ni clameur demeurant" (457). The poem here foregrounds its resistance to humanist rationalism. The nautical tools that permitted the exploration and colonization of the New World—the sextant and the block and tackle of a ship—have no place in this journey. Nor is there a Virgil figure—a "guide"—for this Dantesque poet descending into the underworld. If there are poetic predecessors, they act less as guides and more as echoes of similar poetic journeys beyond the grips of rational order. Césaire's *Cahier*, whose eruptive force inspired anticolonial critique in Martinique and beyond, comes to mind, not least because it earned Césaire the nickname of "le volcan." More literally, Rimbaud's "Bateau ivre," with similar images of a descent and a casting-off of navigational tools, echoes strongly here:

> Comme je descendais des fleuves impassibles,
> Je ne me sentis plus guidé par les haleurs.
> […]
> L'eau verte pénétra ma coque de sapin
> Et des taches de vin bleu et des vomissures
> Me lava, dispersant gouvernail et grappin.

In each case, the poem becomes a journey not only into the unknown but into the unknowable. Swearing off the instruments of mapping and guiding, these poets seek not to bring order to the chaos of the universe but rather to participate in the unpredictable dynamics of the *chaos-monde*. As much as the beginning of "L'eau du volcan" refers to its own way of writing, this descent, "sans

guide," also designates a reading without hermeneutics. The poem's refusal of hermeneutics pertains to both its mythological undertone and to its commentary on reading. In the Greek tradition, the "guide" to the underworld is none other than Hermes, whose name is embedded in hermeneutics, even if the etymological connection is uncertain. Hermes is the messenger god, the god of translation and intersection, the master of the boundary between terrestrial and divine. Hermes is thus a necessary figure of a transcendental system of thought, in which truth exists in a separate realm from the material. Hermeneutics shares this assumption: the interpretation or "explication" of a text allows true meaning to cross from the "hermetically" sealed realm of ideas—housed in, but also obscured by, language—into the accessible material world. A "guide," be it Hermes or Virgil or any other psychopomp, also serves as an interpreter, a translator, a giver of explanations, a dissipater of opacity. The poet of "L'eau du volcan" instead welcomes the opacities of the depths: "*Ne pas craindre les profondeurs*." He thus gains energy from the chaotic and inexplicable mix of entities in Pelée. Rather than penetrating into a hermetically sealed space in search of a single deeper meaning, he contributes a spiraling flux of images to that space, producing a constantly regenerating, self-reinventing *sens*—sensation and meaning:

> Et les marchés de rimes coloniales, d'arum sans goût, de blanc piment, et les crachées d'où nous aura grandi néant, l'espoir aussi têtu comme migan
> Tout avec lui couvait tombait dans la Pelée. (457)

This *migan*, a stew often prepared with breadfruit, whose mixture of diverse elements evokes creolization in a similar way to Louisiana gumbo, acts as a metonym for the passage as a whole. The diverse elements of food, plant, emotion, and poetry combine in the belly of the volcano. The odd coupling of the verbs "couvait tombait" gives the sense that the product of this mixture is in a permanent state of simultaneous germination and movement. Indeed, "couvait" both evokes hermeneutics and refuses it, much like this opening section of the poem more broadly: *couver*

refers to something hidden or buried, but more precisely to a germ or seed with the potential to sprout at any moment. This potential energy, whose kinetic realization remains unforeseeable, characterizes the Glissantian text.

The poet continues his descent, although this descent feels more and more horizontal. Despite the repetitions of the verbs *descendre* and *tomber*, along with other vertical markers like *fond* and *bas*, horizontal images of rivers, bridges, and banks contradict the verticality of this supposed descent. The long lines of Glissant's verse also provide a sense of extension and duration—a quality, as we have seen, of Glissant's poetry from the very beginning. The paratactic syntax, moreover, links images in a nonhierarchical network, in contrast to the hypotaxis so prevalent in the surging verse sections of Césaire's version of volcanic poetics. The chaos of this final poem of *Les grands chaos* includes the spatial disorientation that occurs when the poem appears to be moving both downwards and sideways: "Il marchait dans l'envers de la terre, ses talons passés par-devant / […] / Il tombait dans l'envers de sa vérité, au travers d'un pont, et le pont / Flambant courait l'abîme" (458). The abiding horizontality within this downward journey, in self-reflexive terms, recalls Glissant's injunction in *Poétique de la Relation* to view opaque texts as an opportunity to focus on the "texture" rather than to penetrate to their deeper meaning (204). Rather than locating a hidden meaning beneath the textual surface, Glissant's reader must move along with the "weave" (*la trame*) that creates the texture. A weave is a figure of interconnection, the suturing of diverse material; by associating opacity with the weave of fabrics, Glissant not only affirms its textual significance (for a *textus*, again, is a "thing woven") but also its relational power. Poetic opacity has the unexpected ability to connect distant lands and cultures, as the poet in the volcano discovers: "Il descendit. Un pur bourreau passait au fil de l'eau sa hache son ciseau / Et nouait terre de Mali à l'Ande écartelée" (462). Here, the instruments of cutting and separating—

the ax and the scissors—in fact tie together (*nouer*) the distant lands of Mali and the Andes. The opaque text uses the same reversal of expectations: apparently secretive, reserved, or coy, in fact it becomes a space of interconnection. An opaque text gains its opacity from the coexistence of elements that would appear, by rational standards, unrelated; it puts into Relation the apparently unrelatable.

The seeming darkness of the opaque text thus becomes its greatest point of illumination. "L'eau du volcan" suggests as much in the passage in which opacity gets explicitly mentioned. Coming to a subterranean river crossing, the poet notices that the bridge is guarded by those who would question his mode of expression: "Tenait le pont une hale de Justes. Lui dirent « Nous ne saurions, en tant d'obscurité. Quel est ce vent ? Où, ce balan ? Quoi, cette opacité »" (462). The poet, not responding, continues downwards, where the only lanterns to light the way are the shadows themselves: "Il descendit. / Une Ombre là en grand temps s'effarait" (ibid.) The French verb *effarer* generally means "to frighten," but the sound of the radical "*-far-*" creates the echo of the word *phare*, "lantern." Opacity and obscurity thus replace the conventional epistemological function of light: here, to cast a shadow is to illuminate.

This illuminating darkness reminds us that "L'eau du volcan" is the culmination of a larger poetic project on the notion of chaos, *Les grands chaos*. The primordial resonance of this title, recalling ancient creation stories as well as astronomic theories of the early universe, implies a return to a pre-rational, pre-ordered state of being. Indeed, as Martin Meisel shows in his recent magnum opus *Chaos Imagined*, chaos has long stood for the paradox of an apparent Nothingness out of which Everything is formed, the great Night that gives birth to the day (46–47). Chaos, the word, arises from the Indo-European root *gheu*, "to gape, yawn," from which we also get "gap." Glissant's powerful images of the *abîme* and the *gouffre*, especially important in "L'eau du volcan"

and in *Poétique de la Relation*, would translate to *khaos* in ancient Greek or to *chasma* in Latin, hence the correlation between chaos and the chasm. The poet's descent into the volcano's chasm is thus a descent into chaos itself, that is, into a darkness with the potential to illuminate, into a realm of pure energy arising from disorder. Plato, aptly, calls chaos "the Nurse of Becoming" (ibid. 55). "L'eau du volcan" is bracketed by two short phrases in italics, like enigmatic stage directions, both of which describe the opening of fissures in the rock: "*Faille, surgie d'un roc*" and, at the end, "*Failles, qui surgissez*" (457, 470). The action happens in the "gap," the chasm, the chaos between these two enunciations. The poem's final word, however, comes in the "Note" on the last page, a kind of glossary that nonetheless retains its poetic opacity; this final word is "abîme": "*Connaissance en réel abîme*" (471). This notion of knowledge in the abyss reprises one of Glissant's most famous and most poetically rich passages from his essays, "La barque ouverte" in *Poétique de la Relation*. Here, he asserts that Caribbeans' collective memory exists in the *abîme*, the *gouffre*: the pit of the slave ship, the emptiness of the sea in which so many ancestors corpses were cast during the slave trade, the abyss of cultural memory from the motherland, "qui ne se retrouvera pour des générations que dans les savanes bleues du souvenir ou de l'imaginaire, de plus en plus élimés" (PR 17–19). Given this ontological crisis, the Caribbean subject must find a kind of knowledge that is not rooted in Being but rather in Relation:

> L'expérience du gouffre est hors de lui. Tourment de ceux qui ne sont jamais sortis du gouffre : passés directement du ventre du négrier au ventre violet des fonds de mer. […] La mémoire non sue de l'abîme a servi de limon pour ces métamorphoses […] Et ainsi l'inconnu-absolu, qui était la projection du gouffre, et qui portait en éternité le gouffre-matrice et le gouffre en abîme, à la fin est devenu connaissance. (ibid. 19–20)

This *connaissance*, moreover, is necessarily poetic, as Glissant affirms in the penultimate sentence of the chapter: "Nous crions le cri de poésie" (21). "L'eau du volcan" was written as this cry of poetry.

Yet wouldn't chaos in language amount to a complete disintegration of forms, sentences, and words? Indeed, isn't "form"—one of chaos's antonyms—implied in all *poiesis*, whose notion of "making" or "creating" must involve some kind of forming? Glissant still arranges this chaos-poem into lines and phrases containing nouns, verbs, and modifiers. On the visual and prosodic level, the Anglophone Caribbean poets Kamau Brathwaite and M. Noubese Philip are better examples of obvious chaos, with their radically anti-formalist compositions. Yet for Glissant, unredeemable or unproductive chaos—an absolute Naught—is not what he seeks:

> Le chaos-monde n'est désordre qu'à la supposition d'un ordre que la poétique n'entend pas révéler à toute force […] Le chaos-monde n'est ni fusion ni confusion : il ne reconnaît pas l'amalgame uniformisé—l'intégration vorace—ni le néant brouillon. Le chaos n'est pas « chaotique ». (PR 108)

In "L'eau du volcan," Glissant creates a *chaos-monde* not by destroying every remnant of poetic form but by destabilizing the order of relations between words, images, and places that would conventionally be assumed in French-language poetry. At times, this yields a quasi-surrealistic coupling of verbs and objects that appear incongruent to each other: "ils barricadaient le silence / D'un feu de feuilles amolies" (461). At times, the prosody provides a hidden order, an alternative method of relating otherwise incommensurable expressions, as in the following line: "Il voit comme a brui dans tout ce cri un lent pays de sable, et comme cette barque a navigué sur nos marronnes agonies" (469). The conceptual *tohu-bohu*, hinging on the mysterious past participle *brui*, draws the attention to the oral and sonic texture. The most notable feature is the regular beat

created by the *-i-* sound: "*Il* voit comme a bru*i* dans tout ce cr*i* un lent pa*y*s […]." If the poem's opacity appears as sheer chaos, then this chaos motivates a search for an alternative order, an order that seems to form and reform with every performance of the poem, rather than inhere in it as a fixed constraint.

Thus, the poem, for Glissant, is the exemplary space of a world in relational becoming. It does not represent this vision of the world; it is not a mimetic display or a metaphor, not separate from the Tout-Monde. The poem works as a first finger-hold on the rich fabric woven by Relation. "L'eau du volcan," after chronicling the peregrinations of the poet in the depths (and horizons) of Pelée, ends with a charge of vital power arising out of earth, sea, and poem. As if the poet has moved all the way down to the pit of the volcano and then outwards beneath the sea, the poem ends with an eruption in the water: *eau du volcan*. The "poète" no longer appears here by name, seeming to have joined the forces of the earth, just as the poem seeks to tap into the vital geology and ecology of the Lesser Antilles. In the final paragraph, elliptical phrases spin round one another, becoming more and more ecstatic and eccentric, mixing sounds and colors and elements and actions into a celebration of the productive power of the chaotic:

> Et toute vie à vif, au vieux cyclone de l'année !... Il monte en mer, il a piété... Il a noué gorge de mont à foulard piètre... Et cette idée qui va tonnant le fiel et le courant jauni... Comme semence de chadron !... Comme lait de bécune en folie !... Jusqu'à hausser, où joue la roche avec le rouge des maïs, la baille d'eau qui fut nacrée d'un lourd de mots, tout à veille de la Tracée... (470)

The ellipses also imply the continuation, in some form, of the action taking place. This may be the "end" of the poem, but it never concludes, never closes. Plato's idea of chaos as the "nurse of Becoming" resonates particularly with the reproductive imagery in this paragraph: "Comme

semence de chadron!... Comme lait de bécune en folie!...” Just as the tectonic energy of Pelée ramifies out into the whole world, the Tout-Monde, so do these Caribbean sea creatures (*chadron* is a white urchin, and *bécune* is a species of barracuda) get linked to the vitality of the Tout-Monde. The edge of the chasm, the apparent closure of the italicized bracket that was opened at the poem’s beginning, is yet a further opening: “*Failles, qui surgissez*.” The strange apostrophe to the fissures puts their surging movement into a permanent present tense, a constant state of becoming, of ever-renewing chaos, the opening of new chasms, the plumbing of new depths, new opacities, new poems always building in energy and embracing new subjects. Glissant’s final line of poetry becomes, in this sense, only the guarantee of future beginnings.

Overture: Opacity Beyond Glissant

This chapter has mapped an itinerary of opacity’s development as a politico-poetic category in Glissant’s oeuvre, with particular attention to how it achieves its fullest embodiment in his poetry. Although the chronology associated with this itinerary was a concern only secondary to the fullest articulation possible of the category, it is useful at this juncture to make a distinction about the development of the notion over time: Glissant’s work has always been opaque, since his first published poems in the 1940s, but this opacity became increasingly intentional, increasingly theorized. Indeed, in this context, the theoretical essays partly perform a rereading of the early poetry, reflecting on its qualities of thickness, density, proliferation, and paradox, and subsequently realizing the political and aesthetic stakes of a gesture that began much more intuitively. The later poetry then doubles down on opacity, with *Fastes* using its impenetrability to trace a haphazard geography of the Tout-Monde and with *Les grands chaos* both praising and demonstrating the hyper-productive, chaotic power of opaque poetics.

This chronology opens the way for a purposefully anachronistic application of opacity as a critical category. If Glissant's early poetry was opaque before "opacity" had been fully theorized—and no less potent for it—then it is also worth searching for opacity beyond Glissant. To other opaque poets we now turn, not to reduce opacity's particularity to Glissant's work but rather to claim that a postcolonial, Caribbean-inflected, Glissantian reading can overcome the static barriers that have been erected to separate times and geographies, and can bring canonical poetry into the dynamic space of Relation.

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[1] Maugée also married Aimé Césaire's sister, Mireille. The intellectual community in World War II-era Martinique was close-knit indeed.

[2] All citations of Césaire's poems, unless otherwise noted, come from his 1983 *Collected Poetry*.

[3] Scholars have struggled to establish why exactly Péguy appealed so strongly to Césaire in this period, just before Césaire and Breton's "discovery" of each other. See Arnold 74–75.

[4] Glissant—breaking with Césaire on a specifically political level, about the issue of departmentalization—would soon co-found the Front Antillo-Guyanais pour l'Autonomie, which fought for the decolonization of the Caribbean DOMs. Nick Nesbitt has uncovered textual evidence of Glissant's early militancy, which was first repressed by French censorship and then largely ignored by Glissant scholarship. See *Caribbean Critique* 133–140.

[5] See, notably, René Hénane's *Glossaire des termes rares dans l'oeuvre d'Aimé Césaire*.

[6] Glissant did not coin the term, which arose first in linguistics to describe the formation of a creole language. However, Glissant was evidently the first to make it into a broader cultural category. For an excellent synopsis of the development of *créolisation* as a term, see Ménil 139–206.

[7] For instance, in his famous letter to Maurice Thorez, resigning from the French Communist Party, Césaire states, "Il y a deux manières de se perdre : par ségrégation murée dans le particulier ou par dilution dans l' « universel ». Ma conception de l'universel est celle d'un universel riche de tout le particulier, riche de tous les particuliers, approfondissement et coexistence de tous les particuliers" (*Lettre* 15).

[8] In the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel famously relegates the African peoples to the a-historical and the Native American peoples to the prehistorical, giving them no part of the subject-defining *Weltgeist* (99). Glissant comments upon this in DA 227.

[9] Glissant only begins capitalizing the R in Relation in the next book of essays, *Le discours antillais*, more and more imagining the concept as, in Celia Britton's words, "a system rather than as a number of separate singular relations. It is, however, a fluid and unsystematic system whose elements are engaged in a radically nonhierarchical free play of interrelatedness" (*Édouard* 11). The "relation" of *L'intention poétique* already speaks to this interrelatedness, but it is not yet an independent ontological system.

[10] A notable exception to this rule occurs in "The Fire and the Hearth," the long second story in *Go Down, Moses*. Lucas Beauchamp, son of the slaves Tennie and Tomey's Turl is the main character. An extra-diegetic and apparently reliable narrator gives the reader access to Beauchamp's interiority. Glissant does indeed mention Beauchamp in *Poetics of Relation*, speaking about this very issue, but he refers to a different novel in which Beauchamp is also a character: "Ainsi encore, le personnage noir Lucas, qui est pourtant le héros principal de *L'intrus*, n'est jamais par Faulkner intériorisé, il est décrit tout en postures et en gestes, une silhouette qui se parfait sur un horizon" (PR 80). Glissant's eloquent description aptly describes the treatment of Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust*, but he neglects to mention that Faulkner's reader has already gained a measure of access to Beauchamp in the earlier story.

[11] In his *Science of Logic* Hegel argues that, in the dialectical method, negation is paradoxically the condition for any affirmative: "Negation is just as much Affirmation as Negation" (65).

[12] The *Discours*'s canonicity in the U.S. appears to be confirmed by its prominence on reading lists for M.A. and Ph.D. qualifying examinations. Given Glissant's resistance to conventional, filial regimes of knowledge, we must recognize the problem with inscribing him into such a tradition. The fact that most scholars' idea of Glissantian opacity comes exclusively from the *Discours*, however, suggests that the canon has indeed taken a toll on Glissant's work despite its anti-canonical thrust.

[13] Umberto Eco, in *The Open Work*, also connects the Baroque to a participatory poetics (7). Similarly, Roland Barthes's analysis of Baroque literature in *Le Bruissement de la langue* bears a striking resemblance to Glissant's notion of opacity: "démontrant ainsi que cette vitre n'existe pas, qu'il n'y a rien à voir *derrière* le langage, et que la parole loin d'être l'attribut final est la dernière touche de la statue humaine, comme le dit le mythe trompeur de Pygmalion, n'en est jamais que l'étendue irréductible" (267). Like Deleuze, moreover, both of these thinkers connect Baroque signification to the open poetics of Mallarmé.

[14] Deleuze's *Différence et répétition* makes his most explicit critique of Hegel's dialectic negation, proposing instead a progression by affirmation: "L'histoire ne passe pas par la négation, et la négation de la négation, mais par la décision des problèmes et l'affirmation des différences. Elle n'en est pas moins sanglante et cruelle pour cela" (344).

[15] See, in particular, Nesbitt and Hallward.

[16] This distinction is part of Glissant's loose adoption of Deleuze and Guattari's terms. In *Mille plateaux*, for example, the affirmation of the thought-images of the nomad and the rhizome depend upon a movement of "deterritorialization."

Chapter 2

Archipelagoes of the Nineteenth-Century:

Rimbaud and Mallarmé

J'ai heurté, savez-vous, d'incroyables Florides…
J'ai vu des archipels sidéraux !

–Rimbaud

le heurt successif
sidéralement
d'un compte total en formation…

Toute Pensée émet un Coup de dés

–Mallarmé

The poetry of Rimbaud and Mallarmé shares the sensation of collision (*heurt*). As different times and different geographies collide in their poems, as the terrestrial bumps into the sidereal, the organization of the universe gets called into question. Collision, the agent of productive disorder, is the result of errancy, of vagabondage. Collision shifts boundaries and catalyzes the interaction of elements whose trajectories were previously askew. Rimbaud and Mallarmé, each in their own way, constantly collide with the reader's present; their writing offers itself to unexpected encounters with posterity. Thus, when Rimbaud's "drunken boat" collides with "incroyables Florides," it may seem prophetic, for Rimbaud's impact on Caribbean poetics is by

now indisputable. Yet a collision affects both bodies involved. The more interesting question may be: how have the Floridas redirected the boat, or rather, how has Caribbean poetics reshaped Rimbaud? Mallarmé, too, is an obvious precursor to a number of Caribbean poets ranging across generations, from Césaire to M. NourbeSe Philip, but his fracturing of lines—lines of verse, lines of historical progress, lines of filiation—invites another question: What has Mallarmé's collision with the Antilles done to Mallarmé?

These two poets are among the many that Glissant invokes in essays and speeches throughout his career. Indeed, they are generally accorded a kind of founding-father status (along with Baudelaire) for the twentieth-century avant-garde poets who were so important to Glissant: Reverdy, Valéry, Leiris, Char, and Yves Bonnefoy, to name a few. I focus on Rimbaud and Mallarmé in this chapter for two reasons. The first has to do precisely with their ambiguous ancestral role for Caribbean poetry. Chronologically-speaking, these two poets are the first points in the poetic auto-genealogy that Glissant creates from *L'Intention poétique* all the way through *Philosophie de la Relation*. It is tempting to say that Glissantian poetics "begins" with Rimbaud and Mallarmé, that the two *poètes-maudits* "engendered" or, more politely but no less problematically, "announced" the poetics of Relation. But, of course, Glissant sharply critiques this linear view of ancestry, this tendency to reduce a subject to its "roots" in the past. Instead, by exerting a kind of reverse or anachronistic influence on poets a century older than he, Glissant makes a case for poetry's particular power to disrupt lines of filiation: not only to question the formation of historical-chronological literary canons but also, more broadly, to critique the prevailing rationale about time's role in human identity-formation.

The second reason for focusing on Rimbaud and Mallarmé is that their poetry shares with Glissant's own poetics such crucial qualities as opacity, errancy or vagabondage, and imagery of

the abyss and of chaos. Their poetry thus provides the opportunity to test Glissant's conviction that Caribbean poetics is not confined to the Caribbean region, that creolization occurs broadly across time and space, if only we open ourselves to it (*IPD* 17). This chapter, then, does more than perform a Caribbean reading of the Rimbaud and Mallarmé; it seeks to show that the Glissantian sensibility of opacity, errancy, and chaos provides a way in which to gain access to texts that have resisted legibility for over a century.

RIMBAUD'S SENSORY *TOUT-MONDE*

It can only be assumed that Rimbaud's great diatribe against European ancestry, "Mauvais sang," held an important place on syllabi at the Lycée Schoelcher during Glissant's time there in the 1940s. Rimbaud's legendary rebelliousness appears in full force in this section of *Une saison en enfer*, including his self-recognition as a "maudit." A striking racial commentary runs alongside his embrace of cultural alienation. The poet speaks of leaving Europe and returning with the virility and strength of the "barbare": "Je reviendrai, avec des membres de fer, la peau sombre, l'œil furieux : sur mon masque, on me jugera d'une race forte" (249). He celebrates irrationality as a liberation, evoking the ecstatic African ritual ("Faim, soif, cris, danse, danse, danse !"(251)); he reverses the derogatory term *nègre*, calling powerful Europeans the true *nègres* ("Marchand, tu es nègre ; magistrat, tu es nègre ; général, tu es nègre ; empereur, vieille démangeaison, tu es nègre" (250)). It is no coincidence that Césaire, enumerating his literary antecedents, praises Rimbaud's "paroles mémorables, de détresse et de victoire…" ("Poésie" 160). "Mauvais sang" was apparently required reading for the students of Negritude on the other side of the Atlantic as well: Léopold Senghor's protégé, the Congolese poet Tchicaya U Tam'si, entitled his first book of poems *Mauvais sang*, and U Tam'si, later established as perhaps the greatest post-Negritude francophone African poet, earned the nickname "le Rimbaud noir."

Yet, although "Mauvais sang" bears the most obvious *thematic* relationship to the francophone anticolonial project, Rimbaud's other work, especially the *Illuminations*, goes even more directly to the heart of anticolonial Antillean *poetics*. Indeed, for Aristide Maugée, the member of the 1940s Lycée Schoelcher/*Tropiques* group who seems to have had the most intimate effect on Glissant's writing, Rimbaud is the essential precursor to anticolonial poetic project, led by Césaire. Rimbaud's eruptive language creates the possibility for a new vision of the world:

> La poésie moderne, à partir de Rimbaud, place dans le rêve le secret de toute création. Triomphe du merveilleux : le poète est voyant, le poète est prophète.
>
> D'une telle poésie, A. Césaire est l'héritier. Une gerbe irrésistible, cette inspiration, avide d'exprimer le sentiment dans son infinie complexité, de mesurer l'Insondable, impatiente de saisir l'absolue. (13)

Consistent with the general tendencies of *Tropiques* at this time, there are recognizable surrealist elements here, especially the belief in the liberating power of the dream. But the notions of the "infinie complexité" and the "Insondable" are even more perspicacious, if also more abstract, comments on Rimbaldian poetics, and they also look forward to Glissant. Reading the little that remains of Maugée's work, it makes sense that he was Glissant's teacher and that Glissant heard his lectures day in and day out, whereas Césaire never had him in class (contrary to widespread belief, as mentioned in Chapter One). Maugée had an explicit interest in the obscure, the unintelligible, and the untranslatable, as shown in this proto-Glissantian reading of Césaire and Rimbaud, written while Glissant was still a student at the Lycée:

> Parce que le poète façonne des mots nouveaux, crée des images nouvelles pour exprimer la nuance exacte de sa perception, trouve des sonorités neuves pour libérer son chant intérieur […] Inutile de rechercher l'intelligible—un beau poème ne se laisse pas traduire—(14)

The poet creates something "new" and, therefore, foreign. The poem's opacity is akin to the opacity of the cultural Other, challenging entrenched regimes of intelligibility. As Rimbaud suggests in "Mauvais sang," and as I will demonstrate further, this kind of poetry must be *barbaric* in the most fundamental sense of the term.

In the *Illuminations*, Rimbaud's counter-rationalist barbarity occurs in the fabric of the

text, in the way that the poem reconfigures the meaning-making process. It thereby shakes the foundations of post-Enlightenment epistemology and ontology at their deepest point: in the operations language. If, for Glissant (almost paraphrasing Maugée), the role of poetry is to "changer l'imaginaire des humanités" (IL 85), then it is no surprise that Rimbaud is important for Caribbean poetics not just for his racial reversals in "Mauvais sang" but also for his radical poetic innovations. Rimbaud scholarship has already picked up on the Rimbaud's power to change the "imaginary" or the sensibility of society. This analysis, so far, has generally taken place in relationship with the work of Jacques Rancière,[1] for whom literature has a profound impact on politics:

> Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of influence. It is a partition [*partage*] of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable […] It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking. […] [L]iterature is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing, and saying that frames a polemical common world. (152)

Rancière's formulation of the *partage du sensible* offers the advantage of lending political importance to Rimbaud's poetics of "sense," in all its forms: meaning (*sens*), sensory faculties (*sens*), geographical orientation or direction (*sens*), and the sense of time (*sens du temps*). In what follows, I argue that Rimbaldian sense is not, in fact, polysemic or multivalent; it is, rather, immanent. In other words, Rimbaud conceives of a kind of sense in which meaning and sensation occur together in the material world. In breaking down the dualisms of Platonic thought and its modern iterations (the separation of ideal/real, word/thing, intellect/body, cosmos/earth, etc.), Rimbaud makes his poems incompatible with ontological classifications that prioritize static, self-

sufficient, indisputable truths inhabiting a transcendent realm. Instead, Rimbaud's poems exist as immanent spaces of perpetual becoming, abidingly vital. The inscription on Glissant's gravestone holds the same conviction: "Rien n'est vrai, tout est vivant." This accounts for the two poets' shared opacity, their taste for thick, compressed, sense-charged language that offers a new kind of accessibility.

Complicating Sense

Rimbaud deliberately evades comprehension, all the while appealing to an accessibility of *sens* that somehow bypasses the intermediary of ordinary language: he sought to "inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les sens" (263). The "accessible," paradoxically, cannot exist in Rimbaud's poetics without the incomprehensible or the impenetrable, as the next sentence in "Alchimie du verbe" suggests: "Je réservais la traduction." This paradox, the desire for accessibility to all senses and yet the imperviousness to definitive comprehension, lies at the crux of Rimbaud's expression. Tzvetan Todorov took on this difficulty in the 1978 article "Une complication de texte: les *Illuminations*," proposing a new way of reading Rimbaud, and perhaps a new way of reading modern poetry. Yet Todorov does not go far enough, settling for the negative and the nonsensical—or, at best, the meta-critical—rather than reaching for the affirmative, incantatory way in which Rimbaud appeals otherwise to sense. Glissant's poetics of Relation—especially with its rereading of Gilles Deleuze's baroque ontology—provides a rich supplement to Todorov's reading. In particular, Glissant's notion of *opacité* takes Todorov's *complication de texte* to its etymological potential: to the texture of the language rather than the referential world that exegetes seek to see beneath it. In the immanent world of the opaque text, meaning (*sens*) and senses (*sens*) cannot be separated; not simply a refusal of referentiality,

Rimbaud's poetry seeks, by the waves and folds of its text, to make itself "accessible" even as it escapes the grasp.

In his polemical article, Todorov takes to task nearly a century's worth of criticism on Rimbaud. To characterize the ways in which critics have grappled with the "enigmatic texts" called the *Illuminations*, Todorov proposes four categories of scholarship, each as ineffective as the other ("A complication" 223). "Euhemerist" critics read Rimbaud for historical interest, for biographical information; "aetiological" critics psychoanalyze Rimbaud via his texts, searching for symptoms of psychoses and locating evidence of the poet's drug use; "esoteric" critics seek to find the words' hidden symbolism, asserting a "true" referent for each mysterious enunciation that has, according to them, only been waiting to be deciphered; finally, "paradigmatic" critics gather together themes, forms, or structures from across the work and analyze their patterns, or lack thereof. Despite his rather ungenerous caricature of these modes of criticism, Todorov is right that they, at least in such states of pure stubbornness, cannot come close to explaining how the *Illuminations* work as poetry. Todorov thus proposes to meet Rimbaud's text on its own terms, that is, to abandon the search for a "real" world evoked by the text (ibid. 226). A *complication de texte*, as opposed to the conventional *explication de texte*, attends to the work's difficulty as a subject in itself, not an obstacle to be surmounted, nor an inconvenience to be ignored.

Yet, although Todorov's critique draws the focus to the crucial innovation in Rimbaud's work, and although it provides an astute reading of the *Illuminations*' disruptions of meaning, the article leaves the negative in a place of emptiness. It ignores the possibility of experiencing sense in language that violates the conventions of poetic meaning. For Todorov, Rimbaud's only sense is nonsense, and any attempt to restore meaning to his text actually robs it of this sole meaning: "Paradoxalement, c'est en voulant restituer le sens de ces textes que l'exégète les en prive—car

leur sens, paradoxe inverse, est de n'en point avoir" ("Une complication" 252). Todorov, in other words, explains how Rimbaud's texts remain beyond our grasp, incomprehensible as totality, but he does not allow that they somehow remain "accessible," as suggested in "Alchimie du verbe." However, he does provide a term—*complication*—whose fecundity in itself suggests a fuller way to read Rimbaud. *Complication* and text, in fact, share their etymology in the language of textiles: to complicate is, literally, "to fold together" or "intertwine." It is the very opposite of *explication*, which suggests an unfolding, a disassembling of the fabric which is obstructing the underlying truth. To suggest a *complication du texte*, then, is to give up the search for an underlying truth, a referential world separate from and beyond the text's fabric, and to draw meaning from the operations of the text itself.

Glissant, explaining his notion of opacity, points to exactly this kind of attention to the textual surface. For him, writing in a Caribbean context riddled with colonial exploitation, the opacity of poetic language is the only way to resist the penetrating, invasive rationalism of Western colonialism. The term "comprehension," for him, implies a possessive grasp that does not respect the particularity of the other (PR 206). His poetry, some of the most difficult in the French language in the second half of the twentieth century, seeks to begin a textual weave that only the reader can help complete but, crucially, whose potential variations also make it so that the text will never be finished. More than Todorov, Glissant insists on the openness of this text:

> consentir [...] au droit à l'opacité, qui n'est pas l'enfermement dans une autarcie impénétrable, mais la subsistance dans une singularité non réductible. Des opacités peuvent coexister, confluer, tramant des tissus dont la véritable compréhension porterait sur la texture de cette trame et non pas sur la nature des composants. (ibid. 204)

The poetics of opacity, then, is not the poetics of obscurity, for obscurity maintains the emphasis on something beneath the surface: *obscurus* means "to cover over." Nor is opacity a hermetism or esoterism, in which the proper initiation or code will grant access to the language's deeper truth, lifting the obscuring cover as if by magic. Rather, opacity denotes the becoming-visible or becoming-sensible of the surface. An opaque text thus uses incomprehension as a tool to induce a reading that attends to this new sensibility, to the texture of the weave.

"J'ai seul la clef…": Creolizing the Key

Todorov is not far from this new focus in his reading of "Parade" and its striking last line: "J'ai seul la clef à cette parade sauvage" (294). After the poem's vertiginous swirl of images and personalities, this line would appear to promise relief to the overwhelmed reader in the form of a "key." The line repeats the poem's title—"Parade"—as if to emphasize that this "clef" belongs to the poem itself, that it is a metapoetic key. Yet, as soon as the *je* dangles the key beneath the exegete's eyes, the key disappears into the solitude of the *je*: "J'ai *seul* la clef." Be this a "je" "autre" than Rimbaud or not, this key remains beyond the reader's grasp. Against the interpretation that would view this line as an indication of the hidden code behind the text, Todorov insists that the key is heuristic rather than revelatory:

> Quand un texte comme *Parade* se termine par la phrase : « J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage », on n'est pas obligé d'y voir l'affirmation d'un sens secret détenu par Rimbaud, d'un être dont il suffirait de connaître l'identité pour que le texte tout entier s'illumine soudainement ; la « clef » peut être aussi la façon dont il faut lire le texte : justement sans chercher de qui il parle, car il ne parle pas *de* quelque chose. (251, Todorov's italics)

Rimbaud is not speaking *about* (*de*) anything because, in the immanent textual world he imagines, he is quite simply—or quite complicatedly—speaking everything. The preposition *de* does not work because the text is not *pre*-positional, indicating something beyond it; it is purely *positional* in itself. Yet here again, as Todorov forcibly dashes the hopes of generations of myth-busting and code-cracking critics, he leaves behind the question of *sens* more broadly speaking. He forgets that to "complicate" is not to hail the end of sense but rather to see it ramified and multiplied across the text (in different directions, *sens*) and, moreover, to conceive of the possibility for meaning (*sens*) to converge with the senses (*sens*).

This multiplication occurs in "Parade" as a form of *métissage* or hybridity in both its imagery and its audiovisual structure. This goes beyond the parade's exotic diversity, reminiscent of Baudelaire's fascinated and horrified observations of modern urban masses: "Chinois, Hottentots, bohémiens, niais, hyènes, Molochs, vieilles démences, démons sinistres, ils mêlent […]" (293). This *mélange*, to pick up on that final verb of that quotation, occurs in a more complex way in the textual material: on the surface of the page and in the sounds of the poem read aloud. As Bruno Claisse has shown, the graphemes and phonemes provide a kind of alternative accessibility to this enigmatic poem, as they participate in "l'activité *globale* du poème, qui, en suscitant l'attraction sémantique de mots ayant des phonèmes communs, devient ici indissociables d'une poétique de l'énigme (« hÉbÉTÉs / d'ÉTÉ » ; « PARAdis / enRAgée », etc.)" (96). The value of Claisse's analysis is that the audiovisual "key" does not resolve the enigma but rather exposes it and multiplies its significance. If the *je* appears as a sphinx holding a key and telling a riddle, then in fact the riddle only produces more sphinxes, since sphinxes are themselves hybrid monsters constituted of irreconcilable elements: "(« *Parade* / Paradis ») […] la prosodie accouple sauvagement (et monstrueusement) ce Paradis avec un Enfer" (ibid. 106). The monster becomes

the *montreur* (both words going back to the Latin *monstrum*, a sign or omen). This interpretive "key" does not dissipate the text's monstrosity, does not resolve the text's contradictions into unified discourse, but rather shows that this monstrosity arises from a transgressive coupling of ideas, a kind of epistemological miscegenation.

Miscegenation, Glissant claims, produces creolization. What an atavistic society would consider illicit and "monstrous," in the most derogatory sense, becomes the strength of Caribbean culture. This intermixing is also integral to the notion of opacity, on both the poetic and the subjective level, for it creates a hybrid entity that cannot be reduced to a rooted origin or a single meaning. From a Glissantian perspective, Rimbaud's poetry does not suggest a "key" to the vault of meaning; rather, "la clef de cette parade sauvage" unchains the carnivalesque, polymorphous presence of this poetry and releases it into the world.

Rimbaud and the Fold

This valorization of multiplicity recalls Glissant's most recognizable philosophical interlocutor, Gilles Deleuze. Perhaps most obviously, Deleuze's affirmation (with Guattari) of schizophrenia seems perfectly suited to Rimbaud's celebrated articulation of the self-alienated subject: "Je est un autre." But, in terms of opacity as a poetic phenomenon, another of Deleuze's concepts resonates even more strongly with Rimbaud. At the core of Todorov's term, *complication*, is one of Deleuze's key philosophical concepts: *le pli*, the fold. The embedding of Deleuze's term in Todorov's is no coincidence, for both concepts inhere in the act of reading. Borrowing from the odd couple of Leibniz and Mallarmé, among others, Deleuze conceives of the fold as a modality for simultaneous unity and multiplicity: a single fabric with an infinite number of infinitely changing folds. He equates this notion of material existence to Baroque art, broadly

conceived. The perspectivism of certain *trompe l'oeil* art, in which a clever illusion allows the viewer's angle to determine the content of the painting, creates a multiplicity in the experience of a single painting. Similarly, linguistic ambiguities, such as the cataphoric pronouns in Henry James's novels, create a disorder within a work that nonetheless maintains a unified continuity (LP 30). The Baroque, which Deleuze considers a trans-historic phenomenon, ultimately posits an "état de l'Un : l'unité en tant qu'elle enveloppe une multiplicité" (ibid. 33). It is a special kind of immanence, one in which there are many possibilities, infinite differences yet belonging to a single cohesion: "une large zone d'immanence" (ibid.). Crucially, texts and paintings not only manifest themselves as folds and series of folds within this material; they also demonstrate the relationship between the one and the multiple as a function of polysemy, the multiple meanings arising from a single enunciation. It is no coincidence, then, that Todorov's term *complication* holds a fundamental place in Deleuze's notion of the Baroque fold. Implications and explications, also part of the system of the *pli*—ex*pli*cation, im*plication*—only serve to provide a further complication:

> Ainsi les enveloppements et développements, les implications et les explications, sont encore des mouvements particuliers qui doivent être compris dans une universelle Unité qui les « complique » tous. (ibid.)

Deleuze suggests an understanding of the text as a fabric with its own folds in which implications, explications, and interpretations all act as "particular movements" in this tissue. Whereas Todorov swears off the explication and, with it, the possibility of a referential totality that the text might represent, Deleuze proposes the possibility of a textual totality whose *complication* guarantees an infinity of implications and explications: an infinite process of folding and unfolding, a never-ending interpretation and development.

An opaque text, thanks to its incomprehensibility, draws the focus to its own complication, its own complexity, and thus emphasizes its potential for multiple senses. Rimbaud's combinations of incongruous ideas and images, the concrete and the abstract—"aube de juin batailleuse" in "Bottom", "chevalet féerique" and "fanfare atroce" in "Matinée d'ivresse," "Eux et tristesses" in "Après le deluge"—does not destroy the possibility of sense; they multiply its possibilities. The seeming incoherence of Rimbaud's sentences points to a greater coherence in the totality of the work: the words may not cohere, they may collide in cacophony, but in this cacophony the text comprises a great many eventualities. The strange progression of images—an abrupt parataxis in which one thing leads immediately to the next—often points toward a totality that can only live in the text. A phrase like "cela finit par une débandade de parfums" (297) does not have an extra-textual sense. It is untranslatable and irreducible to other forms of signification, imagination, or ideation. At the same time, it is not banal nonsense, for if this phrase does not *represent* the world as we know it, it is because the phrase is already *part of* the world. In striving to create a *poésie objective* (339), Rimbaud imagines the flesh of language as immanent to social, political, and physical bodies—and therefore capable of acting upon them. The Rimbaldian phrase thus becomes intelligible only through sensation because language, as a faculty of the intellect, participates in the sensible world. Hence the poem-monster that Claisse identifies: the coupling of *Parade-Paradis* also heralds the fusion of the worldly and the ideal, sensation and ideation.

From *Imprévisibilité* to *Errance*

Todorov, in speaking of "complication," comes close to understanding this supreme immanence of Rimbaud's world. Yet Todorov focuses on the absence of the idea: the impossibility of a referential totality. Rimbaud in fact creates the possibility of a totality that can only exist with

words as an integral part, a totality in which concrete meets abstract, olfactory meets visual, and the celestial meets the terrestrial. The last sentence in “Mystique,” beginning with the image of a painting but quickly exceeding the visual frame that a picture implies, suggest such an unbounded totality:

> Et tandis que la bande en haut du tableau est formée de la rumeur tournante et bondissante des conques des mers et des nuits humaines,
>
> La douceur fleurie des étoiles et du ciel et du reste descend en face du talus, comme un panier, contre notre face, et fait l’abîme fleurant et bleu là-dessous. (305)

With such a mysterious context, even such words as “bande” remain in ambiguity. Most translations render “bande” as “frieze” or “panel,” and this may seem the most logical understanding, but it is impossible to speak in terms of simple logic when reading this poem. Certainly, a picture may have a “panel” or “frieze” at its top, but there is no telling how it may be “formée de la rumeur [...] des nuits humaines.” Or rather, this violation of logic in the second half of the verse allows for a disavowal of the logic in the first part. Nothing prevents a reading of this “bande” as a group of individuals, a kind of spectral army depicted in the painting, combining the ethereal images of “rumeurs” and “nuits humaines.” Even the third, stranger meaning of “une bande” is possible, given the sea imagery surrounding it in the poem: *prendre une bande* refers to when a ship leans into a strong wind. This opaque text causes a series of images to hallucinatorily flow between each other, disrupting the syntax of thought. Yet this multiplicity does not simply operate at the level of single words and phrases. Rimbaud collects substances, movements and places and arranges them in such a way as to enlarge the context almost indefinitely. The process of deducing an expression’s sense from the context—a skill so much more important in French

than in English—becomes a virtual impossibility. But this deductive impossibility gives way to an even greater possibility: for sense to ramify in unpredictable directions. Glissant considers this poetry's fundamental strength and its crucial role in creolization: "La créolisation est imprévisible : on ne peut pas calculer les résultats […] Le poète n'a pas peur de l'imprédictible" (*Imaginaire* 33). Rimbaud not only does not fear the unpredictable; he embraces it.

A similar unforeseeableness haunts the final phrase of the *Illumination* entitled, simply, "H." The last two words, "trouver Hortense," seem both to command the reader to find a referent in the extra-textual world for this name—"trouvez [ailleurs] Hortense"—and, inversely, to affirm the presence of this mysterious entity right there in the poem, a kind of brusque introduction: "trouvez [ici] Hortense" (314). The phrase preceding this moment may provide a clue: "Ô terrible frisson des amours novices, sur le sol sanglant et par l'hydrogène clarteux !" (313–314). This phrase, like the final imperative, also lends itself to two primary readings: either as an apostrophe, mysteriously addressed to a "terrible frisson"—"Ô terrible frisson [...] trouvez Hortense"—or as an exclamation about this powerful shiver, leading into a separate address to the reader. The poem continuously forces the reader to decide to what degree she will implicate herself in the text's inner workings and to what degree she will search elsewhere, as in a *roman à clef*. The title, "H," creates a similar duality. It is, on the one hand, an isolated character, a material fragment of language, with a sense unto itself; on the other hand, it begs for completion, as in a game of hangman, and the poem's body seems to promise the possibility to complete what the title only begins. Yet, as Seth Whidden has shown, the poem interrupts the temporality of signification in such a way that the final word, "Hortense" (not far from *hors-temps*), always indefinite, circles back to the title, inciting a new but different beginning, a complete circle with an always incomplete trajectory: a spiral rather than a closed loop (193–194). If, as Whidden claims, this "H" evokes not only the

name “Hortense” or any of the other H-words associated with the poem but also the abbreviation of the word “heure” in time-telling (07h10, 18h30, etc.), then the notion of time is directly related to this opaque fragment of language. “H” is *hors-temps* it crystallizes time, using bits of language to interrupt the linear temporality of reading. It is only appropriate that such a challenge to linearity would occur in an early example of prose poetry, which challenges the metrical and formal constraints of lines of verse. For Glissant, moreover, the crystalline shard of time is essential to Antillean cultural memory because of how colonialism shattered grand narratives of history. The Antillean, Glissant says, must recreate memory from “un morceau impénétrable de temps, une roche incassable” (TTM 43). By this logic, “H” appears destined for the Antilles, where impenetrability does not simply obstruct access but rather guarantees that access must occur in unforeseeable ways, unique to the reader’s experience of the poem.

Admittedly, there is a relativistic aspect to this kind of reading and this kind of writing. When, following Todorov’s lead, we abandon the search for the “real” behind Rimbaud’s text, as if the text had not been real in itself, we open the text to misreading. Yet this misreading contributes to the life of the poem, keeps it dynamic. In this poetics of reading, Glissant and Deleuze are joined by an unlikely mate, Harold Bloom, whose theory of influence considers misreading a positive, heuristic process for critics and poets. Although Bloom’s work is generally at odds with Glissant’s and Deleuze’s, which fights adamantly against the filial structure of influence that Bloom promotes, his idea of productive misreading pertains directly to the poetics of opacity. Borrowing the same term from Stoic philosophy that Deleuze uses in *Logique du sens*, Bloom speaks of reading as a *climamen* (swerve) that takes poetry in unexpected directions:

> There are only more or less creative or interesting mis-readings, for is not every reading necessarily a *clinamen*? [...] Let us give up the failed enterprise of seeking

> to “understand” any single poem as an entity in itself. Let us pursue instead the quest of learning to read any poem as its poet’s deliberate misinterpretation, *as a poet* [...] (43)

Glissant is not quite as didactic as Bloom, and he attends more to the political ramifications of reading, but in the end he calls for a similar disavowal of “cette vieille hantise de surprendre le fond des natures” (PR 204). Importantly, opaque poetry invites the inevitable relativism of misreading, but not in a way that allows the subject to commandeer the poem. In fact, coincidental to Rimbaud’s opacity is the sense of a fierce voice, a lyric presence demanding to be taken on its own terms. This strong, self-possessed voice occurs especially in moments when he offers the text to a reader: “vous qui aimez dans l’écrivain l’absence des facultés descriptives ou instructives, je vous détache ces quelques hideux feuillets de mon carnet damné” (178). The text is now in the reader’s hands, but his power over it, given the strong voice that rises from the page, remains in question. Similarly, Deleuze, in *Le pli*, is careful to note that the relativism of Baroque aesthetics is not the kind of relativism so often derided by critics of literary theory. It is neither nihilism nor pure subjectivism; rather, it is the subject’s confrontation with a necessary variability in the work of art. The auditor does not simply choose what to hear; she is forced to acknowledge that she is not hearing (and here, the double-meaning French *entendre* is preferable) the totality of the work’s possibilities all at once. Deleuze gives the example of baroque perspectivism, which he sees at work not only in seventeenth-century painting but also in modern writing:

> Le perspectivisme chez Leibniz, et aussi chez Nietzsche, chez William et Henry James, chez Whitehead, est bien un relativisme, mais ce n’est pas le relativisme qu’on croit. Ce n’est pas une variation de la vérité d’après le sujet, mais la condition sous laquelle apparaît au sujet la vérité d’une variation. C’est l’idée

même de la perspective baroque. (LP 27)

A *complication de texte,* in the Deleuzian sense more than the Todorovian, does more than draw attention to the difficulties of the text; it emphasizes the way this difficulty demands a different kind of understanding from the reader, one which recognizes variation and multiplicity as the very unifying aspect of the text. When Rimbaud asserts, "J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage," he reminds the reader of the error necessary in all interpretation, the inability to grasp completely the material at hand.

The necessary error involved in reading, the acknowledgement of the text as too vast for the scope of a single reading, would become conceptualized in Glissant's term *errance*. It is here that Rimbaud's vagabondage and Glissant's opacity link up. Often translated as "wandering" or, more literally, "errancy," this term combines the idea of "too err"—both to wander and to make an error—with the process-oriented suffix *-ance*. *Errance*, then, implies a kind of purposeful or knowing erring. The errant reading, a specific kind of misreading, foregoes the attempt to penetrate to the root of things, to see a single truth beneath the text. It operates horizontally, that is, seeing meaning on a broad horizon, unfathomable in its totality but accessible to a variety of possibilities:

> L'errant récuse l'édit universel, généralisant, qui résumait le monde en une évidence transparente, lui prétendant un sens et une finalité supposés. Il plonge aux opacités de la part du monde à qui il accède […] La pensé de l'errance conçoit la totalité, mais renonce volontiers à la prétention de la sommer ou de la posséder. (PR 33)

For Glissant, moreover, Rimbaud is one of the principal examples of an errant poet. The young *poète-maudit*'s physical wanderings cannot be separated from his textual errings: "Avec le troubadour, avec Rimbaud, l'errance est vocation" (ibid. 27). Writing against the imperialistic

movement of penetration or colonial conquest, which is not simply the work of traders and armies but also of humanist thought, Glissant finds in Rimbaud an example of resistance. When, in "Alchimie du verbe," Rimbaud asserts that in his mysterious sonnet of the "Voyelles," "Je réservais la traduction," he is almost flaunting his own resistance of the invasive desire to decode the text and lay bare a single, authoritative meaning.

Barbarian Sense

Yet Rimbaud's resistance, like Glissant's, is not entirely militant or protective; it is also productive. This dialect appears at the crux of "Alchimie du verbe." Just before the reservation of the translation comes the promise of an accessibility: "je me flattais d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les sens" (263). Todorov notes Rimbaud's taste for contradiction (248), but in this case, withholding a translation and yet making a poetics accessible is not contradictory: it goes hand-in-hand. In fact, the only way to make a poetics "accessible à *tous* les sens," *all* meanings, is to acknowledge the work's imperviousness to translation, or at least its imperviousness to definitive translation. Indeed, in translating *sens* as "meaning," I have just demonstrated this principle because I ignored, or set aside, the equally plausible interpretation of *sens* as sensory faculty, evoking the synesthetic *poète-voyant*. In his reading of "Alchimie du verbe," Yann Frémy claims that this poetics constitutes not only a different kind of accessibility but also a poetic "accession," that is, a reterritorialization of poetic meaning that allows the enunciation to be filled with a diversity of perceptions:

> Gorgé de cette richesse sensible, ce verbe est avant tout le non-occulté, le non-indifférent, l'affirmatif qui accepte et accueille toutes les propositions. Il est l'accessibilité devenue accession. Il est objet et sujet, à la fois le territoire et son

> peuplement. À cet effet, nulle explication n'est à fournir, seulement une application : « Je réservais la traduction. » (315)

Frémy thus proposes yet another evocation of the *pli*: "ap*pli*cation," which suggests a meeting of surfaces, a point of contact between two substances linked by a fold. A "verbe accessible" is a *verbe applicable*, touching everywhere, felt by all.

Thus, the meaning (*sens*) is only hidden to emphasize a more capacious notion of sense (*sens*): "Je suis caché et je ne le suis pas," asserts the poet of *Une saison en enfer* (257). This line, characteristically Rimbaldian, explicitly insists on the unexplained, the untranslated, the purposefully opaque. A similar metapoetic comment occurs in "Après le déluge," where, after a flood of strange pairings of words which Todorov perceptively calls an "attaque contre le syntaxe" (247)—"draps noirs et orgues, – éclairs et tonnerre, – montez et roulez; – Eaux et tristesses,"—a witch-queen appears with the sole purpose of *not* explaining what she knows: "et la Reine, la Sorcière qui allume sa braise dans le pot de terre, ne voudras jamais nous raconter ce qu'elle sait, et que nous ignorons" (208). This line suggests that the magic of the witch's pot depends upon our ignorance, our inability to "know" with any certainty. The magic of Rimbaud's verb, its alchemy, depends upon its ability to breed uncertainty even as it provides access to meanings and senses in multiple ways.

As in "Après le déluge," "Parade," and "H," the voice of the enigma often gets the final word, and the poem ends in suspension. Another *Illumination*, "Barbare," is perhaps the most complex example of this phenomenon. At the end of this poem, a "voix féminine" gets relegated to the remote ends of the earth, far from the presumed accessibility of the reader:

> Ô douceurs, ô monde, ô musique ! Et là, les formes, les sueurs, les chevelures et les yeux, flottant. Et les larmes blanches, bouillantes, – ô douceurs ! – et la voix

féminine arrivée au fond des volcans et des grottes arctiques. (310)

Not unlike the poet figure in Glissant's "L'eau du volcan," discussed in chapter one, this voice descends into the contradictory terrain of lava and arctic waters. The further it proceeds, the further away it moves from conventional logic, seeming destined to disappear completely in the silence at the poem's end. Yet "Barbare" complicates this apparent finality. First, as in the poem's other sentences, this one does not have a verb: it is incomplete, *in-finie*.[2] Second, this is not in fact the end of the poem. The poem has a refrain—"Le pavillon en viande saignante sur la soie des mers et des fleurs arctiques ; (elles n'existent pas)"—and at the very end of the poem, the refrain's first two words appear again in suspension: "Le pavillion….." The ellipses could signal, on the one hand, the poem's freezing in this arctic environment or, on the other hand, the poem's infinite repetition: silence or proliferation. Or perhaps the two options are not mutually exclusive; perhaps silence can be a form of proliferation. The idea of a "frozen" enunciation recalls Rabelais, in whose *Quart Livre* Pantagruel discovers the famous "parolles gelées" (206). Preserved from antiquity, these words appear sensibly to those who encounter them in the future ("le peuple voyoit les voix sensiblement" (ibid.)) but are not comprehensible. Solid, visible (colored even, like Rimbaud's "Vowels") and yet inscrutable, these words are opaque in the fullest sense, and they remain so even after they become "dégelées":

> Lors [Pantagruel] nous jecta sus le tillac plenes mains de parolles gelées, et sembloient dragée perlée de diverses couleurs. Nous y veismes des motz de gueule, des motz de sinople, des motz de azur, des motz de sable, des mots dorez. Les quelz, estre quelque peu eschauffez entre nos mains, fondoient comme neiges, et les oyons realement, mais ne les entendions, car c'estoit languaige barbare. (ibid.).

"Barbarian language," indeed. If Rimbaud did not *dégèle* the title of "Barbare" from this passage

of Rabelais, he at least shares with Rabelais a fascination for the opacity of "barbarian" language, which, by refusing transparency to the reader or listener, interrupts the temporality of linguistic communication. This is precisely what happens at the (false) end of "Barbare." The refrain, which is ultimately left suspended, offers not only a fantastic and paradoxical image but also a parenthetical commentary that denies this image's existence: "Oh ! Le pavillon en viande saignante sur la soie des mers et des fleurs arctiques ; (elles n'existent pas)." It is as if the voice of rationalism has elbowed its way into this poem, wedging itself into the space of a parenthesis. "Elles n'existent pas" is the only grammatically complete sentence in the poem; the rest are fragments, elaborate nominal phrases. When the poem ends in suspension—"Le pavillon….."—the question remains as to whether the rational voice has won, the poem fading into nonexistence, or whether the rest of the expression echoes or even, in the Rabelasian vein, congeals, waiting to be rediscovered, thawed, and loosed once again upon the world. The experience of reciting this poem aloud strongly suggests the second possibility, as the ellipses prompt the inner voice to pick up where the spoken voice stops: "Le pavillion….. [en viande saignante, etc., etc.]." Whereas the period would mark finality, the ellipses mark ambiguity; the period is single, and the ellipses are multiple; the period signals a moment, however small, of illumination or enlightenment as the newly-complete sentence lights up like a complete circuit, but the ellipses accept the fertile obscurity of an unfinished enunciation. Thus, if the poet of "Mauvais sang" celebrates his anti-Enlightenment *barbarie* in a proto-Negritude register ("Oui, j'ai les yeux fermés à votre lumière. Je suis une bête, un nègre" (250)), then the Rimbaud of "Barbare" incorporates this project into the flesh of his poetry, the *barbarie* appearing not thematically but as a grammar, a writing, and a practice.

The notion of barbarity resonates in a specific way with Glissant's understanding of

creolization. *Barbare*, with its repeated syllable, quite like *bla-bla*, remains close to the Greek *barbaroi*, denoting those who did not speak Greek and thus appeared (to the Greeks) to be speaking gibberish or baby talk. Glissant recalls that the colonists infantilized the creole languages in the same way: for them, "le créole est un patois, incapable d'accéder à l'abstraction et par conséquent de véhiculer un « savoir »" (DA 590). Creole, he claims, "systematizes" the stammering, halting speech of the enslaved person thrust into a new language, and the opacity of the new creole languages not only provide useful camouflage from the European master but also create a new epistemology that undercuts colonial hierarchies:

> [L]'esclave confisque le langage que le maître lui a imposé, langage simplifié, approprié aux exigences du travail (d'un petit-nègre) et pousse à l'extrême de la simplification. Tu veux me réduire au bégaiement, je vais systématiser le bégaiement, nous verrons si tu t'y retrouveras. (ibid. 49)

When Glissant says, in retrospect, that his theories of the opacity of language originate in the convergence between the "contes créoles" that he heard as a child and the "« scolaire » influence des poétiques rimbaldienne et mallarméenne," he describes a more natural marriage than one might think (IL 18–19). Rimbaud and the *conteur*, for one, share an orality that bypasses conventional semantics.[3] If the creole storyteller orally invokes a "présence non élucidée des langues et des formules dont on n'a pas le sens mais qui agissent quand même sur vous" (ibid. 18), Rimbaud is not far from doing the same in his lines and sentences, whose sense often only appears obliquely, often through reading aloud. The refrain of "Barbare," for example, assaults all lexical and visual logic while weaving together an unexpected sonic coherence. Along with the radically juxtaposed, incongruous images, appears a strong consonance that manifests itself only to the ear, for even the spelling camouflages the repetition of the [j] sound in "Le pav*ill*on en v*ia*nde sai*gn*ante." This

expression is opaque in the most Glissantian sense of the term: not simply for its resistance to a coherent meaning corresponding to a separate "real" world, but also for its attempt to attain sense alternatively, by appealing to the sensory faculties. Glissant's own poetry (especially *Fastes* and *Les grands chaos*, discussed in chapter one) experiments ambitiously with this kind of sense-making. If the sense of the word *barbare*, at its origin, is simply the nonsense perceived by the other (who only hears unintelligible sounds, *bar-bar*), then *barbare* gains its final sense from the sonic repetition within it. *Barbare* thus exemplifies opacity, as it demonstrates how the *sensation* of language can block access to a deeper meaning but simultaneously create extra-semantic effects on the surface of the language. To understand opaque language, one must first experience this sensation without attempting to comprehend its sense in an immediate way. Hence the force that Glissant finds both in Rimbaldian poetics and in the creole *conte*, "dont personne ne connaissait le sens, et qui agissait fortement sur l'auditoire sans qu'on sache pourquoi" (ibid. 18).

Barbarian language, then, embraces the productive, fertile power of "nonsense." But what gets produced? Todorov is able to recognize the *Illuminations*' willful nonsense, but for him nothing redeems them: "ces phrases agrammaticales et énigmatiques, dont on ignorera, à tout jamais et non seulement « dans l'état actuel de nos connaissances », le référent *et* le sens" (252). Laurent Zimmermann, more recently, comes closer when he argues that Rimbaud's notion of nothing—*rien*—is the fundamental condition of his poetry, not the closure of meaning but the opening of possibilities:

> Le « rien » chez Rimbaud n'est pas ascétique, mais intervient au milieu même de l'appel à la sensation, à la rencontre du monde : c'est qu'il s'agit bel et bien d'aller vers le monde, le « rien » n'est pas un « rien » du monde ; il s'agit au contraire d'aller vers un monde encore ouvert, toujours, à l'événement, et donc au futur

> comme « rien », comme « rien » encore de ce qu'il est possible d'imaginer, de penser, de dire. (31)

Zimmermann is referring to the crucial rhyme in the early poem "Sensation" between "rien" and "bohémien," connecting the possibilities of a freed existence with an empty mind and empty expression: "Je ne parlerais pas, je ne penserais rien" (35). This state of simultaneous poetics and silence, Zimmermann suggests, extends all the way through the *Illuminations*, and it manifests itself as a possibility inherent in, of all places, the impossibility. The "nothing" of the *Illuminations* is their referential lack, the fact that, in Todorov's words, "leur sens, paradoxe inverse, est de n'en point avoir" (252). Todorov must end his article there, though, because he cannot proceed beyond the idea that the *Illuminations*' sense is their own nonsense.

Deleuze very nearly predicted this conundrum a decade earlier in *Logique du sens*, and he proposes to reverse the formula. For Deleuze, in his idiosyncratic reading of *Alice in Wonderland*, words and expressions of nonsense appear as both language and thing: "C'est un mot qui désigne exactement ce qu'il exprime, et qui exprime exactement ce qu'il désigne" (84). This is not the same, Deleuze continues, as saying that nonsense has a sense (85); rather, it is to say that, in expressing itself as nonsense, an enunciation becomes material. To read a poem like "Nocturne Vulgaire," with its infinitive phrases like "rouler sur l'aboi des dogues," is to sense the language as a material resource because such a strange combination of images and ideas could only happen through the operations of linguistic syntax (307). Without putting it this way, Deleuze is in fact saying that nonsense operates in a poetics of opacity in the fullest sense: incomprehensible, the expression rather becomes materially visible itself, creating an entirely new regime of signification that gives up the quest for a deeper, referential sense. Glissant's injunction to "focus on the texture of the weave" haunts *Logique du sens* in its most crucial passages on sense. Similar to

Zimmermann, Deleuze argues that nonsense is not a simple negative, a *rien*, but rather the condition for an excess of sense.[4] It is not an absence of sense but rather an indeterminacy of sense, thus allowing for variations to an indefinite degree: "le non-sens ne possède aucun sens particulier, mais s'oppose à l'absence de sens, et non pas au sens qu'il produit en excès, sans jamais entretenir avec son produit le rapport simple d'exclusion auquel on voudrait les ramener" (LS 89). If nonsense renders language opaque, it is in the service of granting a surplus of sense to the material surface of this language. The surface, for Deleuze, is the space of events, constant production, and paradoxes, which guarantee that language is always in a process of *devenir* (ibid. 13–19). Rimbaud's paradoxes—the "fleurs arctiques" as well as the "Je [qui] est un autre"—are not simple stumbling blocks for the reader; they interrupt the comprehension of the expression from its depths and, consequently, grant access to the language's dynamism on its surface: "Le paradoxe apparaît comme destitution de la profondeur, étalement des événements à la surface, déploiement du langage le long de cette limite" (ibid. 18). Nonsense, as Rimbaud conceives it, liberates itself from the static unicity of the depths in order to create a restless multiplicity on the frontier of language.

Deregulating Sense, Decolonizing Poetics

Rimbaud promises this excess of sense: the famous "dérèglement de *tous les sens*" in his letter to Izambard. The hallucinatory quality of his poetics—*dérèglement* as *folie*—indicates a semantics in which sense is "de-regulated" from its conventions. Rimbaud's phrase, often quoted in isolation, is surrounded in its sentence by the language of the incomprehensible and the unknown, suggesting an encounter between the opaque and the excessive. His apparent aggressiveness toward his addressee might also be a challenge to his reader to see the sense in the unknown: "vous ne comprendrez pas du tout, et je ne saurais presque vous expliquer. Il s'agit

d'arriver à l'inconnu par le dérèglement de *tous les sens*" (340). The *inconnu* could be something that only the *voyant* can discover, but it could also be a state at which he must "arrive." Thus, Rimbaud does not seek to "reveal" the unknown but to make an entire poetics out of the unknown, that is, to accept the unknown as the unstable foundation of a new accession to sense. The same emphasis on the unknown occurs in the *Lettre du voyant* to Paul Demeny, sent only two days later: "Car il [le Poète-*voyant*] arrive à l'inconnu ! […] Il arrive à l'inconnu, et quand, affolé, il finirait par perdre l'intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues. »" (344). The *voyant* rejects the narrowness of intelligibility, which is classically opposed to sensibility; the *voyant* instead seeks a kind of visibility that is not confined to the mind—in the same way that he calls into question the notion of *connaissance*, which, taking the Cartesian *cogito* as an example, separates "thinking substance" from "material substance" (Descartes 95). The *inconnu*, as a negation of *connaissance* rather than as an unknown thing to discover, de-regulates this dualism and asserts that sense exists not separate from but rather *through* sensation. This is not to privilege sensibility over intelligibility but rather to destroy the barrier between them, hence the oxymoron in the letter to Demeny: a "long, immense et raisonné *dérèglement*."[5] A "reasoned derangement" uses cognitive faculties to re-activate the sensory faculties, to re-cognize "sense" in its fullest capacity: as a mode of apprehension that involves both mind and body. Sense, in Rimbaud's poetics, is not polyvalent; it is immanent.

The "dérèglement de" in the *Lettre du voyant* later becomes "accessible à" in the otherwise identical phrase in "Alchimie du verbe": "accessible à tous les sens." This slippage emphasizes the fact that *dérèglement* is not simply a destruction of sense but rather a creation of it, a *poiesis*. This alternative accessibility occurs in a poem like "Phrases," whose syntax—in this case a strong anaphoric structuring—provides a hidden form to an otherwise mysterious combination of images. A sense seems to present itself despite the nonsensical propositions that the poem makes:

> Quand le monde sera réduite en un seule bois noir pour nos quatre yeux étonnés, – en une plage pour deux enfants fidèles, – en une maison musicale pour notre claire sympathie, – je vous trouverai. (298)

The apparently simple causality—when this happens, I will find you—juxtaposes with a bizarre complication: the world must be "reduced" into this plethora of idiosyncratic images, which in both their irrationality and their fragmented multiplicity,[6] do not suggest reduction at all. And yet, due to the grammatical structure of the paragraph, the impression remains that this reduction is somehow possible. Moreover, a "bois noir" implies the infinite irreducibility of the unknown, just as the sea visible from the "plage" would unfathomable. Yet, the hypotaxis of this phrase—a simple causality with an interlude syntactically sealed off by anaphoric prepositions—gives the impression that this reduction is possible. In "Phrases," whose title underscores the poem's grammar, "le monde sera réduite" ultimately to the language that created it. Thus, *réduire* does not necessarily mean a diminution but rather a return to an elementary state, which may explain the unorthodox choice of preposition, with "réduite en" appearing place of the expected "réduite à" (Brunel 255). Behind the parodic aspect of this poem, which pastiches Verlaine's sentimental verse (ibid. 261), occurs a singularly Rimbaldian operation: seeing the world and the text "en" a single substance as opaque as a "seul bois noir." Whereas the preposition *à*, from the Latin *ad*, implies distance between two separate places, *en*, from the Latin *in*, suggests an enveloping of elements. That world and phrase are but folds in the same fabric, that sense envelops both signification and sensation: this is the immanent ontology that emerges from the poetic cluster of Rimbaud, Glissant, and Deleuze.

The *Illuminations*, then, offer a sensory experience of words and phrases—a sensibility that cannot be separated from nor overshadowed by their signifying function. Claudel says as much

in his preface the 1912 edition of Rimbaud's work:

> Le langage en nous prend une valeur moins d'expression que de signe ; les mots fortuits qui montent à la surface de l'esprit, le refrain, l'obsession d'une phrase continuelle forment une espèce d'incantation qui finit par coaguler la conscience, cependant que notre miroir intime est laissé, par rapport aux choses du dehors, dans un état de *sensibilité* presque matérielle. (517, Claudel's italics)

The language, more than having a specific sense, becomes sensible: palpable, visible, audible. To "focus on the texture of the weave," in Glissant's conception of opacity, is to feel this texture as much as to see it. Claudel suggests that sense rises to the surface and enters the material world of reading, and Deleuze adds that on this surface occurs an excess of sense, sense in a continual process of production: "le sens n'est jamais principe ou origine, il est produit. Il n'est pas à découvrir, à restaurer ni à re-employer, il est à produire par de nouvelles machines" (LS 89–90). In the immanent zone that Deleuze calls "surface," meaning (*sens*) occurs in the senses (*sens*), and this is already a kind of synthesis of sense, a synaesthesia. The text's incomprehensibility in referential terms gives rise to its accessibility in corporeal terms. Opacity takes sense beyond the realm of single meaning and opens it *à tous les sens*.

In a dialectical logic this becoming-sensible might suggest a new transparency, a new way of gaining direct access to the literary object. The same argument has been made about Glissant's notion of opacity, that opacity is but a step in the overcoming of a reductive, rationalist poetics—a step leading ultimately to a "more total becoming-transparent" (Hallward 79). Yet this move falsely conflates visibility with transparency: a conflation that suits neither the anti-colonial context, in which the subaltern's becoming-visible must coincide with his irreducibility as a subject, nor the Rimbaldian *voyant*. Rimbaud's poetry, on the contrary, abides in a constant and

ever-renewing state of opacity, which operates in both the dark and the luminous parts of the text: “dans les ombres vierges et les clartés impassibles” (315). Although this poetry is capable of creating a feeling of immediate access to an experience, the hallucinatory or necessarily ideational nature of this experience causes the text to reappear always with new possibilities. Rereading inevitably yields something different, a new direction to extend the text’s weave, a new recombination of the senses. A *complication de texte*, in its fullest form, would embrace this productivity while simultaneously bearing in mind that to complicate a text, to read it for its opacity, is to thicken its weave, to add another fold or fiber to its texture. It is, finally, to consent to joining Rimbaud in his vagabondage, in his *errance*, with the knowledge that, as Glissant puts it, “La pensée de l’errance conçoit la totalité, mais renonce volontiers à la prétention de la sommer ou de la posséder” (PR 33). Rimbaud’s poetry suggests this totality, pursues it even, without ever succeeding at summarizing it or reducing it, as at the end of “Vagabonds”: “nous errions, nourris du vin des cavernes et du biscuit de la route, moi pressé de trouver le lieu et la formule” (302). The formula, of course, remains opaque.

MALLARMÉ AND THE CARIBBEAN MOSAIC

Having explored how Rimbaud uses opaque poetics to begin developing a regime of sense-making that "complicates" rational orders and hierarchies, I now turn to how poetry is needed to make some sense of, or provide some access to, modern Caribbean history. Glissant asserts that this history grows out of an abyss: the Middle Passage, the Triangular Trade, the graveyard of the Atlantic.[7] The Caribbean poet looks out upon the infinite vagueness of the ocean and sees a void that swallowed up his African, Amerindian and Asiatic cultural roots. The St. Lucian Nobel laureate Derek Walcott puts it this way:

> Where are your monuments, your battles, your martyrs?
> Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
> in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
> has locked them up. The sea is History. (*Star* 25)

Walcott's poem—indeed his entire oeuvre, along with that of other poets like Aimé Césaire, Kamau Brathwaite,[8] and Glissant—goes on to demonstrate the necessity of poetry itself as a way of making something out of that "grey vault," to poetically refashion those rich histories vanished into the sea. Conventional historiography cannot succeed here, for the vault has been locked and the key destroyed. Archival records and chronologies of events, battles, and monumental figures are largely unavailable to Caribbean history. It requires the poet's creative and playful hand to delve into the mysteries and ambiguities of an opaque past. It requires poetry to creatively reassemble disparate elements into a new mosaic—to see the ocean not only as a void but also as a space of rebirth. In drawing presence out of this abyssal absence, in piecing together the floating shards of an inscrutable past, the Caribbean poet must instead embrace happenstance, chance, the haphazard. Caribbean thought brings new resonance to the famous final line of Mallarmé: "Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés." Indeed, as Caribbean thinkers, especially Glissant, searched for a

way of drawing meaning from the apparent silences and erasures of their history, Mallarmé's work became an ever more important inspiration. By the same token, I will argue, twentieth-century Caribbean poetics also provides a way to see Mallarmé's work relationally extended towards times and places that the poet could not imagine.

Walcott's image of the sea as a locked vault is especially evocative when it comes to Mallarmé's verse. The sea figures prominently in Mallarmé's various reflections on infinity—most famously in "Salut," "Brise Marine" and *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*—and the image of a locked vault or crypt also speaks to the apparent enciphering or encryption of Mallarmé's sinuous and often strangely mathematical texts. I will argue that, in fact, Mallarmé's two enigmatic works about chance and dice throws—*Igitur* and *Un coup de dés*—demonstrate a stark difference between encryption and enciphering. This difference signals his movement from an initial epistemological enclosure to a final opening, ultimately affirming a poetics of errancy, unpredictability, and vagabondage. For Glissant, this is also the stuff of contemporary Caribbean poetics, which offers an alternative ontology to the atavistic, roots-based thinking of Western colonialism. Thus, not only does Mallarmé crucially influence Glissant's rethinking of Caribbean identity, but Glissant also presents an opportunity to hear the unexpected Caribbean resonances of Mallarmé's work.

Igitur's Encryption and the Failure of Ancestry

An explicit intertext to *Hamlet*, Mallarmé's *Igitur, ou la folie d'Elbehnon* recounts the tribulation of a prince whose ontological ambiguity—his to-be-or-not-to-be—is to achieve its fruition in a game of dice. The entire tale, ultimately unfinished, consists of Igitur's descent from his bedchamber to his castle's dungeon to play this fatal game atop his ancestors' tombs. This story

coincides with a drama on a second level: the act of reading Mallarmé's prose, of attempting to decrypt sentences with ambiguous noun-verb agreement and mounting relative clauses whose algorithmic complexity stretches the cognitive faculties to the extreme. Rather than being able to passively accept language as a transparent conduit for information, the reader must make decisions or hypotheses about the sentences' meaning.[9] Mallarmé affirms this from the beginning, in an apparent epigraph to the tale: "Ce Conte s'adresse à l'Intelligence du lecteur qui met les choses en scène, elle-même."[10] Moreover, the notion of chance is intimately tied to these uncertain grammatical connections, as implied in a resounding phrase early in the tale, "le hazard infinis [*sic*] des conjonctions" (483). Similarly, against the colonial obsession with unique, knowable "roots" or ancestral lineages, Caribbean historiography pursues the pluralistic connectivity of what Glissant calls the "poetics of Relation." For Glissant, as for Mallarmé, the text's "opacity" creates the need, and opportunity, for a relational, participatory mode of reading. In the present context, I am particularly interested in how Igitur's own failed pursuit of racial and ancestral purity relates to the textual opacity that the tale both demonstrates grammatically and describes in its content.[11]

At the toll of midnight, Igitur stands up in his bedchamber seeming to hear an ancient calling to play the fatal game of dice. The idea of this game, which appears to have come in a dream, also gets associated with language in general and text in particular:

> Depuis longtemps morte, une antique idée se mire telle à [la] clarté de la chimère en laquelle a agonisé son rêve, [et] se reconnaît à l'immémoriale geste vacant avec lequel elle s'invite, pour terminer l'antagonisme de ce songe pôlaire, à se rendre, avec la clarté chimérique et le texte renfermé, au Chaos de l'ombre avorté et de la parole qui absolut Minuit. (484)

Along with the image of a "texte renfermé" comes the dialectic of shadow and illumination in the

paradoxical phrases “la clarté chimérique” and “l’ombre avorté.” The text describes itself better here than anywhere else, for along with the idea of encryption—a “texte renfermé” by code or key—come moments of haunting clarity, “clarté chimérique.” Such, indeed, is the experience of reading Mallarmé—strange bursts of clarity in an atmosphere of opacity. It is no coincidence that Igitur then descends the staircase in order to enclose (*renfermer*) himself into the castle’s crypt. Along with the apparent textual encryption, then, occurs the literal “en-cryption” of Igitur with his ancestors. With the dice roll, Igitur seems to have the opportunity to break from the atavistic, linear structure of his ancestry and give himself over to the infinite play of chance. Once again, the drama gets associated with a text, with a mysterious book that sits open in the crypt along with the tombs. At the moment when Igitur decides not to cast the dice, the book closes and the ambiguity of Mallarmé’s sentences evaporates:

> Igitur secoue simplement les dés—mouvement, avant d’aller rejoindre les cendres, atomes de ses ancêtres: le mouvement qui est en lui est absous. On comprend ce que signifie son ambiguïté.
>
> Il ferme le livre—souffle la bougie,—de son souffle qui contenait le hazard: et, croisant les bras, se couche sur les cendres de ses ancêtres.
>
> Croisant les bras—l’Absolu a disparu, en pureté de sa race […]. (477)

Igitur’s suicide, following his final refusal to cast the dice and give himself over to absolute chance, also marks the text’s ultimate failure to move beyond a fixed, cryptic expression towards an infinite, relational mode of meaning-making. All of a sudden, the reader loses the power to “met[tre] les choses en scène,” as was promised in the epigraph. Igitur, deciding to make his tomb among his ancestors, closes the impenetrable vault of language in an effort for purity rather than opening it to chance encounters with the world, hence what remains, sterile and unequivocal, in

the final phrase: “reste le château de la pureté” (478).

Ancestral purity, for Glissant, evokes the incestuous lineages of Caribbean plantation families.[12] The Caribbean, with its Creole languages, hybrid genealogies and composite cultures, is inherently impure, at least by this standard. The brutality of the transatlantic slave trade removed the possibility both for the retrieval of ancestral origins and, by violently tearing families apart, for the control over one’s own family structures moving forward. Out of this violence, postcolonial poets like Glissant and Walcott must, in a way, embrace the project that Igitur could not. That is, they must find a way to create meaning from their history without resorting to transparent information about a knowable past. In this spirit, Walcott provides the metaphor of a broken vase, imperfectly yet beautifully reassembled:

> Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. [...] It is such love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. […] Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken from the original continent. (*What* 69)

Glissant, for his part, praises Mallarmé’s poetry for its ability to “faire de l’absence une présence,” for drawing meaning out of an apparent abyss (IP 64). It is here that Glissant completes a thought that Maurice Blanchot began in *L’Espace littéraire*, for Blanchot locates in Mallarmé’s poetics the requirement of breaking with all metaphysical presuppositions and epistemological certainties, but for him this thinking ends in utter despair:

> « En creusant le vers », le poète entre dans ce temps de la détresse qui est celui de l’absence des dieux. Parole étonnante. Qui creuse le vers, échappe à l’être comme

> certitude, rencontre l'absence des dieux, vit dans l'intimité de cette absence, en devient responsable, en assume le risque, en supporte la faveur. Qui creuse le vers doit renoncer à tout idole, doit briser avec tout, n'avoir pas la vérité pour horizon, ni l'avenir pour séjour, car il n'a nullement droit à l'espérance : il lui faut au contraire désespérer. Qui creuse le vers, meurt, rencontre sa mort comme abîme. (33–34)

Blanchot, ever indebted to Hegel, celebrates the power of negativity to overcome old structures of thought, but the writer's meeting with his "mort comme abîme" is also hopeless and final; it is the end.

For Glissant, the *abîme* is only the beginning. The loss of the old gods and old idols was in one way the most violent kind of death for the Afro-Caribbean peoples, an "expérience du gouffre […] le gouffre en abîme" (PR 19–20). Yet the oceanic abyss becomes the collective unconscious of the creole cultures that arose from the horrors of the slave trade and created a form of cultural identity that challenges the equivalence between identity and historical "roots." If Blanchot's abyss is a spiritual death that leads to sheer despair, then Glissant's is one in which massive material death occurred—that of his African ancestors—but out of which necessarily has grown a new vitality:

> L'expérience du gouffre est au gouffre et hors de lui. Tourment de ceux qui ne sont jamais sortis du gouffre: passés directement du ventre du négrier au ventre violet des fonds de mer. […] Car si cette expérience a fait de toi, victime originelle flottant aux abysses de mer, une exception, elle s'est rendue commune pour faire de nous, les descendants, un peuple parmi d'autres. (ibid.)

Inheritor of the abyss, Caribbean thought must embrace the movement creolization, the kind of

purposefully imperfect, mosaic cultural composition that Walcott describes. For Glissant, creolization needs poetry because poetry affirms the power of the unknown and the unknowable, the unpredictable and the haphazard: "La créolisation est imprévisible: on ne peut pas calculer les résultats […] *d'où le rôle du poète* qui va chercher non pas des résultantes prévisibles mais des imaginaires ouverts pour toutes sortes d'avenirs de la créolisation. Le poète n'a pas peur de l'imprédictible" (IP 33, my emphasis). If Igitur's encryption marks an initial failure to achieve this kind of poetry, then *Igitur*'s rewriting in *Un coup de dés* presages the movement from a poetics of pure certainty and atavistic enclosure to a poetics of chance extending along the broad horizon of infinite possibility. Mallarmé's progression from one vision of writing to another—and thus from one mode of knowledge to another—bears a striking relationship to the creolized epistemology that Glissant locates in the postcolonial Caribbean.

The Cipher of the Sea: *Un coup de dés*

Blanchot is right to say that *Un coup de dés* gives Igitur "sa dernière chance" because this final poem serves as a glorious opening of the poetics of chance (147). Igitur's crypt, his enclosure into purity, here instead becomes a cipher, *un chiffre*, a "unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un autre," which nevertheless contains an infinite possibility, for the dice only land *post-factum*. Encryption and enciphering, then, are explicitly opposed to each other across these two poems. The "Maître," going down with his ship and verging on casting a set of dice as his last act before the surf swallows him, experiences the same indecision as Igitur, based on old lines of filiation: "Esprit / pour le jeter [i.e., le Nombre] / dans la tempête / en reployer la division et passe fier // hésite / cadavre par le bras // écarté du secret qu'il détient // plutôt / que de jouer /// ancestralement à n'ouvrir pas la main / crispée / par delà l'inutile tête / legs en disparition."[13] The hand clenches

the dice, anxious about ancestry, about his "disappearing legacy": Igitur haunts the Maître. Yet, poetically or formally, the dice are already thrown. In a Glissantian reading of this poem, the importance of visual refraction across the page cannot be overestimated. It bears on several levels of the poem. The sheer visual experience, from the first cursory glance to the infinite probing into the poem's details, suggests a fractured expression, the debris of language floating errantly on the water, or perhaps the scattered stars in the sky arranged by the chaos of cosmic forces: it is we who draw the constellations.

This is the poetics of Caribbean history, a reconstitution of the debris of meaning in order to create a new vision of time and space. Opacity abides in this history and geography. Mallarmé's strikingly material poem, in which the radical break with poetic form draws the attention to the textual medium, places meaning in the texture of the page itself: its constellations, its debris, its voids. This palpable and visible language, accessible more to sensation than ideation, is the means by which Caribbean stories and histories must be told. Glissant explains that the Caribbean subject cannot afford to be intimidated by the opaque fragments of the past: "Quand nous rencontrons un morceau impénétrable de temps, une roche incassable […] nous n'en sommes pas désenvironnés, nous faisons le tour de cette obscurité […] jusqu'à entrer dans la chose" (TTM 43). Unable to find the origins of Caribbean cultural signifiers, Glissant proposes a deeper and more active engagement with the "thing" itself, in all its obscurity. *Un coup de dés* is the poetic archetype of such an impenetrable, fragmented and yet dynamic piece of material.

The chance encounter with the poem's floating elements sets in motion a participatory poetics, a collective making, that opposes encryption and enclosure. *Igitur* begins by appealing to the "Intelligence du lecteur qui met les choses en scène, elle-même" but ends with a failure, a self-enclosure within a crypt, an encryption. *Un coup de dés* moves in the other direction. At first, it

appears enclosed around a certain encrypted number or *chiffre*, the supposed result of the Maître's final dice throw, which is called a number that "cannot be another": "l'unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un autre" (372–373). This expression lies at the center of the poem's fourth panel, and, zooming in further, the very center of the expression is the verb construction "ne peut pas être." The intertwined questions of *pouvoir* and *être* are the poem's center of gravity. The phrase's negativity here coincides with the poem's Igitur-like moments: the Maître's hesitation, the anxiety about ancestry, and the desire for a single, controlled result. Yet as the poem moves on, the sense of certainty fades, as the poem moves further into the realm of hypothesis. In the end, the central "ne peut pas être" sets up the pivotal, capitalized "PEUT-ÊTRE" on the poem's final panel, where certainty gives way to chance and, in one way or another, the dice are finally cast (386–387). As Quentin Meillassoux has suggested, there is a strong sense that the "PEUT" carries more weight at this point than the "ÊTRE" (197, 206).

The other crucial sentence, rather than confining itself to a single space in the poem's center, spreads across several panels, requiring the kind of reconstruction reminiscent of the Caribbean mosaic. Its uppercase letters attract the eye, and against the earlier phrase's apparent certainty, it suggests that this *chiffre* occurs in the mode of doubt: "*COMME SI* // *COMME SI* /// *SI* /// *C'ÉTAIT* // *LE NOMBRE* / EXISTÂT-IL / COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL / SE CHIFFRÂT-IL / ILLUMINÂT-IL // *CE SERAIT* // LE HASARD" (376–383). The imperfect and conditional tenses keep this sentence in the realm of hypothesis. Moreover, the crucial verbs denoting existence, encoding and illumination all appear in the mode of uncertainty: the subjunctive. The persistent doubt is what gets missed in attempts, most recently by Meillassoux, to "decipher" *Un coup de dés* on a strictly mathematical basis. The possibility of an enciphering, then, does not seal the writer off from the reader but rather places the two of them on the same

level regarding this code, which Mallarmé affirms, can only come about by chance: "*SI* /// *LE NOMBRE* / SE CHIFFRÂT-IL // *CE SERAIT* // LE HASARD." Any encoding owes itself to chance, and, conversely, any deciphering must also occur in the realm of chance. As the eye scans the page, it feels the errant movement of this new kind of reading, and it realizes the happenstance of its encounter with language. As it decodes, which is to say rearranges elements to form meaning, it also knows how relative its experience must be, given the infinite possibility presented before it.

The final act of *Un coup de dés*, the dice throw just before the Maître's drowning, leaves the *Nombre* in suspension. The dice do not land. The last we hear of them is "avant de s'arrêter / à quelque point dernier," and no last point, no number, is given (387). There is a prevailing sense that the Maître is, strangely, at his most powerful just before this moment of double-disappearance, as he is about to disappear from reality, and as his reality is about to disappear from him: "la perdition / dans ces parages / du vague / en quoi toute réalité se dissout" (385). In the face of this annihilation, he prepares his throw. The words' double meanings already begin to fragment the enunciation, and the ambiguity of chance mirrors the chaotic time of human mortality—as Blanchot puts it, "Le hasard est la mort, et les dés par lesquels on meurt sont jetés au hasard" (145). "Parages" most obviously refers to the waterways in which the Maître meets his fate, but it also harkens back to his atavistic concerns ("ancestralement à n'ouvrir pas la main"), as "parage" also denotes a high birth. Additionally, "vague" appears as a masculine substantive—"du vague"—evoking the vagueness into which "toute réalité se dissout," but of course it also calls to mind the waves (*vagues*) rising and falling about the Maître. The surface of the sea, so important for both Mallarmé and Glissant, serves as the most compelling image of a dynamic, moving infinity, as it extends beyond the scope of vision to the horizon, its surface constantly undulating, each wave (*vague*) rising completely unique yet inevitably falling into the vagueness (*vague*) of the ocean.

This marine vagueness, both ancient and new, is the very image of Mallarméan poetics, as in the first line of "Salut": "Rien, cette écume, vierge vers" (4).

The dominant reading of the penultimate panel of *Un coup de dés*, with its talk of perdition and dissolution, is that of a closure before the final opening: the "RIEN," the Igitur-like hesitation, before the ultimate courageous embrace of chance that occurs at the turn of the page. The uppercase fragments, pieced together across two panels, yield a seeming gesture to the transcendence of the mundane into the stars of the heavens: "RIEN // N'AURA EU LIEU / QUE LE LIEU /// EXCEPTÉ / PEUT-ÊTRE // UNE CONSTELLATION" (384–387). This reading appears reinforced by the language of the "beyond" in the final panel: "EXCEPTÉ / à l'altitude / PEUT-ÊTRE / aussi loin qu'un endroit // fusionne avec au-delà / vers / ce doit être / le Septentrion aussi Nord / UNE CONSTELLATION / qu'elle énumère / sur quelque surface vacante et supérieure" (386–387). The religious diction notwithstanding, Mallarmé also leaves open the possibility for, instead of a transcendence from low to high, a unification of sea and sky. The word "fusionne" implies the coalescence of these two seemingly disparate spheres. Further, the "surface vacante" recalls the "vague" of the sea from the previous page; "vague" and "vacant" share an etymological relation in the Latin *vacuus* and *vacans*, both meaning "empty, unoccupied." Given Mallarmé's famous attention to linguistic minutiae, including the etymological play that Alain Vaillant considers part of his "*hermétisme interlinguistique*" (85), I would be tempted to say that it is not by chance, *ce n'est pas un hasard*, that these two terms occur on consecutive panels depicting the sea meeting the sky. Yet the achievement of *Un coup de dés* is to demonstrate that it is *precisely* by chance that these two terms should have grown out of the same roots. It is precisely by chance that they allow for a minor, immanent interpretation of this cosmic finale against the more intuitive, transcendent interpretation. Chance creates these hypotheses, this mode of *peut-*

être, just as chance has brought about the arbitrary bifurcations in the etymology of *vague* and *vacant*—just as chance assimilates, by a felicitous homonymy, *le vague* to *les vagues*, vagueness to the waves of the sea.

I would be tempted to say, moreover, that it is not by chance, *ce n'est pas un hasard*, that growing from the same roots as "vague" and "vacant" is the word "vagabond," from the Latin *vagary* and *vagus*, for wandering. Yet it is a vagabond reading, a chance revelation, a haphazard stumbling-upon that brought me to this connection. That two of the crucial words in the last two panels of Mallarmé's poem point to vagabondage, to *errance*, which is one of the most important terms in the Caribbean poetics of Édouard Glissant[14]—this is a chance in the fullest sense. It is a chance to see the poem's fractured language as, paradoxically, the most complete art possible: one that offers its impenetrable elements up for construction and reconstruction, for recreation, for poetics anew. It is a chance to see that the constellation of words on Mallarmé's final panel, haphazardly strewn yet unmistakably reminiscent of Ursa Major and Minor, is not a controlled representation of the sky but rather a demonstration of the errancy of the stars. If the text is opaque, then so are the cosmos.

Thus, I would be tempted to say that it is not by chance, *ce n'est pas un hasard*, that "vague," "vacant," and "vagabond" all return to a notion of the void, the *vacuus*, translated in Arabic as *sifr* (emptiness, zero), which, as it happens, gave us *chiffre*. Yet chance is precisely what has led us to the *chiffre*: "SI / LE NOMBRE / SE CHIFFRÂT-IL / CE SERAIT / LE HASARD." Critics have long tried to identify the value of "LE NOMBRE," making strong cases for 7, 12, and, most recently, 707,[15] but why not 0, given the equivalence that this sentence sets up between *nombre*, *chiffre*, and *hasard*? Zero may be an impossible result of a dice throw, but in another way it is the overarching figure of dice throws generally. *Sifr*—zero—is the number of *hasard*, for its

emptiness, its indefinition, its *vagueness*, makes it infinitely potent. Friedrich Engels might have said it best when, reflecting on Hegel's paradox of positive negation, he argued that zero, "because it is the negation of any definite quantity, is not therefore devoid of content […] In fact, zero is richer in content than any other number" (qtd. in Meisel 69). If Mallarmé's zero is the abyss, the numerical chasm, its ovoid shape outlining an epistemic pit, then it is the kind of abyss that Glissant sees at the violent birth of modern Caribbean history: a zero pregnant with potential. It is the site of productive, ever-renewing chaos—the baroque space that Glissant calls the *chaos-monde*—evoking the primordial (and, once again, etymological) relationship between chasm and chaos.[16] Taken this way, the act of deciphering Mallarmé's poem yields a *re-enciphering* with the discovery of the *sifr*, which is not at all a simple negation or dead end. If there appears to be nothing—*vacuus, sifr*—at the poem's core, then the poet's task to charge it with creative potential and to, as Glissant says of Mallarmé's work, "faire de l'absence une présence" (IP 64). Caribbean poetics thus makes Mallarmé's oceanic cipher a paradigm for poetically reconceiving histories that seemed scattered to oblivion.

Is it by chance, finally, that the very word for chance, *hasard*, is, like *chiffre*, one of the few French words derived from Arabic? By chance, that *az-zahr* (the die) refers directly to the game that inspires Mallarmé's poem?[17] Could it possibly be *un hasard* that ten percent of the words in the poem's climactic sentence—"*SI* /// *C'ÉTAIT* // *LE NOMBRE* / EXISTÂT-IL / COMMENÇÂT-IL ET CESSÂT-IL / SE CHIFFRÂT-IL / ILLUMINÂT-IL // *CE SERAIT* // LE HASARD"—have Arabic roots, even though only the tiniest sliver of French words—one one-hundredth of a percent—originate in Arabic? Mathematically, the odds are much better for you to cast three dice at once and have them land on the same number.

Yet a Caribbean reading of Mallarmé holds that, against the odds, it is indeed by chance

that his poem is pregnant with the language of Judeo-Christian Europe's traditional cultural Other. *Hasard* is the engine of creolization. *Hasard* was the cruel non-logic by which peoples of different cultures were imprisoned together in West African holding areas, awaiting the deadly journey to Cuba, Martinique, St-Domingue, or Virginia. Under the pressure of this brutal passage, the imprisoned Africans began forming new languages—creoles—which converted slavery's violent haphazardness into something positive: lexicons, grammars, and, eventually, cultures. In Glissant's telling, the destructive *hasard* of the slave trade became the basis not only for new languages and cultural productions but also for a new kind of worldview in the contemporary Caribbean, one that questions the Western colonial pretense of cultural and ancestral purity and, rather, affirms the productivity of unpredictable, erratic encounters:

> Les phénomènes de la créolisation […] permettent de pratiquer une nouvelle approche par une recomposition du paysage mental de ces humanités aujourd'hui. […] La créolisation […] crée dans les Amériques des microclimats culturels et linguistiques absolument inattendus, c'est-à-dire des endroits où les répercussions des langues les unes sur les autres ou des cultures les unes sur les autres sont abruptes. (IPD 15–17)

Glissant goes on to assert that the world as a whole has the potential to become creolized and thus to partake in the movement and mixing that has made the Caribbean into such a dynamic region:

> Ces microclimats culturels et linguistiques que crée la créolisation dans les Amériques sont décisifs parce que ce sont les signes mêmes de ce qui se passe réellement dans le monde. Et ce qui se passe réellement dans le monde c'est qu'il s'y crée des micro et des macroclimats d'interpénétration culturelle et linguistique. (ibid.)

Creolization works in opposition to atavism and to claims to pure origins. Its power comes from its acceptance of chance encounters and haphazard connections, from its appetite for the "shock" of intercultural contact, to use a term that Glissant borrows from Victor Segalen. In Mallarmé's climactic sentence, then, a kind of creolization is already latent, as the affirmation of *hasard* coincides with the etymological destabilization of the French from its foundation in Greco-Latin language and culture. Since *az-zahr* means a die, *un dé* (likely from the Latin *dare*), Mallarmé's title becomes an affirmation of the dominant Latin's inability to abolish the Arabic *métissage* woven into the French: *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le az-zahr*.

Conclusion: Enciphering the Word, Re-Creolizing the Language

My haphazard reading of Mallarmé has taken me to an unexpected place. Etymology seems a strange way to finish in a Caribbean reading of a European poem, for "roots" become Glissant's primary target in his critique of colonial thinking. This critique, in fact, partly accounts for his break with Césaire's Negritude, which he found overly rooted in an idea of African-ness, thus reproducing the basic structure of colonial atavism even as it meant to combat colonial domination. Etymology, likewise, often promotes a sense of authority in the lexical root, illuminating an "original" meaning at the foundation of words that have inevitably strayed in other directions over time. To invoke an etymology is to call upon the authority of linguistic and cultural antecedents, that is, ancestors. The etymology of "etymology" reveals this long-held conflation of roots and truth, as *etymos* is Latin for "true." That the great majority of French words trace back to Latin and Greek only reinforces the legitimizing gesture that comes with connecting today's language with that of the supposed beginnings of Western Civilization as told by Virgil and Homer. The oldest surviving major work of French vernacular literature, *La Chanson de Roland*, recounts

Charlemagne's preservation of these ancestral roots against the invading Saracens, whose victory at Roncevaux could have made French go the way of Spanish, with a lexicon about eight hundred times richer in Arabic roots. The pivotal sentence of *Un coup de dés*, however, is even more Arabic-inflected than twenty words of Spanish would likely be. The weight of the Arabic-derived *chiffre* and *hasard* suggests that French itself is the product of a creolization process. The project of modern colonialism intensified this process and eventually brought it into plain sight, but colonialism did not invent creolization. Or rather, creolization, born of colonial violence, begs to be applied, anachronistically, to precolonial times. In Glissant's words, "[Q]uand on étudie raisonnablement les origines de toutes langues données, y compris la langue française, on s'aperçoit (ou on devine) que presque toute langue à ses origines est une langue créole" (Ibid. 18). *Chiffre* and *hasard* etymologically demonstrate the underlying creolization already at work in French—the intertwining of this Greco-Latin language with another—and together as concepts, they evoke the fecund chaos of a world beyond the fixation on purity and control marked in *Igitur*'s final failing words: "Le Néant parti, reste le château de la pureté" (478). As this purity dissipates into the abiding *hasard* of *Un coup de dés*, Mallarmé anticipates the development of a distinctive, hopeful Caribbean poetics in the next century.

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[1] See, for example, St. Clair.

[2] See also Whidden 193, where he locates a similar phenomenon in reference to "H," which is *infini* in its spiral temporal structure.

[3] For the synesthetic relationship between Rimbaldian *voyance* and orality, see Berger 157–160.

[4] The idea of an "excess of sense" has been iterated in different ways in continental philosophy and the lines of thinking that have stemmed from it. Jean-Luc Nancy's ontology of sense, which exhorts us to "[f]aire place à cet excès du sens sur tout sens appropriable" without falling to a "non-sens nihiliste," comes very near to the phenomenon I describe in reference to Rimbaud and Glissant (12). As Peter Gratton tells it, Nancy's thought attempts "to mark an excess of sense and meaning at the heart of things (a sense of overflowing to the point of nonsense, if not chaos[)]"

(117). In opaque poetry, however, the nonsense/chaos appears first, motivating a search for access to alternative forms of sense. The term has also arisen in social psychology's revival of Merleau-Ponty. In "The Invisible Excess of Sense in Social Interaction," Alice Koubovà relates a "participatory sense-making theory" to the problems of invisibility and opacity. Similar to the version of opacity that I find in Glissant, "opacity is neither an obstacle to be overcome with more precise understanding nor a lack of meaning, but rather an excess of sense, a 'hiddenness' of something real that has an 'active power' (Merleau-Ponty)" (1). Laurent Dubreuil also speaks of "l'excès de sens" as a fundamental quality of literary language. This excess partly accounts for literature's ability to complicate the practice of literary history, for literature creates meaning beyond a single moment, inducing the "sentiment du passé *maintenant*" (*L'état* 87, 95). Literature, for Dubreuil, "est garant de cette signification comme excès de sens, déplacement par rapport à soi" ("Disciplines" 74; see also "La grande scène" 96). In the conclusion to this study, I more extensively discuss how Dubreuil's thought relates to my own complication of francophone literary history.

[5] OC 344. Steve Murphy, in his analysis of the letter to Demeny, attributes "l'aspect oxymorique de la formulation" of a *dérèglement* "*raisonné*" to Rimbaud's complicated attitude towards Romanticism and Art for Art's Sake: "Cette notion d'un *dérèglement* raisonné […] montre à quel point Rimbaud tente non pas de casser le Romantisme, mais de le transcender par une déconstruction en spirale grâce à laquelle il peut récuser en même temps les blandices aristocratiques ou bourgeoises de l'Art pour l'Art et le tout-intuitif sentimental du Romantisme prototypique" (11). This is another way to say that Rimbaud does not accept the classical binary between sensible intuition and reasonable cognition.

[6] See Murat 343–345 for a deeper analysis of the fragmenting quality of Rimbaud's dashes.

[7] See *Poétique de la Relation* 17–21.

[8] See especially *Born to Slow Horses*, whose mixture of experimental typefaces and sea imagery—which Brathwaite calls "tidalectics"—has an unmistakably Mallarméan atmosphere. M. NourbeSe Philip's book-length poem *Zong!* also bears a strong visual resemblance to *Un coup de dés*.

[9] Jacques Rancière, in *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, argues that Mallarmé's verse is not unknowable but rather calls for a series of hypotheses—in short, that we can understand Mallarmé's difficult expression if we just work at it. In this way, Mallarmé is ultimately "democratic" rather than bourgeois or oligarchic. It is no coincidence that Rancière largely limits himself to analyses of Mallarmé's earlier formal verse poetry. I agree that we make hypotheses in reading Mallarmé, but, especially in *Igitur* and *Un coup de dés*, these hypotheses rarely lead to a sense of complete comprehension.

[10] *OCI* 475. All parenthetical citations of Mallarmé's work, unless otherwise noted, come from volume I of Marchal's Pléiade edition of his *Œuvres complètes*. In these quotations, the bracketed words are Marchal's additions unless otherwise noted. Bracketed ellipses, however, are mine.

[11] When speaking of *Igitur*'s "content" and narrative, it is important to note that the text is not drawn from a complete manuscript but rather from some fifty fragmentary pages, probably written

from 1869 to 1870. Bertrand Marchal's genetic analysis in the 1998 *Œuvres complètes* makes a convincing case for the text's ultimate incompleteness (1351–1353). Aiko Okamoto-Macphail also takes great care in her article "Le Livre, flambeau d'une vie" to historicize the writing of *Igitur* and to take a position among the different reconstructions of the text, beginning with that of Dr. Edmond Bonniot in 1925 (Okamoto-Macphail 289–291). In these different reconstructions, however, the ending remains ambiguous: either Igitur simply shakes the dice and then replaces them on the table before lying down on his ancestors' ashes (477), or "il jette les dés, le coup s'accomplit, douze" (482). Okamoto-Macphail focuses on the latter. I opt for the former, the non-throw (which is also preferred by the early editions of Bonniot and Henri Mondor), because it better contrasts with the throw at the end of *Un coup de dés*. I would, in any case, concur with Gilles Deleuze about the second ending of *Igitur*, whose dice throw resulting in the expected twelve negates *hasard* just as much as not throwing the dice at all: "Abolir le hasard en le prenant dans la pince de la causalité et de la finalité; au lieu d'affirmer le hasard, compter sur la répétition des coups; au lieu d'affirmer la nécessité, escompter un *but*: voilà toutes les opérations du mauvais joueur" (31).

[12] For a strong analysis of Glissant's views on atavism and filiation, see Valérie Loichot, *Orphan Narratives*, especially 117–118.

[13] *OCI* 372–374. In citations of *Un coup de dés*, I use one forward slash (/) to indicate a line break within a single page; two forward slashes (//) to indicate a line break that extends from one page to another in a single panel, for example, from page 476 to 477; and three forward slashes (///) to indicate a line break that extends from one panel to another.

[14] See, for example, the chapter entitled "L'Errance, l'exil" in *Poétique de la Relation* (23–34).

[15] Meillassoux, in *Le Nombre et la sirène*, makes an exhilarating, if ultimately unconvincing, case for 707 as the poem's encoded number and "meter" (as *Maître* equals *Mètre*). He also provides a useful summary of previous attempts to crack the code (24–33). Christophe Wall-Romana's excellent article "The Decomposition of Philosophy" makes a strong rebuttal of Meillassoux's method and, perhaps even more usefully, shows how *Le Nombre et la sirène* fits into the grander scheme of the messianic philosophical project that Meillassoux has been developing since *Après la Finitude* (2006).

[16] Meisel provides a helpful and economical survey of chaos's relationship with negativity, including the fecund etymology of chaos in the Greek and Old Norse words for "yawn" and "gap," traced back to a common Indo-European root **gheu* (46–51).

[17] Moreover, as in the quotations above from *Igitur*, Mallarmé often spells *hasard* with a *z*—*hazard*—suggesting not only his intimacy with the English language but also, possibly, a desire to de-Gallicize the word by recalling the Arabic *az-zahr*.

Chapter 3

Errant Poets, Prophets of Relation:

Victor Segalen and Saint-John Perse

名可名, 非常名

[The Name that can be named is not the constant Name.]

—*Daode jing*, and epigraph to Segalen's "Moment"

C'est l'heure, ô Poète, de décliner ton nom, ta naissance, et ta race…

—Perse, *Exil* VII

A name is no small thing. Given or assumed, a name is the coming-to-terms with origins, the construction of a genealogy. My name is not simply my signifier; it makes of me its referent: it weaves me into the fabric of language, thus implicating my personhood and my ancestral roots into writing, conversation and thought. Yet a name can also serve as the trace of irrecoverable origins, and, as Glissant demonstrates,[1] this is particularly the case for the Caribbean subject living in the wake of the transatlantic slave trade. Out of the devastation of the erased name, however,

comes the possibility for a new, more relational ontology. Glissant's poetics sees creative potential in this crisis of naming, in this difficulty in fixing an identity. Near the end of his life, having become an "established" French-language writer and thinker, Glissant's notion of identity was as fluid as ever:

> Nous devons construire une personnalité instable, mouvante, créatrice, fragile, au carrefour de soi et des autres. Une Identité-relation. C'est une expérience très intéressante, car on se croit généralement autorisé à parler à l'autre du point de vue d'une identité fixe. Bien définie. Pure. Atavique. Maintenant, c'est impossible, même pour les anciens colonisés qui tentent de se raccrocher à leur passé ou leur ethnie. Et cela nous remplit de craintes et de tremblements de parler sans certitude, mais nous enrichit considérablement. (Joignot)

As a poet and reader, Glissant was fascinated with poetic language's ability to destabilize the name, to deconstruct the values of purity and atavism seemingly inherent within the French language itself. It is no coincidence, then, that two of his most important poetic interlocutors continuously grapple with questions of naming, rootedness, and otherness: Victor Segalen and Saint-John Perse. Though both born into a kind of nominal legitimacy to which Glissant never had access, these poets' wanderings far from their homelands provided the poetic paradigm for a new way of relating to the world, a poetics founded on the instability of the name. In Segalen's *Stèles* as in Perse's *Exil*, the hidden, undisclosed or erased name underlies a poetics of unending activity, of dynamic becoming rather than the static being of named identity. In their work, as in Glissant's, the subject's life depends upon his abiding opacity.

It is no coincidence that these two poets, along with Claudel and Michaux, are the essential poets of *errance* of twentieth-century French literature. Their travels from the New World to the

Far East motivate them to question their own rootedness in a name, in a nation, and in a philosophical tradition. They come at the question from opposite directions. Segalen, born in Brittany, departed in search of the Other and, by virtue of his travels in Oceania and China, conceived of a theory of otherness that would presage Glissant's poetics of Relation. Perse, a white Guadeloupean, was born among this Otherness and, as Glissant puts it, "né de cet ailleurs, retourne au Même—vers le Centre" (PR 42–43). And yet, Perse found himself just as soon othered from this Center, prompting him to become the great poet of perpetual exile. Segalen and Perse, in their *errance*, in their encounters with diverse otherness, in their coming to terms with the fragmentation of the modernized world, develop notions of world-totality that would fundamentally inform Glissant's own conception of Relation and the Tout-Monde. This chapter will focus on Segalen's *Stèles* and Perse's *Exil*, the collections of poems most indicative of this errant, opaque reflection on questions of otherness and totality. By attending to these two poets' central place in Glissant's auto-genealogy—the invention of his own name as a poet—this chapter will investigate the poetic and philosophical grounds for the worldview he would later develop. Yet, if Segalen and Perse are prophets of Relation, their prophecies remain virtual and unformulated until Glissant's poetics can actualize them. In a prophetic reading of the past (to riff on Glissant's "prophetic vision of the past"), the streams of influence flow in multiple directions across time and space: the poetic modalities that Glissant articulates, especially *errance* and *opacité*, can inform the reading of Segalen and Perse in the global age. Their work does not simply announce globalism's increase of cultural contact across great distances; it makes poetic language a material presence that motivates ongoing cultural interaction and that expands thought-spaces beyond the structures available to a single group: poetics of Relation, poems of the Tout-Monde.

POETICS OF OPACITY, AESTHETICS OF DIVERSITY:

SEGALEN'S *STÈLES*

The speaker of Segalen's "Retombée" walks into a Chinese pagoda and, perhaps thinking of the cathedrals back home in Europe, begins testing the flagstones and columns: "Je frappe les dalles. J'en éprouve la solidité. J'en écoute la sonorité. Je me sens ferme et satisfait." Something strange is happening, though. As the speaker senses the Chinese structure's solidity and hardness, he begins himself to feel "firm"—a strangely pleasant feeling. Intrigued, he moves to the columns. He gives them the only "embrace" he knows, the embrace of rational measurement: "J'embrasse les colonnes. Je mesure leur jet, la portée, le nombre et la plantation. Je me sens clos et satisfait." His firmness evolves into a closure, a closure that he shares with the impassive structure that he is examining. We learn, as the poem continues, that his measurements produce more questions than answers. In fact, the poem becomes an ecstatic meditation on the immeasurable or uncontainable sense of space within the pagoda: "Cet espace, crevé par les pointes, pénétré des neufs firmaments, qui l'entoure et le contient ? Plus loin que les confins il y a l'Extrême, et puis le Grand-Vide, et puis quoi ?" The pagoda's closure, then, ultimately gives rise to a sense of openness, just as the speaker's initial closure motivates a series of open questions. By quiet example, this poem expresses the crux of Segalen's poetics, namely, that true encounters with difference, cultural or otherwise, occur in a state of mutual impenetrability between subjects. This experience of "closure"—expressed in his poetry through images of foreignness as well as tropes of illegibility, darkness, silence and tactile hardness—opens the mind to a broader conception of the world in its totality. Segalen's poetic theory and practice thus presages Glissant's notion of opacity: not simply a protective or exclusive self-enclosure but a different kind of opening, a creation of meaning *by*

virtue of incomprehensibility. This section, then, will both bring Glissant's notion of opacity to bear on Segalen's work and, as importantly, allow Segalen's texts to enrich the idea of opacity as a broader poetic category.

It happens that Glissant was one of Segalen's most enthusiastic readers and, thanks to long delays in publishing Segalen's work in Europe, one of the first writers to take a broad view of his oeuvre.[2] Segalen wrote in the first two decades of the twentieth century, but the reproduction of his work was preciously limited until the 1950s. In 1955, the Club Meilleur du Livre published a complete edition of Segalen's poems from his "cycle chinois": *Stèles, Peintures, Équipée*, which had only seen limited publication since their composition in the 1910s in China. In the spring of same year, the journal *Mercure de France* published the "Notes sur l'exotisme" for the first time, in two installments—a fragmentary set of reflections on diversity, otherness, and a newly revived conception of exoticism. This spree of Segalen publications coincided with Glissant's *entrée* onto the scene of Paris avant-garde literature as a promising young poet, novelist, and critic. He had begun writing review articles for the journal *Les lettres nouvelles*,[3] recently founded by the eminent avant-garde critics Maurice Nadeau and Maurice Saillet, who promptly tasked him with reviewing the new editions of Segalen's work. The encounter's effect on his world view and poetic practice cannot be underestimated. Reading the philosophical fragments of the "Notes sur l'exotisme" alongside the newly published poems, Glissant discovered a notion of difference and diversity that would help shape his own theory and poetic practice throughout his career. His article "Segalen! Segalen!" (later adapted for *L'intention poétique*) is one of the best early sources available for Glissant's development of the poetics of Relation and the notion of opacity. It is no coincidence that almost forty years later, Glissant would end his chapter in *Poétique de la Relation*, "Pour l'opacité," by evoking Segalen.

Although the resonances between these two writers may be obvious enough, given Glissant's explicit recognition of Segalen's importance, it would be impossible to simply assimilate Segalen into Glissant's system as a precursor. Both are careful to theorize opaquely, that is, to grant their philosophical terms an autonomy that simultaneously allows them to resist assimilation into existing systems and to open onto other realms of thought. To put these two thinkers into relation, then, is to set up a kind of conceptual fission: a productive collision of notions that, though sharing substance, are structurally irreducible to each other—a collision that produces unpredictable ramifications into other thought-spaces. In order, then, to examine the constellation of terms that Glissant and Segalen share, I will begin by considering Segalen's "aesthetics of the Diverse," elaborated in the *Essai sur l'exotisme,* in relation to Glissant's writings on poetics. Both of these theories, though different in historical and geographic perspective, are fundamentally concerned with making a productive aesthetics out of unassimilable diversity, but they also put pressure on each other regarding the specific vision of totality that arises out of a system of radical alterity. Then, having explored the relationship between these two theories, I will turn to a several examples from Segalen's *Stèles,* which reflect his project of a revitalized, egalitarian exoticism. Further, the poems help us flesh out Glissant's theory of opacity as, in addition to an epistemological claim, a poetic category generated in the operations of the text itself. I then conclude with a short reflection on Glissant's final critique of Segalen: that Segalen's encounter with otherness ultimately led to his own demise, his own self-negation in the face of otherness. Glissant's poetics of Relation could thus be considered a respectful correction to Segalen's aesthetics of diversity, an attempt to empower the subject with a broader and more affirmative interaction with the world.

Aesthetics of Exoticism, Poetics of Relation

Like Glissant's, Segalen's opaque poetics coincides with an appreciation for incomprehension on an intercultural and intersubjective level. Segalen's notion of *exotisme* became the chief aesthetic lens through which he saw the world. Well before the critique of exoticism now familiar in postcolonial studies—a critique of the objectifying tourist-talk that seems always to negate the full humanity of its subject[4]—Segalen sought to rescue the term from the colonial abyss into which the Romantics, especially Chateaubriand, had cast it. Explaining his essay project, of which he left only unfinished fragments, Segalen coyly hints at the opacity of his notion of *exotisme*, promising not to "hide" the fact that his use of *exotisme* will leave many disappointed, particularly those fans of the late-nineteenth-century *roman exotique* or those nostalgic for the exotic images of Romantic poetry. In fact, the overwhelmingly negative structure of his this first attempt to define *exotisme* may bring the term out of "hiding" but does not yet illuminate it:

> Je ne le cacherai point : ce livre décevra le plus grand nombre. Malgré son titre exotique, il ne peut être question de tropiques et de cocotiers, ni de colonies ou d'âmes nègres, ni de chameaux, ni de vaisseaux, ni de grandes houles, ni d'odeurs, ni d'épices, ni d'Îles enchantées, ni d'incompréhensions, ni de soulèvements indigènes, ni de néant et de mort, ni de larmes de couleurs, ni de pensée jaune, ni d'étrangetés, ni d'aucune de « saugrenuités » que le mot « Exotisme » enferme dans son acceptation quotidienne. (*OC* 1: 765)

The problem with these images of exoticism, for Segalen, is not so much that they are objectifying or exploitative as that they are utterly boring. They lack any intellectual or aesthetic interest

whatsoever, for they reduce the world to a comprehensible system rather than appreciating the vast richness of the world beyond the strictures of human systematics.

Segalen likens this attitude to tourism, a word that he hears in the literal sense of "around," never departing from a fixed center. Tourism, he claims, is a product of the modern discovery of the world's roundness: all travel in this context revolves futilely around a center, never headed elsewhere but always circling back toward the self:

> Sur une sphère, quitter un point, c'est commencer déjà *à s'en rapprocher* ! La sphère est la Monotonie. […]
>
> C'est là que le tourisme a commencé ! Dès qu'on sut le monde-boule. Alors le « Tourisme » serait l'appellation générale d'une mauvaise attitude exotique. (ibid. 764)

Segalen's critique of the touristic "attitude" returns to two separate moments in history, both of which Glissant also criticizes: the Renaissance, when the acceptance of the world's roundness led to Columbus's voyages and Magellan's circumnavigation, and the nineteenth century, when "tourism" became an widespread activity in Western culture, ultimately facilitating casual travel to the colonies. Thomas Cook, the founder of the first worldwide travel agency, affirms Segalen's complaint about the solipsistic circularity of tourism: Cook advertised his 1856 trip as "the grand circular tour," as if to reassure his clients that the group would indeed return to its original point of departure. Segalen's mistrust of the discourse of the circle and the center appears often throughout his work, both in his critiques of simplistic versions of exoticism and in his reverence for the decentering, disorienting effects of symbolist poetry and its experiments with synesthesia.[5]

Indeed the revived notion of exoticism that Segalen proposes includes a radical decentering of the self, an entry into a world whose diversity shakes knowledge from its moorings. This

experience of exoticism thus accepts incomprehension as a fundamental condition of intersubjective experience. It is not, however, a facile or lazy incomprehension, which he associates with reductive exoticism ("ni d'Îles enchantées, ni d'incompréhensions") but an effort at engaging with the impenetrable in a productive way. If Glissant's poetics begins from a demand for the "right to opacity," then Segalen's notion of exoticism, which also calls for an "aesthetics of diversity," depends upon a similar acceptance of incomprehensibility as, paradoxically, the access point to *connaissance*. Exoticism, for Segalen, is the paramount experience available to humans, from the rapture of an infant discovering the world to the wonder of man countenancing a sublime vista or hearing a marvelous poem. This experience requires that one maintain one's individuality in the face of that experience and, similarly, accept the "impénétrabilité" of the Other:

> L'exotisme n'est donc pas cet état kaléidoscopique du touriste et du médiocre spectateur, mais la réaction vive et curieuse au choc d'une individualité forte contre une objectivité dont elle perçoit et déguste la distance. (Les sensations d'Exotisme et d'Individualisme sont *complémentaires*.) (ibid. 750–751)

Importantly, the exotic experience is not the perception or *dégustation* of an "objectivité" but rather a sense *of the distance* between self and other. That is, Segalen's exoticism is not the consumption of geographical or cultural phenomena but, on the contrary, the appreciation that those phenomena precisely cannot be consumed, cannot be incorporated into an individual's subjectivity:

> L'exotisme n'est donc pas une adaptation ; n'est donc pas la compréhension parfaite d'un hors soi-même qu'on étreindrait en soi, mais la perception aigüe et immédiate d'une incompréhension éternelle. (ibid. 751)

Glissant, insisting that "des opacités peuvent coexister, confluer" shows the same enthusiasm for enduring opacity, for opacity that is not meant to be overcome. It is not simply a guarantee of

individuality; it is an appreciation for the macroscopic conditions that create a geography of "mutually consented opacity"—what Segalen calls *distance* and what Glissant calls *la trame*.

For Segalen, exoticism is the crucial experience of the world's diversity, *le Divers*, which both he and Glissant capitalize, lending it the status of a fundamental ontological concept. It is important to note, however, that this specific version of diversity differs from the one so often touted by nations, businesses and academic institutions. Just as Glissant insisted that his notion of a diverse *chaos-monde* should not be confused with the American ideal of the melting pot,[6] it is important to distinguish between the tiresome way in which "diversity" is applied today and Segalen's conception of the Diverse. Segalen almost always uses this term in connection with an idea of feeling or the senses: "le sens du Divers," "la sensation du Divers," "sentir le Divers," and even the subtitle "Esthétique du Divers" refers to a sensory-corporeal encounter with diversity. Segalen understands the Diverse as a kind of energy to be felt rather than a static patchwork to be observed. Hence his fear of an inevitable "entropy"—a degradation of the world's diversity due to the assimilation of cultures. Segalen dedicates a fragment of his *Essai* to this question:

> Dégradation du Divers.
>
> Il semble que *oui*. Comme l'Énergie, l'Entropie de l'Univers tend vers un maximum. (ibid. 770)

The only hope to offset this degradation, he speculates, is the growing appreciation for experiences of the Diverse. The more individuals can feel and "taste" it, to use his sensory terms, the less will be the deleterious effects of its dissipation: "Eh bien, je crois que, très tristement, la dégradation de l'exotisme est de l'ordre des grandeurs humaines… Mais qu'aussi le goût à déguster le plus faible divers croît, ce qui, peut-être, compense ?" (ibid.). The slow dying of exoticism and diversity, which Charles Forsdick calls "the leveling effect of the spread of modernity" (186), may

only be slowed by an aesthetic project—"le gout à déguster" and "la sensation du Divers." Glissant took special note of this subtlety in Segalen's work, which requires the poetic mode not only to communicate the experience of exoticism but also to regenerate it, to give it life even as modernity endangers it. Glissant explains, "Seule en effet la notion poétique est propre à composer le Journal de ces sortes de Voyages, qui sont une forme moderne du mysticisme […] La valeur du Divers est dans sa succulence ; d'où la poétique, qui est une théorie du profit et de l'enrichissement, et de la nourriture" ("Segalen!" 628). Glissant reproduces the imagery of energy and sustenance that Segalen uses to describe his notion of the Diverse. Poetics can fight the movement of homogenization that inevitably occurs in the modern world, not by keeping cultures separate or safely preserving their artifacts but rather by nourishing the pleasure available in an encounter with otherness. A poetics of opacity does not simply preserve these differences by resisting the homogenizing grasp of *com-prehension*; it makes the experience of this difference, this sensation of inaccessibility, the very object of its expression.

I have argued that, for Glissant, this is much more than a bare method of survival; it is a powerful source of beauty and productivity. This sense of joy in the opaque already occurs in Segalen's meditations:

> Partons donc de cet aveu d'impénétrabilité. Ne nous flattons pas d'assimiler les mœurs, les races, les nations, les autres ; mais au contraire réjouissons-nous de ne le pouvoir jamais ; nous réservant ainsi la perdurabilité du plaisir de sentir le Divers. (OC 1: 751)

Without a doubt, the contemporary notion of "cultural understanding," which Glissant implicitly challenges with his demand for the "right to opacity," finds another formidable critic, by anticipation, in Segalen. His particular notion of the Diverse calls for a radical epistemology of

unknowability that, crucially, coincides with heightened *sensation*. Glissant makes a similar turn from *sens*, in terms of "meaning," to *sensation* or *sentiment* in *L'intention poétique*, where he celebrates "le sentiment des limites irréductibles du connu" (98). In contrast to a complacent agnosticism, the notion of *exotisme-esthétique du Divers* involves an exploration of the limits, a becoming-expressive or becoming-sensible of the *distance* between individuals, which maintains these differences even as it promotes contact between cultures. The stronger the "shock" of difference, the stronger the bodily experience that follows: "Si la saveur croît en fonction de la différence, quoi de plus savoureux que l'opposition des irréductibles, le choc des contrastes éternels ?" (Segalen, OC 1: 767). This almost mathematical formula, by which the "savor" of difference increases as a function of the strength of this difference, recalls the moment when Glissant first conceives of relation as a function of opacity: "La poétique de la relation suppose qu'à chacun soit proposée la densité (l'opacité) de l'autre. Plus l'autre résiste dans son épaisseur ou sa fluidité (sans s'y limiter), plus sa réalité devient expressive, et plus la relation féconde" (IP 23). Against a simple opposition between positivism and skepticism, between believing in the power to come into being through knowledge and giving up knowledge-seeking because of a paralyzing uncertainty, Segalen and Glissant in their way propose that we experience being most fully when we encounter the limits of our knowledge in an other.

Countenancing Opacity in *Stèles*

If poetic language can open itself to Relation even before Relation becomes theorized, then Segalen's poetry might be the greatest test of the power of poetry to establish, in Glissant's words, a new "rapport à l'Autre" (*PR* 23). Whereas the *Essai sur l'exotisme* is an incomplete set of notes that Segalen hoped would lead to a finished theory of exoticism, his poetry, especially *Stèles*,

makes a concerted practice of exoticism. This collection takes the opacity of Chinese culture as a subject in itself and uses the dense material of poetic language to disrupt easy comprehension. Instead, it makes available alternative points of contact with the text. Far from trying to penetrate foreignness, translate it, or make it digestible for the European reader, *Stèles* takes its energy from the encounter with cultural, subjective, and literary impenetrability. Themes of negation such as alienation, absence, nothingness, and stony silence recur throughout the collection, but by denying the quest for a profound essence beneath the textual surface, these concepts ultimately serve the more affirmative purpose of sensitizing the reader to a continuous, process-oriented encounter with the text. Much as Glissant considers poetry the catalyst for a more general intersubjective system of Relation, Segalen attempts to create a text that does not simply stand as an example of the aesthetics of the Diverse but actively participates in its dynamics. It is no coincidence that both poets would make opacity a chief quality of their poetics.

Glissant discovered *Stèles* in 1955, the same year in which the "Notes sur l'exotisme" first appeared in *Mercure de France*, and the year in which he wrote "Segalen! Segalen!" for *Les lettres nouvelles*. His article, in fact, attends much more closely to the steles than does the revised version of it later in *L'intention poétique*, which drives more directly towards a general poetic theory. Glissant was exhilarated by this collection of poems, calling it, in comparison with Segalen's other work, "la pierre centrale, le plus rare projet, auquel il faudra sans cesse revenir" (633). In comparison with other modernist poetry, moreover, Glissant holds that Segalen's is "sans aucun doute aux sources mêmes du renouveau lyrique dont la poésie française a bénéficié depuis le début du siècle ; cet homme mystérieux avance en effet au premier rang des glorieux Régents de l'actuelle poésie" (ibid.). The hyperbolic praise, including the diction of royalty, playfully situates Segalen among those poets whose work has been enshrined in literary fame—Apollinaire, Char,

Éluard, and Claudel, to name a few. As Glissant promises, he would come back to Segalen's poetry more than just about any other poet, with the exception of Saint-John Perse. The reason, perhaps, is not simply the pleasure of reading this text—he praises the text's "saveur" or "succulence"—but also that *Stèles* suggests an affirmative poetics within a broader system of intercultural encounters.

Segalen wrote *Stèles* during his "cycle chinois," roughly from 1910 to 1914. Their form is his own invention: an epigraph in Chinese script, usually borrowed from classical Chinese literature, alongside a poem in versets—the long-lined, almost biblical form between verse and prose largely revived by another poet whose travels in China had a massive effect on his work: Claudel, to whom, incidentally, Segalen dedicates *Stèles*. Each stele is framed in a bold rectangle, reminiscent of the figure of a Chinese stele, a stone pillar with an engraving. Segalen provides an introduction that explains the aspect of these monuments and prepares the reader for the strange, and estranging, effects of their impassive, seemingly eternal form. Already written in a poetic mode, evoking the austere solitude of the encounter with a lone stele on a Chinese plain, Segalen's introduction warns that these steles' fundamental quality is their impenetrability. This applies not only to their stony bodies but also to the architecture of their inscriptions, which take on the material impassibility of the pillars themselves:

> Les Caractères pendent les uns aux autres, réfractaire même à celui qui l'a tissé. Sitôt incrustés dans la table, — qu'ils pénètrent d'intelligence, — les voici, dépouillant les formes de la mouvante intelligence humaine, devenus pensée de la pierre dont ils prennent le grain. De là cette composition dure, cette densité, cet équilibre interne et ces angles, qualités nécessaires comme les espèces géométriques au cristal. De là ce défi à qui leur fera dire ce qu'ils gardent. *Ils*

> *dédaignent d'être lus*. Ils ne réclament point la voix ou la musique. Ils méprisent les tons changeant et les syllabes qui les affublent au hasard des provinces. Ils n'expriment pas ; ils signifient ; ils sont. (OC 2: 37, my italics)

The steles' inscriptions are hauntingly inanimate, removed from any notion of the soul manifested in a human voice preserved in writing. They are the hard elements of language, strangely impervious to the human presence that supposedly created them. Segalen goes on to explain that the texts that he derives from the Chinese inscriptions cannot be seen as translations or "glosses" of their meaning. Rather, they will participate in the steles' opacity, ultimately demonstrating the poetic power of the untranslatable: "On les subit ou on les récuse, sans commentaires ni gloses inutiles,—d'ailleurs sans confronter jamais le texte véritable : seulement les empreintes qu'on lui dérobe" (ibid. 38). To read these steles is to take part in an activity of reading based upon the original text's inaccessibility. The residual "empreintes" provide the poetic material, and the poetry undertakes the task not of peering through these imprints in search of an absolute origin but rather of contemplating the movement across time, space and cultures that this imprint embodies. The deconstructionist ear will no doubt pick up echoes between Segalen's poetic theory and Derrida's notion of the "arche-trace"—the mark of non-presence that undermines any notion of a fixed origin of an inscription. Equally, though, we must hear the echoes of the Taoist philosophy that Segalen was reading in China and that indisputably marked his writing of *Stèles*. The Taoist priority on "eternal transformation" would emphasize the impermanence of the stones themselves (Bien 14). The steles stand as a futile attempt to defy the infinite process of becoming that nature exacts upon them. "Elles seules impliquent la stabilité," Segalen explains in his preface, but this implicated stability is just that—a suggestion, which gets undermined as the letters fade gradually overtime (OC 2: 35). Word and stone are subject to the same fragility. As Gloria Bien notes, in

Taoism, “Nothing endures: neither solid stone, nor wood, nor knowledge, nor even poetry: only the Tao is eternal” (14). Coming to its own version of impermanence via the Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, Segalen’s poetry becomes yet another imprint, an inscription with an irretrievable origin and a power arising precisely from its elusiveness.

After this description of the memorial monuments whose form Segalen borrows for his text, the collection’s first stele, “Sans marque de règne,” addresses the monuments’ relationship with time and memory. The opening verset consists of infinitive phrases that evoke the conventional function of the memorial:

> Honorer les Sages reconnus ; dénombrer les Justes ; redire à toutes les faces que celui-là vécut, & fut noble & sa contenance vertueuse

Yet this verset only exists to be renounced. In the next verset, the first-person voice appears for the first time, presumably the monument’s own voice. The prosopopoeia, the giving of a voice or persona to an inanimate object, is heightened by the personal tone of the exclamations, which directly contradict the memorial function that the first verset has proposed:

> Cela est bien. Cela n’est pas de mon souci : tant de bouches en dissertent ! Tant de pinceaux élégants s’appliquent à calquer formules & formes

Not only does the stele refuse to be a monument like other monuments, that is, to remember someone or something; it also refuses to resemble any art dedicated to remembrance. It will not recite elegies (“tant de bouches en dissertent !”), and it will not paint a portrait of its noble subject. It will not, in short, presume to represent the past or bring it back to life. It claims that too many examples of this effort already exist, and the homogeneity of these examples undermines the very specificity that they attempt to keep alive:

> Que les tables mémoriales se jumellent comme les tours de veille au long de la voie d’Empire, de cinq mille en cinq mille pas.

The overwhelmingly positive first verset, then acts only as a set-up for the negation that truly begins the poem and, indeed, the whole of *Stèles*. The negation operates on two levels. On the conceptual level, this stele claims to do the opposite of conventional memorial stones. Given Segalen's description of steles in the first sentence of his introduction—"elles sont des monuments restreints à une table de pierre, haut dressé, portant une inscription" (OC 2: 35)—it seems easy to confuse his textual steles with the endless "tables mémoriales" that "Sans marque de règne" dismisses. True steles are indeed memorial stones, but Segalen's first stele spends its first few versets denying the memorial function of *his* steles. Then, on a formal level, this stele contradicts itself even more strongly, for it claims to exist silently even as it speaks; it claims to exist outside of time even as its language must adhere to the temporal cadences of human speech:

> Attentif à ce qui n'a pas été dit ; soumis par ce qui n'est point promulgué ; prosterné vers ce qui ne fut pas encore,
>
> Je consacre ma joie & ma vie & ma piété à dénoncer des règnes sans années, des dynasties sans avènement, des noms sans personnes, des personnes sans noms

More radical than claiming to recall unrecognized or forgotten eras, the stele does not reserve itself to a time before history or memory but rather to an outside-of-time, a realm inaccessible to any ordinary historical understanding. The title itself suggests this, for the traditional Chinese calendar marks its years according to the "reigns" of its emperors.[7] Further, if speech occurs in time, to the rhythms of breath and thought, then the poem's own assertions of its a-temporality also undermines its own voice. It denies the prosopopoeia that allows it to speak, even if, presumably, such a denial would first require the ability to speak.

One might read this impasse as a pre-de Manian commentary on the haunting ambiguity of writing: always already prosopopoeial because simultaneously vocal and inanimate, lyric writing in particular seems to at once revive the voice and yet conjure "frozen world of the dead"

(de Man 80). Yet the stele goes even further when it challenges the assumptions of time and history that underlie the reading of lyric poetry. Rather than being like "tant de bouches [qui] dissertent," the stele insists that it is "marqué," with the implication that the mark does not produce words that were at one time uttered but rather that it detaches itself from the history of its own inscription. In the words of Haun Saussy, "not temporal writing, not voiced writing, not information […] the stele is a kind of absolutization of matter in space" (Billings xxii–xxiii). This absolute materiality runs against the search for an ineffable in poetry, the transformation of material text to the voice's pure expression of the soul. If the classical notion of lyric poetry is that the soul re-presents itself in and through the voice,[8] then the stubbornly material, voiceless stele prompts the opposite movement: not the exteriorization of a speaker's previously silent spirit, but the turning of a reader's gaze inward towards the inscrutable signs of his own subjectivity:

> Que ceci ne soit point marqué d'un règne
> […]
> Mais de cette ère unique, sans date & sans fin, aux caractères indicibles, que tout homme instaure en lui-même & salue,
>
> A l'aube où il devient Sage & Régent du trône de son cœur.

The Sage and the Regent, an allusion to the official titles of the Chinese emperor, again recall the traditional subjects of memorial stones. In this stele, though, this royal title refers not to someone who existed but, in fact, to someone who becomes, "devient." We suddenly find ourselves in the dynamic ontology of poetic creation that Glissant envisions, channeling Heraclitus through Deleuze and Nietzsche. Thus, quite different from the de Manian "frozen world" of the prosopopoeial epitaph, Segalen affirms a productive force in the encounter with material writing. The reader, presumably anyone ("tout homme") who encounters the stele, gains strength from this experience of inscrutability. Incomprehension, the inability to attach the stele's signs to an historical or conceptual referent, leads to a deeper experience of his own subjectivity.

There are recognizable aspects of Segalen's theory of exoticism in this notion of the self gaining strength from the shock of the impenetrable. Yet the poetry articulates this idea more forcibly, if also more opaquely. Whereas in the *Essai*, Segalen provides a seductively simple version of the paradox—"La sensation d'Exotisme augmente la personnalité, l'enrichit, bien loin de l'étouffer" (OC 1: 762)—the opening stele demonstrates the spatio-temporal importance of such an experience. To be uprooted from one's geography and history is to gain a truer sense of the world's diversity and to tap into the energy of this diversity. There is a proto-Glissantian tone in this idea, for Glissant argues throughout his career that the violent, unforgivable uprooting of the peoples of African and Indian descent and their removal to the Caribbean can eventually become a source of different, stronger selfhood. Moreover, the importance of language, particularly poetic language, to this experience cannot be overestimated. Envisioning language as opaque—of which the most literal image would be an opaque material text blocking access to a deeper meaning—figures in both Segalen's aesthetics of diversity and Glissant's poetics of Relation. Furthermore, poetic language in particular calls attention to its own materiality, to the incongruity between its corporeal form in the world and its semantic function; poetic language is thus the opaque language par excellence.

Perhaps the most fundamental instance of opacity in *Stèles* is the Chinese epigraph at the top right of each stele. As Timothy Billings and Christopher Bush note, "epigraph" is a term of convenience (which I will continue to use) but not an accurate measure of this script, for the word implies the hierarchy of a title subordinating an epigraph both in space on the page an in font size (28). In fact, since Chinese is read from right to left, up to down, the characters' placement on the right-hand part of the page would situate it as the first thing to be read, that is, the title. The French "title" to the left of it would be read second, thus positioning the French as the true epigraph in

relation to the Chinese script. The point, though, is that the hierarchy does not at all work here—in fact, French and Chinese readers, each beginning at opposite sides of the page, would meet directly in the space between the two inscriptions. These interstices, the spaces inhabited by the mutual opacity of the languages, are the essence of Segalen's poetics.

The epigraph to "Sans marque de règne" is especially important: it brackets *Stèles* as a whole, since it is also stamped after the final poem in the collection. The phrase is Segalen's own invention, contrary to the popular assumption that he borrows all of the inscriptions verbatim from Chinese literature. According to the notes he left behind, which *Mercure de France* later collected and edited, the six-character inscription means "« composé durant la Période Sin Siuan ». Littéralement : « Promulgation du cœur de la dynastie Wou-tch'ao ». Littéralement : « Sans avènement dynastique »" (OC 2: 41). Even this translational layering suggests something about Segalen's understanding of the work of translation: the Chinese characters lead to a phrase transliterated into Latin script—"Sin Siuan"—which then requires translation. This second translation leads to yet another impenetrable phrase—"Wou-tch'ao"—which is finally resolved into a phrase resembling but not equal to the French title—"Sans avènement dynastique." Yet it is a false resolution, for the epigraph itself, once translated and reassembled, remains enigmatic: Billings and Bush render it, "Composed during the year of the Promulgation of the Heart, of the 'No Accession' Dynasty." It refers to a year that is not a year, because entirely interior to the subject, and a dynasty that negates the very idea of dynasticism by refusing accession. A dynasty is based on accessions to the regency; a " 'No Accession' Dynasty" is a brash oxymoron. Much like the poem's body, then, the epigraph challenges conventional notions of the time and space of poetic language.

It would be tempting to think of the poem's body, the versets, as a kind of final translation of this epigraph, but their true purpose is to thicken the opacity, not to dissipate it. Segalen insists that "aucune de ces proses dites Stèles n'est une traduction, — quelques-unes, rares, à peine une adaptation" (OC 2: 28). The epigraph remains opaque to the verse—and vice versa—as the poem draws its energy from the tension between the probing eye of a curious mind and the impenetrable texture of the Chinese script. The verse is not a meditation on the meaning of the epigraph but rather an expression of the encounter with their imperviousness to complete ownership by the reader.

Importantly, though, the epigraph's opacity does not equal absolute illegibility. Segalen learned to read, write and speak Chinese, if not with native fluency then at least well enough to actively engage with its classical literature and contemporary culture. The epigraphs, then, are meant to be read, if not fully comprehended. Billings and Bush rightly reproach critics who assume that "since the epigraphs only repeat the French title or highlight some motif clearly evident in the body of the poem, the Chinese contains no surprises that would force a monolingual reader to reevaluate the fundamental meaning of the poem […] such arguments are usually paired with assertions about the sufficiency of gazing admiringly at the calligraphy" (31). The very strangeness of the epigraph to "Sans marque de règne" certainly goes beyond its foreignness to the Western eye. By tantalizingly situating the poem in a space outside of the dynastic history of China—the very history that Chinese steles putatively celebrate—they carry a semantic value that sets up the chief paradox of the poem.

If opacity does not imply absolute illegibility (which might be more akin to obscurity, whose etymology signals "covered over"), it stands as the sensation of the material language, whether ink on the page or sound vibrations in the air. Its physical manifestation reasserts

language's semi-independent ontological status: it is an object in itself, although its life depends upon a symbiosis with the minds that use it to think and communicate. Language cannot be translated unproblematically because, corporeal in itself, it cannot be reduced into the subject's mind. These characters quite literally have their own character. The experience of a foreign language, as Segalen knows well, brings this reality to the fore. Even if one can derive meaning from foreign utterances or script, a strong impression remains of the fabric of this language. The *Stèles* ultimately appear as an appreciation of this fabric. Opposed to translation, at least in the conventional sense, the stele presents the sensation of foreignness as a kind of ecstasy. The fact that, even though Segalen created the phrase, the six characters forming the epigraph to "Sans marque de règne" will carry infinite degrees of meaning that he could not possibly predict—the notion that this language might, to a native speaker, *feel* transparent even as Segalen swims in its thickness—this fact fuels the sense of amazement drives the poetics of *Stèles* and indeed Segalen's aesthetics of the Diverse as a whole.[9] That one rediscovers a stronger and fuller self through this challenging encounter with the other: this is the ultimate dream of the *Essai sur l'exotisme* and the aesthetic project of Segalen's poems.

Each stele that follows "Sans marque de règne" exhibits, in one way or another, this dialectic of the self enriched through contact with the impenetrable other. Glissant, in his article on Segalen in *Les lettres nouvelles*, takes particular interest in the "Stèles du milieu," the final section of the collection. Glissant calls it "le corps et l'âme de l'œuvre ségalienne […] la pierre centrale, le plus rare projet, auquel il faudra sans cesse revenir" (633). Indeed, steles such as "Eloge & Pouvoir de l'Absence," "Movement," and "Nom caché" are perhaps the strongest examples of the productive impenetrability that Segalen attempts to enact in his poetics. Another stele from this section, "Juges souterrains," bears a striking resemblance to part of the final poem in Glissant's

last work of poetry, *Les grands chaos*, in which the poet travels through a subterranean volcanic landscape and encounters "une halée de Justes" guarding a bridge. In Segalen's stele, a group of judges also preside over a kind of underground crossing:

> Il y a des juges souterrains. L'assemblée siège dans la nuit pleine ; il faut traverser des roches que les satellites fendent et tomber plus creux que les puits.

The idea of a difficult crossing haunts the entire collection. Linguistic crossing—translation—appears as an act that must be attempted even though it will surely fail. The fact that both Segalen and Glissant choose an underworld setting for these scenes of crossing, complete with a final judgement, demonstrates the sense of mortal danger that accompanies the plunge into the opacity of another language, culture or subject. These scenes' resonance with classical mythology, moreover, suggest that problems of language and translation have always been crucial to Western ideas of death and the afterlife: both death and the dead are the ultimate Other, the ultimate incomprehensible. As Glissant puts it, again speaking of Segalen's death, "il s'est héroïquement consumé dans l'impossibilité d'être Autre. La mort est la résultante des opacités, c'est pourquoi son idée ne nous quitte pas" (PR 208). In the haunting stoniness of the steles, one can sense the closeness of death to any act of translation, even one that does not presume to render the text into transparent terms. As Billings and Bush cleverly put it, "If, as Valéry writes, translating poetry into prose is like putting poetry into its coffin, Segalen's own poetry in prose lingers over the act" (18). The "Stèles du milieu" provide the most concise expression of this near-death experience by meditating directly on the notions of concealment, absence and pure negativity.

"Eloge & Pouvoir de l'Absence" directly asserts the creative power of this negativity. The "je" appears as a kind of anti-emperor, a regent who is impervious to everything regents normally have to handle—issues of the court, economics, rebels and foreign wars. Like "Sans marque de règne," this stele begins in the negative, asserting not what it is but what is not:

> Je ne prétends point être là, ni survenir à l'improviste, ni paraître en habits & chair, ni gouverneur par le poids visible de ma personne,
>
> Ni répondre aux censeurs, de ma voix ; aux rebelles, d'un œil implacable ; aux ministres fautifs, d'un geste qui suspendrait les têtes à mes ongles.

The commas in the second verset, especially the one offsetting "de ma voix," bolster the impression that this speaker not only does not use his voice but that he has no voice to use. The paradox is by now a familiar one: to say he has no voice, he requires a voice, just as the steles' stony silence is undermined by the voice that reads the words engraved on them. The trope of beginning with a negation also participates in this paradox, for to say what is *not* is still to say it, still to bring something into being even if the purpose is to negate it. The problem goes back at least as far as Parmenides, who struggled with the twists of logic that allow us to simultaneously negate something and give it being in language: "Thou canst not know what is not—that is impossible—nor utter it" (fragment 2). In the *Daode jing*, moreover, absence does not equal pure nothingness but rather the state of pure potentiality or "formlessness" (*Dao*) that precedes the formation of presences: "Only the absence of all delectable measurements can be infinitely expansive" (Liu 184). Glissant's refrain in his early book of poems *Un champ d'îles* makes its own concise expression of this paradox: "Absence qui êtes présence !" For Glissant and Segalen, poetry itself is the literary mode that gains most from this paradox, due to its inherent opacity, its sense of a simultaneous absence of signification and surplus of meaning.

Indeed, the "je" of Segalen's stele draws immense power from his paradoxical absence. One might read it as a protection against the vulnerabilities of the throne—for the regent's body, his corporeal presence, is all that stands between him and pure divinity. Yet the text also attributes an affirmative power to the *notion* of absence itself. Absence is not simply a veil that protects royal power or renders it absolute but more precisely a force in itself:

> Je règne par l'étonnant pouvoir de l'absence. Mes deux-cent-soixante-dix palais tramés entre eux de galeries opaques s'emplissent seulement de mes traces alternées.
>
> Et des musiques jouent en l'honneur de mon ombre ; des officiers saluent mon siège vide ; mes femmes apprécient mieux l'honneur des nuits où je ne daigne pas.
>
> Egal aux Génies qu'on ne peut récuser puisqu'invisibles, — nulle arme ni poison ne saura venir où m'atteindre.

The regent's inaccessibility or unattainability does not simply protect or preserve his power; it is the vital source of that power. Like "Sans marque de règne," this stele uses the themes of dynasty and history to imply the political importance of the "je," but in fact the "je" exists outside of dynastic temporality. The epigraph, moreover, adds the notion of invisibility to the poem, doubling the paradox: not only does the poem appear as a voice without a voice ("Ni […] de ma voix"), but it is also a text that cannot be seen. The epigraph, Segalen notes, means "Éloge de l'invisible." Confronted with the radical materiality of the Chinese script, the Western eye privileges the visibility of this character, its opacity in a quite literal sense, over and against its role as a conduit for information. And yet its "invisible" meaning contradicts this materiality. Segalen's notes further show how he examines the etymology of the word by dissecting the pen strokes of written character. Intent upon the visibility of the character, Segalen nonetheless arrives back at the notion of invisibility that the character conveys: the different ideograms imbedded in it, he finds, evoke the "bord d'un précipice où l'on marche, tombe, et devient invisible" (Billings 393). Indeed, Segalen's poems move constantly toward the edge of this precipice, where the invisibility of meaning is both a power and a danger. It is a danger because it disrupts the constitution of the self in thought, for thought is mostly, if not completely, composed of language. It is a power because it manifests to the self an intelligence beyond the self's own limits. This recognition of the beyond is crucial to both Segalen's and Glissant's poetics of the Divers.

I have focused on a specific line of inquiry within *Stèles*, setting aside the other rich cultural, historical and philosophical resources available in the work. The final stele, "Nom caché," however, inscribes itself solidly within the problematics of inaccessibility, reading and the absence-presence dialectic. Acting as a conclusion that does not close but rather opens, it also demonstrates more emphatically than any other stele how diversity gains from the unreachable and the unknowable. Anticipating Glissant's process-oriented poetics, it ultimately privileges the heuristic value of the search for truth over the discovery of truth. The stele begins slowly and quietly, once again explaining what it is not:

> Le véritable Nom n'est pas celui qui dore les pratiques ; illustre les actes ; ni que le peuple mâche de dépit ;
>
> Le véritable Nom n'est point lu dans le Palais même, ni aux jardins ni aux grottes, mais demeure caché par les eaux sous la voûte de l'aqueduc où je m'abreuve.

The anaphoric negations seem to build a linguistic architecture of concealment. The poem's rhetoric presents itself as a screen behind which "le véritable Nom" hides. Beyond this verbal concealment, the signs of life described in the stele—the gardens and grottos and flowing water—also conceal the mysterious name, for the poem asserts the absence of the "Nom" by affirming their presence: "Ni aux jardins ni aux grottes." The naming of something, which in the Adamic tradition coincides with its new aliveness (Genesis 2:19), gets inverted in this stele. Set aside from signs of life, the "true Name" exists in the lifeless reaches, far away from earthly proliferation:

> Seulement dans la très grande sécheresse, quand l'hiver crépite sans flux, quand les sources, basses à l'extrême s'encoquillent dans leurs glaces,
>
> Quand le vide est au cœur du souterrain & dans le souterrain du cœur, — où le sang même ne roule plus, — sous la voûte alors accessible se peut recueillir le Nom.

The two possibilities of the strange compound verb "se peut recueillir" testify to the silence of the Name: *se recueillir* most obviously refers to "collecting" or gaining access to it (which, the poem

tells us, must occur in the deepest, most silent depths of the heart), but it also carries the religious meaning of meditation, a practice of silence and, especially in certain Eastern belief systems, self-forgetting or self-absenting. Accessibility, then, only occurs by through a deliberately attained state of total absence. This is not an allegory of "uncovering" a deeper meaning by removing the superfluous barriers; it is the story of the *becoming* of meaning—"se peut recueillir le Nom"—which occurs in a space of its own. The movement of penetration or dis-covery ends not in a true revelation of the hidden name, for the "Nom" remains always the "Nom" throughout the poem. Contrary to the semantic function of naming, which is to select a linguistic sign for an extra-linguistic reality, this name does not answer the question of who it "really" is, does not designate a reality external to itself. The persistent opacity of the name, in fact, fuels the entire poem. It especially energizes the final, exclamatory verset, which in true Glissantian fashion celebrates the chaos of the unknowable over the stasis of the known:

> Mais fondent les eaux dures, déborde la vie, vienne le torrent dévastateur plutôt que la Connaissance !

A simultaneous sense of proliferation and destruction imbues this verset. The "torrent dévastateur" both brings the vitality of water and the devastation of the flood. Yet the energy present in these phrases, front-loaded with dynamic verbs, gives the verset an overwhelmingly affirmative feel. In this, it recalls Rimbaud's "Après le Déluge," which also associates poetic creation with the destruction of old epistemological paradigms—capital-C *Connaissance*—and imagines a new proliferation growing out of the flood's devastation. The end of "Nom caché" does not reveal the name; it is a false riddle, an enigma with no answer beyond its own telling. But, it claims, in this telling lies the greater power of the unknown.

This final praise of the unknown leads back to Segalen's notion of exoticism, which describes the experience of the radical difference or impenetrability of otherness. The question for

a postcolonial reading of *Stèles*, then, concerns the ethics of this unknown. Privileging a "sense" or "sensation" of the unknown over the study of the knowable, Segalen places himself squarely in the aesthetic realm—particularly, an "aesthetics of the Diverse." As with any project that calls itself an aesthetics, Segalen's risks subordinating concrete realities to sensory, even sensational, experience of the subject. Moreover, Segalen's aesthetics requires an "Other" to provide the conditions for this sensation. In so doing, it *fictionalizes* the other, all the more because it refuses a representational mode of writing, opting rather for a self-reflexive poetics. The concrete, material texture of his steles, which Glissant appreciated so much, overshadows the material realities of Segalen's time in China. His notion of exoticism thus risks collapsing into the same ignorance as the clichéd, Romantic exoticism that he censures in his *Essai*. As Billings and Bush put it, "Segalen's defense of 'difference' often looks suspiciously like a desire to preserve the purity of the native; Segalen's 'aesthetic of the diverse,' is, we must not forget, an *aesthetic*. This aesthetic is, ethically speaking, a double-edged sword; readers must decide for themselves which side cuts deepest" (13–14). They go on, however, to note correctly that Segalen's apparent nostalgia for "classical" China is an unfair reduction of the true work of *Stèles*, for the steles are stubbornly ahistorical. They cannot compare a "native Chinese" concept with an impure one because they never seek to establish an historical original. When Glissant speculates that "Segalen, plus que tout autre, est à jamais pénétré d'une nostalgie sourde" ("Segalen!" 632), he is not referring to a nostalgia for a cultural origin. He is referring to Segalen's sadness in the face of diminishing diversity in the modern world, which is quite different from an idea of pure, unadulterated cultures. Segalen laments the modern presumption of familiarity with or comprehension of the world. It is thus important that his poetry does the opposite of familiarizing the speaker and reader with a cultural object. It presents the opacity of languages, cultures, and minds as a sensation in itself, an

aesthetic whose "succulence" or "goût," to use his idiosyncratic culinary terms, corresponds to the energy of diversity. Poetry participates in this energy because of its oral, esculent materiality and, more importantly, because of its abiding unpredictability and incomprehensibility. Poetry, for both Segalen and Glissant, carries the power of the Diverse in a world endangered by assimilation.

The Limits of Segalen's Exoticism

Glissant thus takes care to separate Segalen from the broader critique of French colonialism, but amid this reverence, he makes a more pointed critique of Segalen's aesthetics. Segalen was the poet who came closest, perhaps, to conceiving of a poetics of Relation—as Glissant puts it in *Poétique de la Relation*, "j'attire l'attention sur ce que Segalen ne dit pas seulement que la reconnaissance de l'autre est une obligation morale (ce qui serait généralité plate) mais qu'il en fait une constituante esthétique, le premier édit d'une véritable poétique de la Relation. Le pouvoir de ressentir le choc de l'ailleurs est ce qui nomme le poète" (42). Yet this poetics, which engages with the *ailleurs* much more justly and complexly than the egocentric explorations of the Romantics (ibid.), still falls short of Relation in a crucial way. Indeed, the poetics of Relation could be seen as a long, respectful corrective to Segalen's attempt to revive exoticism as an esthetics of the Diverse in both theory and poetry. Revising for *L'intention poétique* the admiring article on Segalen that he wrote in *Les lettres nouvelles*, Glissant adds a piercing qualification, which he would then refine in the next few volumes of essays in the *Poétiques* series. He suggests that Segalen cannot live up to the assertion in the *Essai sur l'exotisme* that "[l]es sensations d'Exotisme et d'Individualisme sont *complémentaires*"; that is, Glissant senses that Segalen goes too far in sacrificing his self to become Other. This exoticist quest was too absolute to enter into true Relation: although he understood that he could not comprehend the

other, perhaps he attempted too wholeheartedly to become comprehended, subsumed. We have seen that, in his poetry, the "absence" inherent in the Other in fact gives way to a greater sense of presence, but often it seems that this absence gets transferred to the speaker himself. The speaker disintegrates into this new presence. Glissant speculates, "Peut-être en effet qu'après avoir en lucidité vécu l'appel du Divers, il restait à Segalen à revérifier *son propre terreau*. Le Divers n'est donné à chacun que comme une relation, non comme un absolu pouvoir ni une unique possession" (IP 101). Playing on Rimbaud's famous phrase "Je est un autre," Glissant goes on to argue that the other is already implicated in the self and that, consequently, eradication of the self does not bring it closer to the other but in fact endangers the other.

Ultimately, Segalen's philosophy of diversity gets stuck between an idea of the individual and a movement toward the other. As Segalen focuses on the strong experience of an individual encountering alterity, "sentir la Différence," he risks ignoring the importance of a plurality of differences across time and space. The following sentences in particular from the *Essai sur l'exotisme* clash with the broader perspective on Relation that Glissant promotes: "L'Exotisme ne peut être que *singulier*, individualiste. Il n'admet pas la pluralité […] on ne peut concevoir l'exotisme pluriel" (OC 1: 760). Not only does Segalenian exoticism putatively strengthen the individual's sense of self, but it also limits itself to the closed space of the singular interaction with a specific difference. Chris Bongie, who studied the notion of exoticism before beginning sustained work on Glissant later in his career, smartly recognizes this problem in Segalen in his first book, *Exotic Memories*. Reading Segalen's first novel *Immémoriaux* alongside the *Essai sur l'exotisme*, Bongie notes a major systemic problem, namely, that colonial reality, which has brought destruction upon the colonial other, undermines the neat self-other dialectic upon which Segalen's individualism depends: "in a colonial context the individual can […] be referred to only in the

register of loss. Although the loss was not traumatic for those who adopted the pluralist values of colonialism, it severely debilitated any ideological system that still held to the centrality of the individual" (115). Bongie goes on to claim that Segalen's later retreat into "extreme formalism," away from social or historical concerns that would challenge his notion of the individual, is a symptom of the contradiction in his theorization of exoticism. This assessment, presumably referring to *Stèles* in a superficial way, ignores the careful attention that the steles pay to the notion of history even as they place themselves outside of it, but Bongie is right insofar as the steles' apparent permanence—their rocky impassiveness—acts as a kind of self-erasure on another level.

Yet Glissant's critique of Segalen's individualism is slightly different. Whereas Bongie uses the term "pluralist" ambivalently at best—for in his account modern pluralism is largely a result of colonial violence—Glissant affirms pluralism as a fundamental condition for the Diverse. Without citing Segalen's statement that "on ne peut concevoir l'exotisme pluriel," Glissant seems to respond directly to it in a different chapter of *L'intention poétique*: "le Divers est encore plus menacé quand il n'est pas diversement assumé : inclus en une pluralité d'êtres. Sa vérité est qu'il ne peut s'amasser *tout* dans un seul" (101). The Diverse, like Relation, functions as an open system, not a single exchange between isolated subjects. Segalen's reduction of the Diverse into a binary self-other encounter prevents him from conceiving of a totality in which these encounters occur. Despite his obsession with the world's loss of energy through "entropy," he forgets the other law of thermodynamics, by which this energy is in fact conserved within the totality of the universe even if it escapes the local space in which it was stored. Perhaps Glissant's system of Relation, by conceiving of a *totalité-monde* without presuming to fully grasp it, seeks to correct Segalen's thermodynamic miscalculation. In the closed circuit of the self-other interaction, Segalen can only lose the individuality that he so celebrates as integral to the Diverse, for the individual must take

sustenance in multiple others, in a plural alterity. Glissant claims that this failure to enter fully into Relation ultimately caused Segalen's death. (Segalen returned to Brittany in 1919, at the age of forty-one, to be treated in a psychiatric hospital. He took a walk in the nearby forest one day and was found dead two days later, a tourniquet on his leg and a copy of Shakespeare's complete works, open to *Hamlet*, at his side). Although Glissant may take the mythology of Segalen's biography to yet another extreme here, his narrative demonstrates the degree to which he believed that Segalen was tragically stuck in a closed, binary space:

> Il n'est pas nécessaire de tenter de devenir l'autre (de devenir autre) ni de le « faire » à mon image. Ces projets de transmutation—sans métempsychose—sont résultés des pires et des plus hautes générosités de l'Occident. Ils désignent le destin de Victor Segalen.
>
> La mort de Segalen n'est pas qu'un résultat physiologique. On se souvient de la confidence qu'il fit, dans les derniers jours de son existence, sur le laisser-aller de son corps, dont il ne pouvait ni diagnostiquer le mal ni contrôler le dépérissement. Sans doute saura-t-on, le progrès de la médecine aidant et les symptômes rassemblés, de quoi il s'en est allé. Et sans doute a-t-on pu dire dans son entourage qu'il est mort d'une sorte de consomption généralisée. Mais je crois, moi, qu'il est mort de l'opacité de l'Autre, de l'impossibilité où il s'était trouvé de parfaire la transmutation à laquelle il rêvait. […] il a souffert la contradiction maudite. N'ayant pu savoir que le transfert en transparence allait à l'encontre de son projet, et qu'au contraire le respect des opacités mutuelles l'eût accompli, il s'est héroïquement consumé dans l'impossibilité d'être Autre. (*PR* 207–208)

Segalen perished, according to this account, because he attempted to live out an impossible contradiction: to recognize the opacity of the other and yet to attempt to become this other, to make himself transparent so as to accommodate the other's opacity. Glissant's choice of verb—"impossibilité d'*être* Autre"—foreshadows the problem. Relational ontology, he claims time and time again, persists as an ongoing *devenir*, not a static *être*. Rimbaud, like Segalen, left behind poetry and life too early, perhaps because of the immovable *être* in his maxim, "Je est un autre"; Relation calls instead for an infinite becoming of the self through a "rapport" with the other. Thus, opacity must be "mutual"; the self must be just as opaque as the other. Segalen could not yet conceive of a world whose energy comes from the interaction of multiple, mutually-respecting opacities. He died, Glissant laments, of his flawed attempt at Relation.

A final critique of Segalen comes in *Traité du Tout-Monde*, where Glissant adds that Segalen, along with Mallarmé, appreciates the baroque "démesure" of the world—the unforeseeable flux of becoming that charges the Tout-Monde—but he cannot escape the temptation to "supposer une Mesure à la démesure" (159). Mallarmé, with his project of the polysemic Book of the world, and Segalen, with his aesthetics of the Diverse, understood the power of unknowability, unpredictability and irreducible diversity. However, Glissant claims, they ultimately conceived of this open-endedness within a closed system, dreaming of a legible totality that masters this system. Glissant seeks to go further: "Non pas pourtant le Livre, absolu et improbable, de Mallarmé, non pas cette Mesure de la démesure dont il a si généreusement rêvé, mais la Démesure elle-même, imprédictible et inaccomplie" (168). Segalen and Mallarmé are thus two of the most important poets for conceiving of a poetics of Relation and a Glissantian Tout-Monde, but it would require a more radical break from European epistemology to achieve a poetics that accepts the notion of totality without attempting to sum it up or compress it into a knowable

system. Perhaps Glissant is slightly unfair to Segalen in this analysis, for Segalen's critique of the world's roundness—"le monde-boule"—demonstrates a similar interest in embracing an unknowable *totalité-monde*. Glissant seems to forget that he and Segalen share the dream of an open, endless horizon as opposed to an enclosed sphere. Segalen's mistrust of the unicity, of the "Mono"—"La sphère est la Monotonie"—presages Glissant's career-long critique of the *Un* and the *Univers*. The difference, though, is that Glissant finds it necessary to avow totality without totalizing it within a single discourse: "concevoir la totalité, mais renonce[r] volontiers à la prétention de la sommer ou de la posséder" (PR 33). It would be more accurate to say, then, that Segalen gets stuck in the renunciation of totality, and this absolute renunciation becomes a tragic negation of his own place in the world.

Crucially, though, Glissant's reservations about Segalen arise out of the *Essai sur l'exotisme* and Segalen's biography. Segalen could not live out Relation as Glissant would eventually conceive it, but his poetry lives beyond him. The steles themselves, though at times reflective of the problem of self-disintegration and restrictive *mesure* that Glissant identifies, also demonstrate a greater opening by virtue of their poetics. For Glissant, they are the "pierre centrale" of the Segalenian aesthetic because the poetics of Relation is inscribed upon them, in their poetic potential if not in their explicit discourses. That is, Segalen himself cannot, alone, conceive of a poetics of Relation because Relation requires an exchange, an interaction, a relational reading. If one of the primary features of opaque poetry is that its meaning is not inherent within it but must arise out of a productive interaction with readers, then the *Stèles* do this work in helping Glissant conceive of his poetics—and in helping us *make sense*, in the fullest sense, of this poetics. The accumulation of opacities is the omen of Relation.

A CARIBBEAN VOICE "DIFFRACTED INTO THE WORLD": PERSE'S *EXIL*

> *Saint-John Perse, dans une lettre vous évoquiez le critique idéal. Face à l'œuvre du poète, il devrait, disiez-vous, se transformer en compagnon de route. Cheminer avec l'œuvre, en vivre les écarts, en vivre les rêves, l'obscur et l'indicible. Trouver comme le poète, par le dedans, ces éclats du réel qui échappent au réel. Ce critique devrait être poète lui-même sous peine de n'être pas.*
>
> *Et vous aviez raison.*
>
> —Patrick Chamoiseau
>
> *Poésie, science de l'être ! Car toute poétique est une ontologie.*
>
> —Saint-John Perse

Alexis Saint-Léger Léger died in 1975, having completed a successful career as a French diplomat under the name of Alexis Leger and having garnered international fame as a poet under the name Saint-John Perse. Most of his contemporaries, poets and critics alike, ignored the fact that he was not a French poet but, to the end, a Caribbean poet. He did little to combat this misconception—indeed, he often encouraged it. When he won the Nobel Prize in 1960, it went virtually unmentioned that no Caribbean poet had won the prize before. In fact, the honor seemed to cement his place among the North Atlantic modernist literati whom he frequented. Archibald MacLeish was his great friend and host during his Vichy-inflicted exile to the United States, and T. S. Eliot had admiringly translated his most famous work, *Anabase*, into English. Shortly after his death, the *Nouvelle Revue Française* dedicated a special issue to him, entitled *Hommage à Saint-John Perse*. Sandwiched between essays about Perse's classicism or symbolism or surrealism were two essays by Martinicans that reclaimed Perse's *créolité*. The first, by Georges Desportes, takes on the combative tone associated with Negritude: "D'évidence on a oublié qu'il était avant tout un poète créole. Et après tout, un insulaire révolté. Révolté contre vous…" (49).

The second article was written by Glissant, and it tells a more complicated story. Beyond demonstrating the Caribbean inflections and creole terms latent in Perse's poetry, Glissant tells of a poet whose wanderings away from the Caribbean, whose opaque struggle with an irresolvable question of origins, whose ultimate opening onto a broader conception of totality, in fact makes his work all the more Caribbean. The purpose of this section is both to closely examine Glissant's relationship with Perse's poetics and to explore the opacities of Perse's most metapoetic poem, *Exil*, in order to articulate the specific processes by which Perse's work "prophesies," to use Glissant's term, a postcolonial Caribbean poetics.

Glissant wrote about many poets throughout his career, but he wrote most abundantly and most beautifully about Perse. The article in the *Nouvelle revue française*, largely forgotten though appended in modified form near the end of *Le discours antillais*, might be the best example of his ambiguous, fraught, loving and ultimately productive relationship with the poet of exile. Entitled "Saint-John Perse et les Antillais," it is at once critical and deeply personal. Perse, it argues, simultaneously renounces the Antilles and retains a distinct Antillean nature. A privileged white *béké*, Perse had the luxury to leave and wander freely: his *errance* was made possible by his race and class position. Yet he made of this *errance* a poetics, a way of speaking to and of the world. His relationship with language—technically perfectionist, nearly precious, and yet exhilaratingly inventive and open to indefinite possibility—presages the postcolonial Caribbean poetics of Glissant and Walcott and, perhaps less obviously, Chamoiseau and Brathwaite. Indeed, Perse's "fragile antillanité," to borrow Glissant's description, goes to the heart of his famous self-enclosure into language, summed up on the phrase from *Exil*, "J'habiterai mon nom" (135). This self-enclosure tends, in fact, towards a greater opening; in this way, Perse's poetic project makes opacity its chief technique and its fundamental characteristic. This opacity, this

incomprehensibility that opens onto a broader horizon of "creative reading," a *poetics of reading*, is in turn fundamental to Glissant's sense of Caribbean poetics. Of Perse's place in this dialectic, he explains, "Pour qui aime Perse, il n'est rien d'aussi émouvant que ce lieu clos où le poète se met en marge de sa connaissance. Pour un Antillais, il n'est rien d'aussi évident que cet écart irrémédiable, par quoi Perse nous ignore et nous rejoint" ("Saint-John et les Antillais" 69). The deeper problem in this sentence, though, is the "nous," for Glissant's own relationship with his native Martinique especially at this time in his life, is ambiguous. Unlike Césaire, whose "retour au pays natal" may have been ambivalent in his poetry but was ultimately realized politically, Glissant spent his early and middle career removed from the Antilles. Like Perse, he is a poet of exile—and not simply the separation from one's home but the sense that that home was already a kind of exile. His relationship to Perse's poetry reflects his choice to affirm this exile—an exile in which, though often away from the Caribbean, he discovers a Caribbean poetics.

Perse is now better associated with the Antilles than he was when he accepted his Nobel Prize, thanks in large part to the broader recognition of Glissant's work. His appreciation for Perse has reverberated into the writings and speeches of such other Caribbean writers as Walcott and Chamoiseau, and scholars have begun, especially since the 1990s, to recognize his importance to Caribbean studies.[10] Mary Gallagher takes an intertextual approach to Perse's work to demonstrate its "créolité," calling it a kind of "texte mosaïque" in which the Caribbean elements from Perse's childhood fuse with the European, North American and East Asian elements of his adult travels (422). Valérie Loichot has made the convincing case for Perse as a kind of anti-patriarch for Caribbean literature—a poet whose voice is not the law of the father but rather, in its fragmented, schizophrenic way, can only be productively reassembled by the later poets who read his work.

Thus, Caribbean re-readings of his work participate in the productively haphazard reassembly of terms so important to the reconstitution of Caribbean memory:

> Saint-John Perse's budding Caribbean poetics are still contained in lonely isolated fragments, not yet implementing Glissant's or Walcott's work of relational reconstruction. The fragmented nature of Saint-John Perse's poems allows them to be inscribed in a genealogy—or an antigenealogy—of Caribbean literature, in the place of an orphaned father needing to be rewritten by his successors. (116)

Loichot's method is compelling: an "antigenealogy," a term that she borrows from Deleuze and Guattari.[11] Indeed, it is close to the method of the present work, which rereads Glissant's poetic genealogy not as a lineage of influence but a reflection of the power of Glissant's notion of opacity as a critical category—one that, as might be expected, bears powerfully on the texts that he read as a young man. However, Loichot's examination of how post-plantation literature disrupts atavistic lineages focuses on Perse's only poetic work explicitly set on the plantation, or indeed in the Caribbean at all, *Éloges*. Indeed, perhaps unsurprisingly, most research into Perse's *Antillanité* has focused on that volume.[12] My contention is that Glissant found in that work the crucial ambiguity of his relationship with Perse—a sense of radical otherness and yet a deep affinity for it. To the Caribbean ear, there is an unforgettable tension between the vibrant Guadeloupean landscape that Perse describes in *Éloges* and the poignant memory of his family's servants as "des faces insonores, couleur de papaye et d'ennui, qui s'arrêtaient derrière nos chaises comme des astres morts" (27).[13] The later *Exil*, though, more strongly initiates a poetics of opacity precisely because of its refusal to root itself in the Antilles, or indeed in any fixed setting, while still gathering minute particularities from different locales. This poem thus presages a broader, more

planetary project: to conceive of a poetics of Relation as a new reflection on totality, a totality conceived of innumerable particularities, in opacity and *errance*.

Errance has been a term attached to Saint-John Perse since well before Glissant. Perse's life and literature were characterized by a ceaseless wandering and a conspicuous refusal to return to his native Guadeloupe. The ambivalent nostalgia of *Éloges* is not a *mal du pays* in the conventional sense of wishing to return to one's origin or center; it is the pain associated with sensing the absence of a center, of having originated in a place that never felt like a center, an original and irrefutable decentering. Perse's nostalgia is dull and illusory, not attached to crisp images of a home but rather to fragmented snapshots and disappearing traces of a place where he was born but always distant from. Errantry was his fate. Maurice Saillet, the co-founder of *Les lettres nouvelles* and a critic whose works Glissant read, wrote a book on Perse in 1952, about the time when Glissant was coming onto the literary scene in Paris. Saillet says of Perse's *Exil*, "tant il se sent étranger à toute patrie de ce monde, Saint-John Perse retrouve aujourd'hui sa vocation d'Errant, qui ne s'attache à rien" (87–88). Forty years later, in *Poétique de la Relation*, Glissant would link Perse and Rimbaud with a very similar formula: "l'errance est vocation" (27). Even if he was not the first to associate *errance* with Perse, though, Glissant has done the most to make of this *errance* a philosophical category. *Errance*, in Glissant's thinking, becomes the figure for Relation in action: a movement of body and mind that does not presuppose legitimate origins or fixed destinations, but rather affirms the process of wandering, stumbling-upon, and connecting distinct, irreducible materials and subjects in Relation. This ontological and epistemological position, Glissant says, owes much to Perse's poetics: "la poésie de Saint-John Perse, si elle n'est pas le raccrochement épique des leçons d'un passé, augure un nouveau mode du rapport à l'Autre, qui par paradoxe, et à cause même de cette passion d'errance, prophétise la poétique de la Relation"

(PR 54). High praise, apparently, for an elitist *béké* who swore off the Caribbean. By contrast, Glissant reserves a pointed critique for Perse's universalizing impulses, his ceaseless "rejet des histoires des peuples, mais leur magnificence comme assomption de l'Histoire, au sens hégélien" (ibid. 53). Perse was anything but localizing, and his personal inclination to flatten and unify might appear as the most damaging of modernist projects. However, the power of poetry itself to exceed this leveling project, to erupt with particularities and unexpected connections beyond the poet's control: this is the dialectic that most interests Glissant in Perse's textual totalities. Perse's true *errance* occurred less in his life as a world voyager; it occurs most fully in the chaotic, uncontrolled movement by which these poems *mean* and keep meaning anew. The poetics free the poetry from the author's putative self-enclosure within language. Built by a poet who famously took solitary refuge in a purified language, this self-styled "House" of linguistic purity cannot help but open its doors to the world, and the expression that emanates from it cannot help but move with infinite unpredictability: "Davantage l'errance se déroule, davantage la parole s'émeut de fixités" ("Saint-John Perse et les Antillais" 73). Put another way, "Il écrit la lettre suprême de l'Occident immobile et le premier chant de l'Occident partagé" (IP 115). Perse embodies the pride, conservatism, and epistemic violence of the Occident (which, as Glissant reminds us, "n'est pas à l'ouest. Ce n'est pas un lieu, c'est un projet" (DA 14)), but he also demonstrates the power of poetry to undo the very principles that wrought it, to imagine, from "une situation bloquée," a new world in Relation.

Oceanic Poetics

Caribbean poetics must arise out of the ocean, that vast abyss underlying modernity. "Perse est toujours océanique," asserts Chamoiseau (48). Indeed, Perse, the self-proclaimed "homme d'Atlantique," drew on the poetic power of the sea to such an extent that even his landscapes—

deserts, plains, beaches—exhibit the fluid nature of the ocean. If the ocean is the ultimate modernizer, globalizer and totalizer—the conduit of conquests and enslavements from 1492 onwards—it is also the exemplary image of the unknowable and irreducible. Mallarmé's obsession with the ocean surface and its residual *écume* testifies to the tension between the apparent uniformity of the seas' substance and the particularities that materialize out of it. A vast moving surface, it collects elements from every corner of the world. Just as Mallarmé perceived a metapoetic potential in the ocean, just as Rimbaud's "Bateau ivre" jounces wildly on the waves, just as Lautréamont repeatedly exclaims, "Je te salue, vieil Océan," Perse creates an oceanic poetics in his imagery, his flowing rhythms, his extended versets on the page and, most of all, his attempt to conceive of a capacious *Tout* without rendering it comprehensible. The sea's rhythmic nothingness, the ambivalent lapping of the waves, corresponds to a greater energy by virtue of its power to connect the continents. It has been proposed that Perse, too, aspires to a rhythmic nothingness, an a-signifying poetics,[14] but this absence indicates a greater presence: a meaning latent in the poem, a meaning that can only arise within a new approach to reading, a new way of understanding. Glissant approaches the same dialectic first in the abstract and then in the historically concrete: the refrain in the early poem *Un champ d'îles*, "Absente qui êtes toute présence," intermixes with images of sea and island; then, much later, he elaborates the notion of the *abîme* of the Atlantic, the site of cultural fracturing and erasure during the slave trade, out of which emerges the vast Creole world. This world would require a new way of creating meaning, and Glissant saw hints of this new, distinctly Caribbean creativity in Perse's oceanic poetics.

The ocean is also the site of exile, the space where one becomes unrooted from the continent, unmoored from History. The exile that *Exil* describes is only incidentally related to Perse's "exile" to America following his refusal to participate in the Vichy government during the

Second World War (Winspur 55–56). Exile is, from the first canto, figured as a more general condition that gives rise to poetic production. The closure of exile becomes a greater opening. "Portes ouvertes sur les sables, portes ouvertes sur l'exil," begins the poem,

> Les clés aux gens du phare, et l'astre roué vif sur la pierre du seuil :
> Mon hôte, laissez-moi votre maison de verre dans les sables…
> L'Été de gypse aiguise ses fers de lance dans nos plaies,
> J'élis un lieu flagrant et nul comme l'ossuaire des saisons,
> Et, sur toutes grèves de ce monde, l'esprit du dieu fumant déserte sa couche d'amiante.
> Les spasmes de l'éclair sont pour le ravissement des Princes en Tauride. (123)

Glints of light reflect across the surface of the poem, both in its aquatic and glassy images and in the way these images surface out of an obscure semantics. These images are hard to connect in syntactic logic, but they create a strong impression of tension between closure and opening, between darkness and illumination. The overture manifests itself not only in the twice-repeated "portes ouvertes," but also with the "clés" and the "seuil" in the second line, which could signal either opening or locking, entering or exiting. The idea of visibility, of illumination, comes through the images of the "phare," the "maison de verre," the luminous "Été de gypse" and the "spasmes de l'éclair," in contrast with the dark "lieu flagrant et nul comme l'ossuaire des saisons." Eschewing easy description and opting rather to use a series of disparate images to evoke the broader dialectics conventionally associated with knowledge—light/dark and opening/closure—Perse places the question of comprehension front and center. He also, without reverting to place-names or landmarks, inscribes a particularly Antillean geography and oceanography into his work, for, as Giovanna Devincenzo points out, "la présence de l'élément aquatique fait du milieu insulaire un territoire fuyant, un espace en même temps étendu vers le monde et replié sur lui-même, un endroit soumis à une profonde dialectique entre éloignement et rapprochement, errance et fixité" (10). Devincenzo here, without thinking of Glissant, describes the fundamental Caribbean

dialectic and the chief paradox of Glissantian opacity, “en même temps étendu vers le monde et replié sur lui-même.”

The next canto is perhaps the most quoted of all of Perse’s poetry because it speaks directly of the poem, seemingly offering a clue about Perse’s enigmatic style in general. If the first canto, with its “clés aux gens du phare,” raises the question of whether *Exil* will cast light upon or unlock the meaning of its poetic landscape, then the second canto seems to provide a kind of response to this question. In contrast to the general feeling of overture in the first section, however, this passage about the poem’s composition begins as a stark negation:

> À nulles rives dédiées, à nulles pages confiée la pure amorce de ce chant…
> D’autres saisissent dans les temples la corne peinte des autels (124)

Negative though the grammar may be, however, this foundationless poem gets affirmed with hyperbolic descriptions of vastness and grandeur. As the first line implies, the nothingness of exile opens the door to a broader, further-reaching form of expression, uprooted from the soil of nation and filiation. Glissant calls this the “vocation du rien (du non enraciné)” (IP 119). The beach sands embody this dynamic, unrooted space:

> Ma gloire est sur les sables ! ma gloire est sur les sables !... Et ce n’est point errer, ô Pérégrin,
> Que de convoiter l’aire la plus nue pour assembler aux syrtes de l’exil un grand poème né de rien, un grand poème fait de rien… (124)

Critics, including Glissant and Chamoiseau, have often seized on these last two phrases about a poem born of nothing, made of nothing, to demonstrate Perse’s putative self-isolation in the refuge of “pure” language. This could be seen as a product of the modernist project of searching in the dark corners of language for a previously undiscovered self: iterations of this occur from the “livre sur rien” of Flaubert through the *automatisme* of the surrealists and the high esoterism of Joyce and Pound, not to speak of Freud’s “talking cure.” We will revisit the question of Perse’s

modernism shortly, in reference to his notion of totality. For Glissant, though, Perse's self-enclosure within language has everything to do with his latent *antillanité*. His separation from a specific location, his self-exile into the word, mirrors his flight from Guadeloupe and his unsuccessful search for roots elsewhere. This separation, for Glissant, signifies at once a cold dissociation from the Caribbean and a participation in the Caribbean quest for a non-rooted vision of selfhood, hence Perse's singular ability to "nous ignore et nous rejoint" ("Saint-John Perse et les Antillais" 69).

Perse's turn inward is not simply an obsessive self-reflection in language; it is an effort to conceive of a totality vaster than representational or mimetic poetics can capture. Although it has become a matter of course when speaking of Perse to quote the phrase "un grand poème né de rien," it might be productive to cut the phrase a different way, to include what comes before: "de convoiter l'aire la plus nue pour assembler aux syrtes de l'exil un grand poème […]." Indeed, just as important as the negation or "nothingness" of Perse's expression is the notion of *assembly*, the productive process of placing together disparate elements, of creating a unity, fragmented though it be, out of an incomprehensible diversity. Glissant's friend Jacques Charpier, one of the first critics in France to draw attention to Perse, already noticed this hope and optimism, embodied in the poetic process, underlying the apparent nothingness in Perse's poetry:

> Saint-John Perse, lui, dit au poète que *sa leçon est d'optimisme*. C'est que, d'une part il s'oublie lui-même dans l'acte poétique et, d'autre part, l'être se présentant à lui sous l'aspect d'un changement perpétuel, la douleur, le mal, le désespoir ne forment qu'une saison dans *un plus vaste cycle d'enchaînements de de renouvellements*. Ainsi des poèmes comme *Exil* et *Neiges* sont-ils le lieu d'une

> métamorphose subite, d'une conversion de la tristesse au plaisir, du désespoir à l'espérance, du néant à l'être. (111)

Glissant sees this hope from a post-slavery perspective, where histories are not accessible through established lines of filiation but through the continual reassembly of fragments. He argues that Perse inaugurates this new poetics of assembly: "Perse ne peut *s'établir* […], du moins mettra-t-il sa gloire à *rassembler*" (IP 118). The poet who cannot "establish" himself in a fixed history, nation or lineage must "reassemble," in a necessarily haphazard way, his material presence in the world. This act goes to the heart of the Caribbean poetics that Glissant conceives and that others, such as Walcott, Brathwaite and Chamoiseau, will profitably adopt.

The chief trope of this poetics is the ocean, the site of ceaseless flux, intermixture and mosaic luminosity. The sands of the desert and beach similarly participate in this fluid totality, with the winds and tides causing a constant reshaping of the landscape. In this vein, Perse's poetry has accurately been called a "mouvement rituel et incantatoire d'une poésie océane où chaque verset est une vague toujours nouvelle est toujours recommencée" (qtd. in Devincenzo 97–98). Further, the sands serve as the interstices between sea and land, the place where debris collects, rots and becomes something other than it was before. The sands form a kind of anti-foundation: a place of origins that nonetheless itself calls into question the solidity of its grounding, as its grainy material constantly moves across the horizon or gets redeposited into the tide. Perse undoubtedly takes advantage of the uncanny slippage between the two words that, in this light appear entirely incongruent: *stable* and *sable*. The idea, then, that Perse seeks a refuge in the sturdy "House" of pure language is always undercut by the simultaneous flux and fragmentation of his ubiquitous sands: "Sifflez, ô frondes par le monde, chantez, ô conques sur les eaux ! / J'ai fondé sur l'abîme et l'embrun et la fumée des sables" (124). For Glissant, this poetry's power lies not only in its anti-

foundationalism but moreover in in the hope to draw beauty and meaning from the experience of the "abîme" that Perse evokes, a conspicuously oceanic abyss that recalls the horror of the Middle Passage. Glissant's final line of poetry is "*Connaissance en réel abîme*" (PC 471), and his *Poétique de la Relation* famously opens with a meditation on how to render productive the horrific experience of the *gouffre* of the Middle Passage. If, for Perse, the "goût de la grandeur" lies paradoxically in the deathly "lieux fades" exemplified by the dry sands of beach and desert, then for Glissant this poetic richness must also arise out of the dark depths of the Atlantic, with its legacy of murder, enslavement, and forced cultural amnesia. In both cases, the experience of a kind of exile opens onto a broader poetics "founded" precisely on the unavailability of stable foundations. Against the Occidental reverence for the *stable*, a Caribbean poetics founds itself on the unsteady but ever-dynamic *sable*.

Perse's Modernism and Caribbean Totality

In the world Perse creates, this instability manifests itself most strongly in, of course, the forms of language itself. Perse's famous "recherche du mot pur," coupled with the decentered, fragmented nature of his poetics, befits the prototypical modernist project: the quest for a purer expression by breaking formal conventions. Pound's retrospective call to arms—"To break the pentameter, that was the first heave"—serves as perhaps the most efficient summary of the formalist project of Anglo-American modernism. Eliot admired Perse for how his fragments of language produce a purer "effect" than could a more narrative or syntactical expression. In his preface to his translation of *Anabase*, Eliot asserts,

> Any obscurity of the poem, on first readings, is due to suppression of "links in the chain,"[15] of explanatory connecting matter, and not to incoherence, or to love of

> the cryptogram […] the reader allows the images to fall into his memory successively, without questioning the reasonableness of each at the moment; so that, at the end, a total effect is produced. (*Anabasis* 10)

I will return shortly to the specific ramifications of this "unconnected" poetic material—which I would call a pervasive parataxis and which goes beyond Eliot's and Pound's form-breaking ethos, particularly because the reader takes a much more active role in connecting the images than Eliot allows. In connection to the quest for a purer form of expression—a "mot pur," to use Perse's phrase—achieved by the corruption or even shattering of older lyric conventions, the connection has often been made between Perse and Mallarmé, the great father of modernist (anti)prosody.[16] Hugo von Hofmannsthal's preface to the German translation of *Anabase* claims that Perse and Mallarmé

> are concerned with the renewal of lyrical inspiration from the heart of language itself. The creative individual, enclosed as in a prison by outworn means of expression, throws himself into language in an effort to find in it the ecstasy of inspiration and new avenues into life. (*Anabasis* 106)

Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Claudel, and Valéry are also implicated in this movement, and it is no coincidence, given these poets' emphasis on freedom from conventional constraint, that Eliot would draw heavily from the French avant-garde in the early part of his career. Perse, though, was the first to demonstrate how much modernism is a project of exile: a separation from established borders, or limits, that permits a quest for broader frontiers. The colonial undertones to this quest is no coincidence: modernism, as an expansion into the broader world, had its evils, but it also carried within its ethics a capacity to fight those very evils, as Nick Nesbitt has argued in various ways from *Voicing Memory* to the later volumes *Universal Emancipation* and *Caribbean Critique*.

Perse lived this modernist contradiction, and he embodies the fraught relationship between North Atlantic modernism and what Charles Pollard calls "New World modernism." Just as he was simultaneously aloof to his Caribbean home and yet quintessentially Antillean on a poetic level, so does North Atlantic modernism, often ignorant of and even hostile to the colonial subject, share points of contact with Caribbean poetics. Comparing Glissant and Eliot, Pollard claims that Glissant's project of *créolisation* attempts to move beyond a limited, Eurocentric notion of unity and universality in order to conceive of a greater whole: a worldwide creolization, a Tout-Monde. With Eliot, then, Glissant shares the quintessential modernist method: "it is a poetics that collocates an increasingly diverse set of cultural resources and perspectives to imagine an increasingly comprehensive but still contingent sense of cultural wholeness" (Pollard 6). Although the character of this "wholeness" differs greatly between Glissant and Eliot (for one, Glissant strongly questions the term "comprehensive," which simultaneously implies confinement and transparency), it is undeniable that the two poets share a critique of limits and an interest in conceiving of a more spacious thinking of the world. For both, in fact, as for Perse's Exile, this new thinking must arise out of an abyss of broken forms. Here is Eliot in the *Four Quartets*:

> We must be still and still moving
> Into another intensity
> For a further union, a deeper communion
> Through the dark cold and empty desolation,
> The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
> Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning. (*Collected* 189–190)

The internal rhyme between "union" and "communion" conveys a new kind of formal unity, exceeding the rhyme schemes of traditional prosody. Indeed, the poem as a whole generates a kind of improvised prosody as it proceeds, building on localized repetitions and conceptual counterpoints. It is no coincidence that in order to think this "other intensity / for a further union," Eliot turns to the imagery of the "vast waters" so important to Perse and Glissant. This

"communion"—this process of bringing together (*com-*) to create a new *union*—must come about through an experience of the nothing-everything dialectic embodied in the high seas, a testimony to an interest in dialectic totality that modernist and Caribbean poetics share. Nick Nesbitt views this modernist project as fundamentally tied to the notions of history and memory. Out of the destroyed possibility of inscribing oneself in conventional history (that is, *Histoire,* or Hegel's *Weltgeschichte*), must arise a new poetics conceived with a broader notion of historical totality:

> The problematic Antillean relation to memory Glissant describes is not fundamentally that of an erasure of presence, of something already or once there, but rather a failure of representation, more specifically a failure of the *production* of memory by conscious subjects. A failure of representation underlies the Antillean blindness to global, dialectical relation […] Glissant's work is in this sense an ever-renewed attempt to represent to his readers that totality." (*Voicing* 178)

Although I would argue that Glissant's work places more emphasis on the creation of and participation in that totality via its collective poetics, Nesbitt is right to point out this movement towards a broader (and ultimately unbounded) totality and to view it as an indication of an abiding Antillean modernism.

Re-Creation: Perse's Material Poetics

Perse appealed to Eliot because of his ability to produce a "total effect" that exceeds the individual senses of the words and phrases contained in his lines. Eliot, then, already understood something of the ungraspable, incomprehensible (though he would hate the term), irreducible totality lying potent in Perse's poetry. Glissant would come to a more full appreciation of this

thinking of totality when he conceptualized the closely-related terms *opacité* and *errance*. Of course, the word *errance* was attached to Perse from the beginning of his critical reception in France, not least because the word, or one of its close variants, crops up often in the poems. *Errance* appeared to describe Perse's wandering in different hemispheres; at best, it described how his poetry constructs landscapes from diverse geographies.[17] Glissant proposes that Perse's errant poetics is inextricable from his thinking of totality. The "total effect" that Eliot praises is not simply a radical refashioning of poetic form; it is a product of a specifically Antillean effort to trace an alternative path to a relationship with the broader world. Although Glissant criticizes Perse for over-generalizing this wider totality, he ultimately asserts that Perse's poetics of *errance*, similar to Segalen's errant encounter with the Other, presages the poetics of Relation:

> C'est que la poésie de Saint-John Perse, si elle n'est pas le raccordement épique des leçons d'un passé, augure un nouveau mode du rapport à l'Autre, qui par paradoxe, et à cause même de cette passion d'errance, prophétise la poétique de la Relation. L'en-aller perpétuel permet d'amasser roches, de tramer la matérialité de l'univers, dont Saint-John Perse fait son récit. Ainsi rencontre-t-il à la fin Victor Segalen, dont il a peu parlé, sans doute parce que leur itinéraires, de le même somptueuse manière, en sens opposés se défont. (PR 54)

We have earlier discussed the importance of a nonlinear, process-oriented movement to a creolized, relational idea of time and space, but what is particularly interesting about this paragraph on Perse's poetics is the connection between *errance* and the "matérialité de l'univers." Indeed, the tension between Perse's supposed retreat into the abstract realm of the "pur mot" and the imposing materiality and tactility of his expression will provide a clue as to why he must take an errant path to his thinking of totality.

In *Exil*, the notion of *errance* offers a way to understand Perse's strange coupling of a concrete, material poetics with the verbal purity so often evoked in his poems. Perse creates an atmosphere whose foreignness—"étrange" is the poem's first word—comes not from radical separations of places and experiences but, on the contrary, from the messy unity of things within the immanent space of the poem. This collection of disparate things, Perse's famous *chosification*,[18] is both oceanic in its haphazard acceptance of everything and in its guarantee of ephemerality. The fourth canto uses the word *errance*, or a variant of it, three times, and this repetition most certainly has to do with strange groups of things—images, words, sounds collected from all over—that over time must be disjoined, fading back into the vague totality from which they came. In this sense, Perse's poetics is a continual movement of contraction and dissipation, of elements coming sharply into view only to quickly fade into the background. The phrase that ends the canto—"Voici que j'ai dessein encore d'un grand poème délébile"—is remarkable for its visual-spatial image of erasure, but there is an important temporal element here as well: *encore*. The poem may be "delible," as letters written on the sand, but only inasmuch as yet (*encore*) another poem will arise out of this erasure, *encore*, again.

This erasure is cast as a condition of both physical *errance* and of writing. The tall girl who appears at the beginning of the canto, called the "Partout-errante," moves between landscapes in the depth of the night, only to have her "traces" erased by morning. The search for purity passes through the most heterogeneous domains and can only end in a kind of erasure:

> Et qui donc avant l'aube erre aux confins du monde avec ce cri pour moi ? Quelle grande fille répudiée s'en fut au sifflement de l'aile visiter d'autres seuils, quelle grande fille malaimée,
> À l'heure où les constellations labiles qui changent de vocable pour les hommes d'exil déclinent dans les sables à la recherche d'un lieu pur ? Partout-errante fut son nom de courtisane chez les prêtres, aux grottes vertes de Sibylles, et le matin sur notre seuil sut effacer les traces des pieds nus, parmi de saintes écritures… (128)

The “lieu pur,” for which these “hommes d’exil” search, links up quickly with the “recherche du pur mot” a few lines later. A logical reading of this text might posit that the “grande fille” wanders everywhere only to achieve linguistic purity in entering, “sur notre seuil,” the *oeuvre* of pure language, in which all reference to the world gets effaced and she may subsist in a kind of linguistic nirvana. Yet Perse himself explains elsewhere that this mystical purity must come about *through*, not in spite of, concrete contact with the world:

> Le poète a parfaitement le droit, et même le devoir, d’aller explorer les domaines les plus obscurs ; mais plus il va loin dans cette direction, plus il doit user de moyens d’expression concrets. Aussi loin qu’il pénètre dans le domaine irrationnel ou mystique, il est tenu de s’exprimer par des moyens réels, même tirés de sa vie expérimentale. Gardez votre emprise au sol et bâtissez avec tout cela une œuvre hors du temps, hors du lieu, édifiée dans cette re-création… Je prétends que ma langue est précise et claire. (OC 1111)

In theoretical terms, regarding the notion of *lieu*, Glissant might say the opposite. His poetics tend toward a creation of *lieu* outside of political boundaries, never an “hors du lieu.” However, Perse shares with Glissant the latently Hegelian conviction that deliberate contact with the concrete provides the means for an opening of consciousness, a “soleil de la conscience.” As Glissant puts it in *L’intention poétique*, “Le poète est noué au drame du concret” (98), and perhaps here is where Perse, with his tidal collections of things, and Segalen, with his impassive poetic edifices, connect in Relation. The purity of the word thus owes itself not to an idea of perfection but precisely to a tolerance for error and errantry, a recognition of poetry as the medium in which disparate substances can come together in unexpected ways:

> Et quand se fut parmi les sables essorée la substance pâle de ce jour,

> De beaux fragments d'histoire en dérive, sur des pales d'hélices dans le ciel plein d'erreurs et d'errantes prémisses, se mirent à virer pour le délice du scholiaste. (128)

These "fragments" of linguistic, historical and cosmic substance may not conform to a logical order, but the internal rhyme on *–isse* provides an underlying prosodic unity, granting poetics a connective power that is not available to ordinary discourse. Indeed, the consonance of *–isse*, which occurs not only in the *hélices/prémisses/délice* rhyme but also within the word "*his*toire," is the dominant sonic repetition throughout the poem, recalling the second canto's invocation to the conch shells and slingshots to "whistle" (*sifflez*) to the world. As discussed in Chapter One, Glissant also uses this technique of according a hidden prosodic order to poems whose referential systems suggest sheer chaos; this the case particularly in *Fastes*. Moreover, in another way, the passage above recalls Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*, which draws a link between the contingency of the constellations and the writing of poetry. The constellations are a kind of poetics in themselves, for they can only form images, stories and meaning by the haphazard connection of the stars that form them. Poetics is thus not a reference to substance; it is the very interaction of substances.

In Perse, the connective force of the prosody leaves the sentences radically paratactic, as Eliot suggests in his preface to his translation of *Anabase*. The parataxis imparts a biblical feel to the verse, especially as sections often begin with the conjunction *et*, even though it remains unclear to what exactly the opening sentence is being conjoined. Parataxis is the grammatical procedure of the poetics of Relation: nonhierarchical and expansive, mixing the conceptual with the concrete without prejudice. Perse, along these lines, locates beauty in the collisions between the terrestrial and the cosmic: "fragments d'histoires" and the "ciel plein d'erreurs et d'errantes prémisses" (128). As if to further demonstrate this fragmentation shared throughout the universe, he then lays down a wild series of nominal phrases, which clash both in the interior of their phrasing and in

their relationships to the other phrases. That is, the nominal puts one noun in prepositional relation to another, but in this case, the relation strains the bounds of visual logic: "Ainsi va toute chair au cilice du sel, le fruit de cendre de nos veilles, la rose naine de vos sables, et l'épouse nocturne avant l'aurore reconduite…" (ibid.). There is a sense of potential, of an *à-venir*, in this language. The vaguely monastic imagery—the penance implied in the hair shirt, the vigils, the nocturnal atmosphere—hints at a kind of dark reflection preceding an awakening to higher consciousness. The contradiction between "fruit" and "ashes"—reproduction and destruction—indicates the movement of becoming, the dynamic ontology of creation that underlies both Perse's and Glissant's poetics.[19] This notion bears itself out as the ashes quickly give way to the active burning of every bit of material encapsulated in the heavy nominal phrases that Perse assembles. The burning finally provides the energy for the greater movement towards the "mot pur":

> Et les poèmes de la nuit avant l'aurore répudiés, l'aile fossile prise au piège des grandes vêpres d'ambre jaune…
> Ah qu'on brûle, ah ! qu'on brûle, à la pointe des sables, tout ce débris de plume, d'ongle, de chevelures peintes et de toiles impures (129)

The final lines of the section then seem to promise that, from the burning of old art may come a new, purer poetry. Though seemingly suited to the modernist form-breaking of Eliot and Pound, the canto turns against that tide in its final word, *délébile*, which implies that this poem, too, participates in the errant movement of infinite becoming:

> Et les poèmes nés d'hier, ah ! les poèmes nés un soir à la fourche de l'éclair, il en est comme de la cendre au lait des femmes, trace infime…
> Et de toute chose ailée dont vous n'avez usage, me composant un pur langage sans office,
> Voici que j'ai dessein encore d'un grand poème délébile. (ibid.)

For those who would see to see in this famous final phrase a proof of Perse's ideal of an "unwriteable," "unwritten" or "impossible" poem,[20] the question remains why this is a "poème délébile" and not a "poème toujours déjà effacé." In other words, to be delible (or combustible, to

return to the earlier images of burning), something must first be material. Perse does not seek a radical break from past poetry nor from material reality; he seeks a radically errant unification, combination, and collection of that reality; he seeks a poetic thought that operates in, to use his word, constant "re-création" (OC 1111). Far from an "impossible" poem, *Exil*'s great energy lies potent in the possibilities of its haphazard and ceaseless collection of materials. Its creative force occurs as connection rather than origination—a poetics as an errant movement to, as Glissant puts it, "tramer la matérialité de l'univers" (PR 54).

Spaces of Exile

As if to insist that the poetic voice is yet another element in this fragmentary poetic material, Perse places large portions of *Exil* between quotation marks. On the surface, this technique recalls the multiple voices of *Anabase*, which, as Steven Winspur convincingly argues, causes an interweaving of the poem's *Je* and the *Nous* of the broader community that participates in the anabasis (39). In *Exil*, however, it is not a chorus working toward a common end. Rather, the *Je*—the voice not in quotation marks—seems to be in a deranged dialogue with a single, ambivalent voice that goes by various names: *Pérégrin*, *Étranger*, *Monstre*, *Prodigue* and, finally, *Poète*. Carol Rigolot calls this voice the "monster-muse" (101); Winspur calls it "the Stranger" (66); I will simply call it the last of its names, the Poet, in order to keep in mind *Exil*'s overarching attention to the metapoetic. Indeed, *Exil* distinguishes the Poem/Poet of which it speaks from the speaker/text of *Exil*, such that the poem styles itself as literally meta-Poetic, a poem "beyond" the Poem. The poetic *Je* is not the *Poète*; indeed, the two are in dialogue. Thus, in this context, Winspur is right to say that "the poems dreamt of in *Exil* […] are never *written down*" (61–62) insofar as *Exil* is not the Poem, but rather a poem *about* the Poem. *Exil*, paradoxically, cannot achieve the

délébilité of the "grand poème," for, having been *inscribed* and reprinted, *Exil* can only *de-scribe* another Poem.

The Poet, apparently free from the finitude of the page, speaks with the vastness of all the world. Rather than a dialogue, the exchange between him and the *Je* is probably more of a monologue suddenly overheard, continuing its wanderings far and near even when the *Je* attempts to interrupt. We gain access to this running monologue through the speaker's invocation, which itself emphasizes the planetary reach of the voice: "Sifflez, ô frondes par le monde, chantez, ô conques sur les eaux!" The Poet's voice answers *in medias res*, as ellipses begin our encounter with his song and recur with each interjection by the *Je*. The poet's crucial tirade comes in the sixth canto, where he enumerates at length various occupations of the "princes de l'exil." Commentators have noticed both the diversity of this enumeration, like an earlier version of it in *Anabase*, and the fact that it generally patterns its list of occupations from manual labor to the linguistic labor of the semiotician "qui prend souci des accidents de phonétique, de l'altération des signes et des grandes érosions du langage." However, this progression is not so neat.[21] What appears is rather a magnificent, chaotic diversity indefinitely enumerated according to the poetics of the "seule et longue phrase" earlier evoked in the poem. That said, the unending sentence follows a grammatical ordering—the anaphoric repetition of the "celui qui"—as if to demonstrate that language itself will be the unifying force of an otherwise inconceivable totality. In a kind of perversion of Whitman's enumerations of the diverse American labor force,[22] Perse's blocks of text are populated with random idiosyncrasies. Their exile lies in their vibrant particularity, unlike Whitman's type-cast characters, and the text's job is to convene them together in a dynamic totality. Here is an excerpt:

> Celui qui marche sur la terre à la rencontre des grands lieux d'herbes ; qui donne, sur sa route, consultation pour le traitement d'un très vieil arbre ; celui qui monte aux tours de fer, après l'orage, pour éventer ce goût de crêpe sombre des feux de ronces en forêt ; celui qui veille, en lieux stériles, au sort de grandes lignes télégraphiques ; qui sait le gîte et la culée d'atterrissage des maîtres-cables sous-marins ; qui soigne sous la ville, en lieu d'ossuaires et d'égouts (et c'est là même l'écorce démasclée de la terre), les instruments lecteurs de purs séismes… (133)

This mixture of the wide-ranging landscapes (the great grasslands) with underground and enclosed settings (submarines, ossuaries, sewers) recalls the dialect of opening and closure evoked at the beginning of the poem. Here, as in the dialectical version of opacity that Glissant explains in *L'intention poétique*,[23] closure always coincides with an opening. Moreover, Perse's exiles occupy a space far more alive and capacious than the space of bourgeois normalcy or even proletarian workmanship. In fact, the litany recasts ideology-driven snapshots of a concerted citizenry so familiar in the mid-twentieth century. Of this genre, Perse creates what Confiant and Chamoiseau would later, in a *créoliste* context, call a *diversalité*: a diverse totality that resists the flattening of universality. Glissant would later borrow Perse's scene for his late poem "Les grands chaos," in which the vagabond "mages" populate the Place Furstemberg in Paris, creating a kind of localized *chaos-monde*. Like the characters in Perse's litany, the mages resist romanticization:

> Pas loin de Seine, sur l'aire mélancolique de la Place Furstemberg et du marché de Buci à Paris, les mages de détresse que sont les sans-abri, tombés de l'horizon. N'infliger aucun romantisme à leur dénuement, mais concevoir qu'il manifestent le monde […] Ils comprennent d'instinct le chaos-monde. (PC 409)

This passage shares with Perse's litany the dialect of closure and expansion, for as these "mages" convene in the confined space of the Place Furstemberg, their heterogeneity creates an expansive unknowability within the Place. Gathered in a European center, they call into question the

centeredness of the city: “Venus de partout, ils décentrent le connu” (ibid.). Their *errance* has not simply led them here; it continues with their poetic activity and reconfigures the urban space constructed around them.

Perse’s litany of exiles achieves a similar effect of simultaneous reunion and indefinite expansion, but in a different way: by the sound pattern that lends a sense of wholeness to this ceaseless, ever-expanding catalog. The ubiquitous “s” sound is repeated not only in the anaphoric “celui qui” but in alliterations and consonances throughout the section: “qui **s**oigne **s**ous la ville, en lieu d’o**ss**uaires et d’égouts (et **c**’est là même l’écor**c**e déma**s**clée de la terre), les in**s**truments lecteurs de purs **s**éi**s**mes.” The air-expelling fricative sound, coupled with a range of vowels, recalls the poem’s opening invocation—“sifflez, ô frondes par le monde”—as if this whistling were being performed throughout the world of exile. This totality can exist only by virtue of the poem itself, for it requires a unity irreducible to semantic conventions. The whims and felicities of prosody, with the connective force of sonic repetition independent of semantics, provide an alternative way to bring together these errants and exiles. Poetry, for Perse, has the particular potential to create an ontological space of opening and connection.

Furthermore, such poetry would reach perfection by achieving pure spontaneity, pure becoming. The idea of a “grand poème délébile” thus resurfaces in the speaker’s response to the Poet’s “celui qui” litany: “Étranger, sur toutes grèves de ce monde, sans audience ni témoin, porte à l’oreille du Ponant une conque sans mémoire” (135). And the Poet’s response takes the notion even further: “Syntaxe de l’éclair ! ô pur langage de l’exil ! Lointaine est l’autre rive où le message s’illumine” (136). The message’s obscurity persists, perpetuating the poetic search. We never reach this “autre rive” of clarity but rather get glances in the lightning flashes above the far shore. The *je*, responding to this final message—that no other “message” will reveal itself—chooses the

path of *errance*, a wandering in both geography and language: "Je reprendrai ma course de Numide, longeant la mer inaliénable… Nulle verveine aux lèvres, mais sur la langue encore, comme un sel, ce ferment du vieux monde" (ibid.). The odd centrality of "verveine," a European plant often consumed as an infusion, might be explained by the connection in this sentence to the "vieux monde." Chateaubriand claims that vervain was a "plante sacrée parmi les Druides,"[24] a vestige of prehistoric Europe, indeed of Europe before the great migrations, colonizations and conquests of antiquity gave Europe its name and its putative centrality. *Verveine* thus recalls the more obscure "vieux monde" before Europe became modernity's "Ancien Monde." *Verveine* moreover, splices the words for poetic line (*vers*) and blood vessel (*veine*). In this respect, the word performs a similar function as the double-signifying "langue" that appears just after it in the line: "Verveine," like the "tongue," makes language inextricable from the material human body. The image of "vein-verse" emphasizes the organic sinuosity of Perse's poetic expression, the forking and branching of poetic meaning following the rhizomatic logic of veins and capillaries. The "ferment du vieux monde" thus circulates through the speaker's body-language, expanding indefinitely into the world as he errs with the deserts sands in his "course de Numide."

Time in Exile: *Poétique de la durée*

The final phrase of the poem rests on two pressure points of ambiguity, the verb *décliner* and the final ellipsis. What appears as a call for self-identification, for the revelation of the Poet behind the Poem, in fact becomes a final guarantee of the poem's central mystery: "Et c'est l'heure, ô Poète de décliner ton nom, ta naissance, et ta race…" (137). In a poem so focused on space—on the limitless expanses and quirky enclosures of exile—the ending turns to an emphasis on time. It is precisely this turn to the "heure" that heaves the poem into eternity, for the injunction, nearly an

ultimatum, receives no response. The ellipsis marks the final moment—indeed, extends the final moment indefinitely. Winspur proposes to read the text's "silences," embodied especially in this ellipsis, as a "*meaningful* silence in which the absence of words portrays the presence of an unverbalized thought" (80). I am sympathetic to this notion of "meaning" beyond the semantic coding and decoding of words—for this sense beyond semantics is one of opacity's chief features—but I see a different kind of meaning here. Rather than, as Winspur finds, a pre- or post-verbal immediacy of the Idea in thought, *Exil*'s (non)ending uses the notion of time to situate itself not as a beginning or end, not as a before or after, but as *pure duration*.

Having sketched an infinite totality out of his oceanic poetics, a dynamic space as ever-moving and all-collecting as the high seas, Perse holds the final revelation in front of us only to suspend it into an indefinite ellipsis. This ending is the final iteration of what Glissant calls the "poétique de la durée," which he senses first of all in Perse's use of the verset form.[25] Glissant asserts that this poetic temporality "mène l'auditeur à travers des épaisseurs accumulées où peu à peu se dessine le projet" (DA 423). Such a temporality applies precisely to Perse's poetics, whose sense of thickness and accumulation is unmistakable. Even more apt is the description in *Poétique de la Relation* of the category of *durée*, which recalls the tension between the lightning flashes and the unknowable expanses that characterize the end of *Exil*. Glissant claims,

> Nous ne révélons plus en nous la totalité par fulguration. Nous l'approchons par accumulation de sédiments. La poétique de la durée […] réapparaît et relaie la poétique de l'instant. La fulguration et le tremblement de qui désire ou rêve la totalité impossible, ou à venir ; la durée exhorte celui qui tâche à la vivre, quand les histoires conjointes des peuples en dessinent l'aube. (45)

The final line of *Exil*, in its turn, crystallizes the temporal dynamics Glissant describes: the tension between the lightning flashes of momentary revelation and the patient accumulation of the *durée*. Having proclaimed that "l'éclair m'ouvre le lit de plus vastes desseins," the speaker makes his ambiguous demand of the Poet to "décliner ton nom" (137). On the one hand, he demands in this instant—"c'est l'heure, ô Poète"—the final revelation, to "*declare* your name," as goes Denis Develin's English translation (37). Yet the imperative to *décliner* also directs the reader to reflect on the "declensions," the multiple variations of a word's cases or forms; in fact, the command seems fairly direct, for, in the study of grammar, one most often performs declensions on a noun: *décliner un nom*. In the declension of a name, there is already something of Glissant's mission to split apart, fragment, or rhizomatize the filial root. In this spirit, it turns out that *décliner*'s other meanings are crucial at the end of *Exil*. The English cognate, "to decline," is equally possible, and, given the Poet's silence, it requires both translations to depict what happens in the poem: the speaker asks the poet to "declare" his name, which he "declines" to do. Indeed, *décliner* as "to decline" is used several pages earlier, at the beginning of the fourth canto—an echo that lingers subconsciously as we encounter the word again in the final phrase. A fourth meaning of *décliner* exists: to veer off course, to err, used especially in a nautical context. Although this iteration of *décliner* is subordinated because, intransitive, it would not act upon "ton nom" as neatly as the first two, it resonates with an unmistakably Perse-like undertone. Here, the encounter with a name, a birth, a race—that is, with origins—occurs via a movement of *déclinaison*, deviation from the line of navigation. If Glissant teaches us one thing about Caribbean self-identification, it is that origins—"ton nom, ta naissance, et ta race"—can now only be conceived by *déclinaison*, by *errance*. This cluster of senses thus charges Perse's verb *décliner*, embodying the dialectic of

revelation and refusal, and extending the errant search for meaning into the infinite space-time of the ellipsis.

Poetics of Opacity, Ontology of Becoming

Perse demonstrates that an entire ontology—a vast reflection on our being—can lie potent in a word. So long, that is, as this word can then erase itself in the pursuit of a more dynamic and capacious space of meaning. Eliot sees this in formal terms, saying that Perse's words and sentences cannot signify individually but sacrifice this signifying function for a "total effect." Where Eliot sees the absence of "connecting matter" between sentences, Glissant hears a creole orality, for in Perse, as in the creole *conte*, "j'ai subi l'influence de cette présence non élucidée des langues et des formules dont on n'a pas le sens mais qui agissent quand même sur vous" (IL 18).[26] The opacity of the word simultaneously erases its fixed signification and gives way to sense on a broader spectrum: a sense that persists in the errant connections between words, geographies and histories. When Glissant claims that Perse's poetry "permet de tramer la matérialité de l'univers," he is referring specifically to this connecting power. For Glissant, the "trame," is the essential activity of the poetic mode and the material presence of Relation. Hence the importance of poetics in general to Glissant's conception of being, a being that can only persist in the space of incessant becoming and material interconnection embodied in Perse's poetics of "re-création." The poetics of Relation is indeed a poetics of the "délébile" if we are willing to maintain the priority on the *poetic*, the activity of creation and connection, as the result of the erasure.

Thus, in renouncing his Caribbean birth, Perse stumbles upon a Caribbean poetics. His complex treatment of the notion of birth, be it the poem's, the Poet's or Alexis Leger's, takes a crucial step towards the unrooting of knowledge and linguistic convention that Glissant elaborates

more fully with his conception of Relation. In Perse, Glissant found the language that would distinguish him from the Césaire's Negritude generation, which, as much as he revered its self-liberating poetics, he admitted very early on having a different experience: "poète nègre de la génération qui a suivi immédiatement celle de Césaire, je puis dire n'avoir pas connu les déchirements qui ont marqué l'apparition d'une littérature nègre de langue française."[27] Glissant insisted that he was not African, though the fragments of his African heritage would never leave him. His renunciation of this birth—a renunciation forced upon him, of course, by the legacy of colonialism and the Middle Passage—allows him to open himself to the infinite, to vast possibility instead of remaining within the geographically limited conception of the Afro-Caribbean *conte*. Glissant remembers the inflections and techniques of the *conteur*, most of all the *conteur*'s fruitful use of opaque place-names and cultural artifacts, but he must open himself further. Perse, too has the oral aspect of the *conteur*, but like Glissant, he encounters the world quite differently from the *conteur*. Explaining that Perse's poetics goes beyond the closed, nocturnal circle around the *conteur*, Glissant may well be describing himself:

> Ce qui distingue Saint-John Perse du conteur antillais, d'abord : qu'il n'y a pas autour de lui un cercle qui résume la nuit. Il n'y a pas de flambeaux à l'entour de cette parole ; seulement la main tendue vers l'horizon qui monte, houle ou haut plateau. C'est l'infini toujours possible. La ronde de la voix est démultipliée au monde. L'oralité de Saint-John Perse ne s'enclot pas du bruissement des ténèbres, d'où devinerait l'entour ; elle salue les aubes, quand les échos lointains se mêlent déjà aux bruits familiers, que la caravane prend le départ du désert vivace. (PR 51)

Perse and Glissant share the impulse to open out to the world, and their putative enclosure in precious language (and anyone who has read Glissant's poetry know him to be as "guilty" of this

as Perse) is in fact a way of escaping the trap of localization within their given names, within the (very different) island-born heritages imposed upon them. They opt for exile, for opacity, for chaos, not to disengage from the particularities of the world but to allow these particularities to persist in the infinite relational possibilities of an ever-expanding totality: "l'infini toujours possible." They therefore pronounce their poems with the hope and faith that the language will interact concretely with the world and, thanks to this interaction, multiply in sense and intensity. The poem must exceed the poet, must become a space of infinite becoming: hence Perse's aesthetics of erasure and re-creation, hence Glissant's project to create "non des œuvres mais la matière elle-même dans quoi l'ouvrage chemine […]—cela qui tremble, vacille et sans cesse devient" (PC 9).

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[1] The question of naming is central to Valérie Loichot's perceptive study in *Orphan Narratives* of how post-plantation literature grapples with the Occidental ideal of atavistic lineages and the New World reality of broken families.

[2] The two critical works that largely introduced Segalen to the French readership, Henry Bouillier's *Victor Segalen* and Jean-Louis Bédouin's *Victor Segalen*, appeared in 1961 and 1963, respectively.

[3] His work in the journal reflects the review's wide range of topics, from political commentary on decolonization and the disappointments of COMINTERN to reviews of recent literary publications. Many of Glissant's articles would be adapted for publication in the 1969 volume *L'intention poétique*.

[4] For an insightful review of this tradition, see Forsdick, *Victor Segalen and the Aesthetics of Diversity* 30–31.

[5] See "Les synesthésies et l'école symboliste" and "Le double Rimbaud" in *OC* 1: 61–81, 486–511.

[6] See Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du Divers* 62.

[7] See the translation by Bush and Billings 295. I am indebted not only to their translation but also to their superb explanations and notes, which demonstrate that a good translation does not dissipate opacity but rather makes apparent the intricacies of the opaque work.

[8] This is where de Man's work on the Romantic lyric in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* most clearly intersects with Derrida's critique of "logocentrism" in *De la grammatologie*.

[9] It should be noted, however, that Segalen's epigraphs in classical Chinese would not appear transparent to the typical Chinese reader, either. I am not equipped to explore the complexities of this intra-linguistic opacity in the Chinese tradition, but suffice it to say that opacity, like translation, occurs within a linguistic tradition as much as between linguistic traditions.

[10] See, for example, Ventresque and Combe. Perse is conspicuously absent, on the other hand, from Chamoiseau and Confiant's otherwise broad-ranging *Lettres créoles*. Chamoiseau left it to his work without Confiant to pursue his interest in Perse. All work on Perse's Caribbeanness owes itself, in some measure, to Émile Yoyo's early study of Perse's Creole inflections and diction, *Saint-John Perse et le conteur* (1971).

[11] See *Mille plateaux* 11.

[12] Gallagher, for example, spends most of *La créolité de Saint-John Perse* on *Éloge* and Perse's own biographical fabrications in the *Pléiade* edition of his complete works that, quite exceptionally, he edited himself. Gallagher only dedicates ten pages to reading *Exil*. Ventresque's work takes a productive path to reconstructing *Les Antilles de Saint-John Perse* by closely reading Perse's inscriptions in the books of his library. This labor has solidified our understanding of Perse's philosophical and literary background, which has strong intersections with Glissant's. My intervention is to show how this bears out in the less explicitly Antillean parts of his oeuvre.

[13] Unless otherwise noted, all parenthetical citations for Perse's poetry come from the 1972 *Œuvres complètes*.

[14] See Raybaud 87. Stefano Agosti makes a similar argument about the signifying "absence," though more focused on a kind of pre-linguistic, immediate expression of the spirit, in his "Instance phatique et construction du poème chez Saint-John Perse."

[15] Eliot is quoting Lucien Fabre's article on *Anabase* in *Nouvelles littéraires*. It seems that, despite claiming to understand the poem quite well simply from rereading it, Eliot found himself turning to Fabre's summary of the poem. Perse sought to "explorer les domaines les plus obscurs" (OC 1111), and although Eliot chalks this obscurity to the confusion of "first readings," his uncritical adoption of Febre suggests that the poem's obscurity was more persistent even for him—as it was meant to be.

[16] Charpier, among others, disagrees with any modernist or avant-garde characterization of Perse because of the poet's reverence for eloquent language and traditional forms, which lay hidden throughout his work: "Il n'écrivait pas en vers, son propos n'étant pas académique, mais ce poète—ô combien!—exaltait des valeurs peu modernes. Les alexandrins, il les cachait dans ses versets; les traditions, il les essaimait au fil des pages. Il reprenait à son compte une éloquence tombée en désuétude" (63). True enough—and true of Alexis Leger, too, who fetishized his white origins—

but, for Glissant, the intentions of the man who wrote the poem are quite different from the *intention poétique* that brings the poetry to life.

[17] Glissant's editor at *Les lettres nouvelles*, Maurice Saillet, is an early example of a critic making this kind of claim. See *Saint-John Perse, poète de gloire* 87–88.

[18] See, for example, Jérôme Ceccon, "Traces persiennes déorientées dans la narration caribbéenne et mondiale." Ceccon, like others, uses "chosification" to describe Perse's treatment of the Antilles; in this case, the word is not far from meaning "objectification." I use *chosification* here more broadly, to describe Perse's concrete poetics, in which words take on the material quality of "things."

[19] In Chapter One, reflecting on Glissant's philosophical intertexts, I explain the importance of the lineage from Heraclitus through Nietzsche and Deleuze, each of whom developed an ontology of dynamic becoming, as opposed to static being. Charpier remarks on the Heraclitan connection in Perse (109). The Nietzschian connection has also been made with Perse, whose library contained a well-worn copy of *The Will to Power*, along with the writings of Nietzsche's great American counterpart, Ralph Waldo Emerson. See Ventresque 25–35.

[20] Mireille Sacotte, for example, argues that "« Exil » se présente […] comme un anti-poème qui dit sa propre impossibilité […] c'est-à-dire sans sujet, sans matière extérieure à lui-même, sans page pour l'écrire, et sans mot pour le dire, « un grand poème délébile », *inécrit*" (qtd. in Devincenzo 126, my italics). Winspur, too, claims that "the poems dreamt of in 'Exile,' 'Pluies' and 'Neiges' are never *written down*" (62–63). Although I agree with Winspur that Perse generally "disdain[s]" the fixity of the written poem, he is technically wrong: a poem must first be "written down" to become "délébile." This technicality, in turn, opens onto a broader understanding of Perse's immanent and perpetually active ontology.

[21] Cf. Archambault, who asserts that "cette longue énumération d'hommes dans la diversité de leurs activités quotidiennes, évoqués avec sympathie au sixième chant d' « Exil » représente, si l'on regarde de près, un ensemble d'activités ou de poursuites intellectuelles faisant usage de signes linguistiques à des fins scientifiques, utilitaires, techniques, ou rituelles. Ce qui fond la différence radicale du langage poétique, c'est qu'il n'a à justifier de rien" (120). In fact, a "close look" demonstrates that these occupations are not all linguistic, and it seems indefensible to claim that Perse separates poetics from them.

[22] Ventresque reports on the presence of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in Perse's library and the importance of Whitman to Perse's philosophical thinking (28). The litanies to which I refer here are to be found particularly in "I Hear America Singing" and *Song of Myself*, canto 12.

[23] See Chapter One for an investigation into Glissant's various articulations of opacity, particularly, for this case, the chapter "De l'opacité" in *L'intention poétique*.

[24] "Verveine," *Ortolong*, Centre Nationale de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, accessed online at http://cnrtl.fr/definition/verveine on 9/15/2015.

[25] See also *Pour Saint-John Perse* 15.

[26] See also *Poétique de la Relation* 51.

[27] "Aimé Césaire et la découverte du monde" 54. For a perceptive treatment of the Césaire–Perse–Glissant triangle, see also Chamoiseau, *Césaire, Perse, Glissant* 159.

Conclusion

Opacity and Influence

This project has attempted a difficult marriage: between poetic opacity and poetic influence. Opacity promotes incomprehension, apparently preventing influence. Must not a text be comprehended, at least in some measure, before it gains influence? Conversely, how can an opaque entity open itself to influence? That is, if something is impermeable to external visions, perceptions, and forces, how can it (a person, a poem, a culture, a tradition) be influenced in any meaningful way? I have chosen poetry as the officiant of this unlikely marriage not simply to make a specific contribution to Glissant studies—that Glissant prioritizes poetry and that it is therefore worth studying how he reads and writes poems—but also because, like Glissant, I consider poetry the art that most fully subsists in the paradox of opacity and influence. I read a poem; it changes me. I also change it every time I read it. The poem's opacity and my own—our "opacités consenties" (DA 418)—make us mutually influential. As I argued in Chapter One, Glissant's poetics of opacity is also a poetics of reading: opaque poetry teaches us to read differently, by entering into the poem as a participant. In this conclusion, I reflect on the broader gesture that Glissant's notion of opacity has prompted me to make: to bring together poets from across history and geography to examine the influence that they exert upon each other through their opaque poetics.

Harold Bloom will inevitably haunt any discussion of literary influence. Despite parallels between Bloom's idea of "misreading" and Glissant's valorization of errancy (a comparison taken up in Chapter Two, in reference to Rimbaud), Glissant's work suggests widening the map of literary studies and de-historicizing literary history. Bloomian influence is essentially

chronological, as the flow of influence rushes from the past towards the present, gaining breadth and depth like a river moving onward from its source. A few "strong" authors contribute originality to this tradition despite the "anxiety of influence," and their works are like major tributaries emptying into the great river called the canon of Western literature, flowing from Homer and Pindar to the present day.

In my analysis of Glissant and his intertexts, I have decided to maintain the term "influence" because its underlying sense of "flow" can also emphasize the fluid, ever-shifting dynamics of interaction between poets, readers, and texts. In temporal terms, influence is not necessarily a unidirectional stream. Influence includes the coming-together and intermingling of previously separate substances. Glissantian influence would include confluence and interfluence—the meeting of different currents in the ocean rather than the erosive, unidirectional surge of the river. Glissantian influence is therefore anachronistic in the sense that texts from different eras meet on equal footing and interact, unpredictably, with each other. In this respect, I concur with Laurent Dubreuil's rethinking of literary temporality: what matters most, he suggests, is not the chronological life of texts—composition followed by reception—but rather the ever-renewing "now" that literature produces, inducing a "co-presence of past and present" ("What Is" 53–54). Dubreuil has more recently shown how the literary *now*, beyond complicating the temporal relationship between the text and its reader, also creates the possibility for "bidirectional influences" between texts ("Francophone Circulation" 41). Taking an example of unexpected poetic influence occurring between 1830s Haiti and 1860s France, Dubreuil argues for both a geographic and a temporal reorientation of literary history, embracing anachronism (ibid. 44).[1] In this framework, the Haitian poet Coriolan Ardouin becomes a "contemporary" of Baudelaire, even though the former preceded the latter by a matter of decades. Dubreuil thus centers his analysis on

the productive coincidences that arise from this sudden contemporaneousness: "textual circulation should […] produce novel as well as reciprocal semantic events" (ibid. 47). Rereading the well-known *fleur du mal* "Spleen (J'ai plus de souvenirs…)," Dubreuil finds that his recent work on Ardouin has shed an unexpected light on Baudelaire, particularly in reference to the "sphinx" at the end of that poem. A conspicuous "papillon noir" in Ardouin's poem unhinges the "quite sensible but also quite contorted traditional explanation of the singing stature of the Sphinx at sunset" in Baudelaire's poem. Baudelaire's "vieux sphinx ignoré" is "what is called in French '*un sphinx,*' that is a *night moth*" (ibid. 48). For Dubrueil, this felicitous revelation occurred as a "textual event" with the distinct potential to create anachronistic, interspatial relationships previously unavailable to the reader:

> I can confess that, before reading Ardouin, I had simply never seen a "*papillon noir*" behind (or above) this splenetic *sphinx*. This textual event has been created by the conflation of times, and by the circulation of words and images between Haiti and France (and Egypt). (ibid.)

I would add that the text's opacity generated this event. Dubreuil's visual metaphor for how he experienced the text is not incidental: "I had simply never seen a '*papillon noir*' behind (or above) this splenetic *sphinx*." The *papillon noir* had been blocked "behind" the seemingly transparent but secretly opaque word *sphinx* (or, alternatively, the *sphinx*, covered in darkness, did not immediately reflect the *papillon noir* fluttering "above" it). The opacity of the "splenetic sphinx" provides the semantic resistance, and thus the potential energy, that would eventually fuel this anachronistic textual event.

Dubreuil does hint elsewhere at the semantic potentialities of language's opacity, especially in his recent philosophical text, *The Intellective Space*, which argues that the

relationship between language and thought goes beyond recent scientific models of cognition. In this work, opacity is not necessarily poetic or literary but rather a general quality of language:

> Language is opaque because the virtual is untouched by the actual: the designation is not exhausted by its operation. As long as words stay with us, their meaning is able to be performed differently, while they are structurally identical to themselves (in their phonology, their spelling, etc.). I can "replay" her [sic.] words over and over again; their senses will differ. (39)

Language's opacity thus creates its openness. Although this principle applies to language as such, Dubreuil will later affirm "la place centrale de l'expérience littéraire du penser dans tout ce que je fais, même si parfois je m'éloigne du texte littéraire" ("Disciplines" 70). My own research has largely dwelled upon how poetry in particular[2] tends to maximize this experience of the "virtual […] untouched by the actual" as it welcomes the opacity of language rather than trying at all costs to eliminate opacity for the sake of expressive clarity. All language is opaque on a certain level, but one of poetry's primary qualities is to make sense *with* its own opacity, not in spite of it.

Poetic language, especially the kind surrounding Glissant's work, uses opacity to charge itself with undetermined, unregulated, multidirectional potential: poetic language opens itself to unexpected relationships and influences across time and space. Verse poetry prepares us for the different results of repeated performances by virtue of its internal structures: rhythm, meter, rhyme, repeated words, and homonyms are all forms of repetition gaining their significance through variations in sound, sense, or tonality. The same differential repetition occurs in the recital or rehearsal (*répétition*) of a poem, for, to return to Dubreuil's terms, each recital is a singular "event," informed by other events and therefore open to "outside" influences. Prose poetry, on the other hand—along with the poetry that occurs felicitously in other modes, such as fiction or film or the

odd television advertisement—usually does not systematize this repetition to the same extent, but its semantic density and hidden rhythm often create a similar coincidence of sense-richness and repeatability.

* * *

Still, it seems that for Glissant the poem goes beyond the paradigm of the textual event, if a textual event generally describes readers' singular encounters with the text(s). In a seemingly impossible dream, Glissant asks for poetry to interact with the forces of nature. When he praises Saint-John Perse's poetry, in which "l'en-aller perpétuel permet d'amasser roches, de tramer la matérialité de l'univers" (PR 54), he is not speaking of Perse's way of *representing* the materiality of the universe; he is speaking of Perse's active *work* on the universe. He admires Pierre Reverdy, similarly, for his "ambition [qui] pose le poème comme une chose qui répond aussi densément aux lois d'existence et de durée que cet arbre ou cette plaine" (IP 79). In naming his anthology of the poetry of the Tout-Monde *La terre, le feu, l'eau et les vents*, Glissant invokes what he believes to be the elemental force of poetry. Like much of his work, this conviction arises from the incantatory power of the creole *conteur* as well as from the attack on regimes of representation by the likes of Rimbaud, with his project to produce a "poésie objective," acting beyond the subject, acting on objects in the world. This poetry is not impersonal or detached, however. An objective poetry is integral to the poetics of Relation, "selon laquelle toute identité s'étend dans un rapport à l'Autre" (PR 23), because *objet*, whose etymology suggests "throw toward," implies extension toward others. It is no coincidence that Rimbaud coins "poésie objective" in the same letter as his famous phrase "Je est un autre" (OC 339–340). To bring poetry into the realm of objects is to disavow romantic egocentrism and to turn to the whole poem, even its *je*, toward others. The poetics of Relation is an ontology that includes not just humans but the whole of existence, the Tout-

Monde—although it probably remains too humanistic to be assimilated to an "object-oriented" ontology—and poetry is its lifeblood.

In this way, Glissant's poetic influence is inseparable from his philosophical influence. On the subject of relational/objective poetry, Glissant and Rimbaud are not far from Deleuze and Guattari, his most explicit philosophical interlocutors, who, in "La géologie de la morale," argue that language is immanent to the material world. The speaking mouth, for them, is connected to the working hand via a "deterritorialization" of language (MP 80). If pre-linguistic communication was largely gestural, then verbal languages freed the hands to do their work. However, this innovation did not, as may be expected, create two separate spheres of human activity—conceptual work (mouth) and substantial work (hands)—but rather highlighted the substantiality of speech, "la substance vocale" (ibid.). For Deleuze and Guattari, language produces effects upon every other "stratum" of existence: "Avec la troisième strate [le langage] se fait donc l'émergence des machines qui appartiennent pleinement à cette strate, mais qui en même temps s'exhaussent et tendent leurs pinces en tous sens vers toutes les autres strates" (ibid. 82). But how does this work? How does language gain an objective, material, or substantial purchase upon the world? It goes far beyond the "performative" properties of language suggested by J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*. For Deleuze and Guattari, as for Glissant, opacity plays a major role in language's work on the world, especially opacity's ability to interrupt the signifier-signified relationship that has dominated semiotics since Saussure. Deleuze and Guattari assert that language creates "expressions" in the strata of being, just as bacteria can "express" a protein. Linguistic signs, in this system, do not simply represent something else; instead, they signal the crossing of substances between different strata:

> [L]es signes ne sont pas signes de quelque chose, ils sont signes de

> déterritorialisation et de reterritorialisation, ils marquent un certain seuil franchi dans ces mouvements […] De même qu'il y a des régimes de signes asémiologiques, des signes asignifiants, à la fois sur les strates et sur le plan de consistance. (MP 87)

Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari's final move in "Géologie de la morale" is to collapse the "strates" into the "plan de consistance," in an ultimate becoming-immanent of the all elements of existence, from words and gestures to insects and amoebae. Like Glissant, then, Deleuze and Guattari maintain a certain faith in the power of the opaque word to act upon the world on the elemental level, crossing thresholds and gaining energy through its resistance to signification.

A measure of poeticity is required even to propose such an idea: for Glissant, this seems obvious from his very first essay, the obscure but resonant *Soleil de la conscience*. Philosophy and theory remain troubling terms for Glissant, however often they have been applied to his essays: "theory" implies a kind of speculative separation that runs against the becoming-immanent thrust of his world-poetics, and "philosophy" requires a systematicity and disciplinary and conceptual territoriality that does not suit the relational extension of creolization. Until their final work together in the 1990s (to which I will return shortly), Deleuze and Guattari also create a happy conflation of poetic philosophy: this tendency is best embodied in the rhythmic, performance-like, verbally inventive, form-conscious *Mille plateaux*. Rather than philosophy, sophistry may in fact be a term everyone can agree upon, detractors and advocates alike, especially those familiar with Deleuze's earlier work. In the 1969 essay "Plato and the Simulacrum," Deleuze asserts that Plato, reflecting on the figure of the sophist, vertiginously perceives the undoing of his entire system of Idea and image, original and copy:

> Le sophiste lui-même est l'être du simulacre, le satyre ou centaure, le Protée qui

> s'immisce et s'insinue partout. Mais, en ce sens, il se peut que la fin du *Sophiste* contienne l'aventure la plus extraordinaire du platonisme : à force de chercher du côté du simulacre et de se pencher sur son abîme, Platon dans l'éclair d'un instant découvre qu'il n'est pas simplement une fausse copie, mais qu'il met en question les notions mêmes de copie… et de modèle. (LS 295)

The sophist is one of Deleuze's several companions in his development of a single-substance ontology of immanence,[3] and it is worth recalling the kinship between the sophist and the poet, both exiled in one way or another by Plato. The sophist, Plato says, uses words to confuse "appearance" or "phantasm" with real statements of truth. The being/not-being paradox of Parmenides (discussed briefly in Chapter Three, in reference to Segalen) exposes the nonsensicality of the sophist, since the sophist would argue for the impossibility of the concept of not-being because of the simple presence of the word "not-being." The word, for the sophist, exists on an equal plain of being with the rest of existence (Plato 241a–c). By breaking down Plato's dualistic ontology, just as creolization breaks from the idealized "root," the sophist acts as the proto-creole of Western philosophy.

Opaque poetry, like Rimbaud's "sophismes magiques" (OC 265), brings language into immanence with the material world. Glissant uses the language of weaving (*tramer*, *tisser*) when describing the world in Relation because it emphasizes the work that texts (from *textus*, "thing woven") do upon it. The text's opacity makes its texture available to the senses; opacity renders texts sensible. Opacity thereby places meaning (*sens*) on the same level as the bodily senses (*sens*). Consequently, the text's resistance to transparent intelligibility moves its ontological position from *being* to *becoming*. No longer rooted in an ideal, deeper meaning, the opaque text becomes present to the senses and enters the productive chaos of ongoing Relation. Becoming, as Deleuze and

Guattari assert, cannot fully exist in a system of filiation or descendence, but rather by a rhizomatic "alliance":

> Enfin, devenir n'est pas une évolution, du moins une évolution par descendance et filiation. Le devenir ne produit rien par filiation, toute filiation serait imaginaire. Le devenir est toujours d'un autre ordre que celui de la filiation. Il est de l'alliance […] Devenir est un rhizome, ce n'est pas un arbre classificatoire ni généalogique. (*Mille* 291–292)

Glissant's initial attraction to Deleuze and Guattari (which appears to have occurred around 1980, when *Mille plateaux* was published) may very well have been due to their common critique of the logic of filiation and roots; the other shared philosophical modalities, like the baroque, likely followed from this initial connection. Glissant had long made his own version of this critique, though earlier on the terms were more post-Enlightenment and post-Hegelian (humanism, universalism, History). Upon his encounter with the terms of Deleuzoguattarian nomadism, Glissant begins to show how the critique of filiation and ancestry has real political and social purchase, especially in the rhizomatic space of the Caribbean. He also immediately frames this rhizomatic becoming as a *poetics*, in which the poem operates in the world to generate becoming-as-"alliance" or becoming-in-Relation.

Glissant, then, explicitly adopts Deleuze and Guattari's terms in what remains his most successful conflation of philosophy and poetry: *Poétique de la Relation* (although, as shown in Chapter One, Glissant does not so much "adopt" the Deleuzoguattarian rhizome as creolize it with a productive misreading). By its publication in 1990, however, Deleuze and Guattari were beginning to think of philosophy as a wholly independent discourse, separate from any art. It is a strange coincidence, then, that *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie* and *Poétique de la Relation* were

published within months of each other—and doubtless written in near simultaneity—because the former seems to rebuke the latter for subsuming the philosophical "concepts" of the rhizome and the baroque into the "affective" mode of poetics. If for Glissant, "la pensée du rhizome serait au principe de ce que j'appelle une poétique de la Relation," Deleuze and Guattari would have to insist that the rhizome and poetics do not inhabit the same plane (*plan*). "Le concept appartient à la philosophie et n'appartient qu'à elle," they claim, adding later that the work of art, including the poem, does not produce concepts but rather "est *un bloc de sensations, c'est-à-dire un composé de percepts et d'affects*" (37, 154, Deleuze's italics). Even if "les deux entités passent souvent l'une dans l'autre […] dans une intensité qui les co-détermine" (64), the book concerns itself primarily with the distinction, not the intersection. Deleuze and Guattari write *Qu'est-ce qu*e *la philosophie* in a less exuberant, more dialectical style than their previous works, which aligns with its overarching preoccupation to "couper le chaos" or to "sortir [le concept] du chaos mental" (64, 21). Nowhere to be found is the Deleuze of *Logique du sens*, coining proto-creolisms like "chao-errance" and praising the vitality of Nietzsche and Joyce, whose work "n'exprime nullement un ordre qui s'oppose au chaos, et qui le soumette. Au contraire il n'est pas autre chose que le chaos, la puissance d'affirmer le chaos" (305).

Beyond the reduction of chaos and the neat separation of philosophy and art, a deeper error plagues *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie*: the sequestering of sensation away from the concepts and the propositions that influence thought—yet another way to speak of textual influence. Deleuze and Guattari's move here runs directly counter to the more capacious notion of *sens*—applying both to language and bodies, "le sens comme mince pellicule à la limite des choses et des mots"—elegantly developed in *Logique du sens* (44). The result is to limit the effect of both sensations and concepts by reinforcing the Kantian split between the phenomenal and the noumenal:

> La différence entre les personnages conceptuels et les figures esthétiques consiste d'abord en ceci : les uns sont des puissances de concepts, les autres, des puissances d'affects et de percepts. Les uns opèrent sur un plan d'immanence qui est une image de Pensée-Être (noumène), les autres, sur un plan de composition comme image d'Univers (phénomène). Les grandes figures esthétiques de la pensée et du roman, mais aussi de la peinture, de la sculpture et de la musique, produisent des affects qui débordent les affections et perceptions ordinaires, autant que les concepts débordent les opinions courantes. (QP 64)

This last point—that art influences perceptions, while concepts influence opinions—is particularly puzzling. Sensations inform opinions, just as opinions inspire sensations. Percepts and affects invade the opinion-forming faculties of the mind, and opinion-formation puts new configurations of percepts and affects into circulation. By no recognizable definition of "opinion" can Deleuze and Guattari convincingly argue that art cannot influence opinion. Glissant is saying something quite different when he states that poetry and art must change the collective "imaginary": "il faut changer l'imaginaire des humanités. Je crois que c'est seulement la poésie et l'art qui en sont les moteurs décisifs" (IL 85). It is true that the noun "imaginary"—distinct from imagination—does resemble in a significant way the percepts and affects that Deleuze and Guattari describe: the Glissantian imaginary exists independently from the self, moving through but also beyond us who "imagine" things, just as, for Deleuze and Guattari, "les sensations, percepts et affects, sont des *êtres* qui valent par eux-mêmes et excèdent tout vécu" (QP 154–155). However, the Glissantian imaginary has a direct bearing on subjects' *conception* of the world. Glissant, for his part, *conceives* of the Tout-Monde through an imaginary act, that is, through poetry. Concepts and poetry operate on the same plane in Relation.

This is not, however, to assimilate poetry to politics, or vice versa. The idea that poetry's "rôle" is to "changer les imaginaires des humanités" may appear similar to Jacques Rancière's configuration of politics and literature: literature, he claims, has a fundamental role in what he calls the "partage du sensible," by which sensory perceptions—especially "the visible and the sayable"—affect the way subjects make sense of their "common world" (*Dissensus* 152). For Rancière, the very definition of politics is the "cluster of perceptions and practices" that art, especially modern literature (as opposed to the earlier regime of belles-lettres), can rearrange (ibid.). For Glissant, though, "l'action de la pensée poétique" can, and often does, include political ramifications, but politics as such is not the fundamental concern (IL 81). Poetry operates in a much vaster ontological realm, perhaps intertwined with the specific political concerns or positions of a particular person or people but not limited or tied to those concerns. What is "poetic" about a poem, novel, essay, or film is precisely its mysterious ability to engage deeply with others far beyond the spatio-temporal context of its composition, while still retaining a particular quality of the event of its composition. Glissant makes this distinction in reference to Césaire, whose poetry cannot be reduced to the Negritude political agenda:

> Il est certain que les positions politiques de Césaire ont fait écran à la perception des qualités réelles de sa poésie. Moi, j'ai toujours regretté qu'on ait ramené sa poésie à des espèces de déclarations de principe tournant autour de la négritude. Mais il y a autre chose. Il y a la qualité fondamentale d'un grand poète, qu'il soit partisan de la négritude ou non. Il est possible que, maintenant que la vie politique de Césaire a cessé d'une certaine manière, on soit plus disponible pour aller à sa poésie elle-même. (ibid. 83–84)

If, today, we often return to Césaire to recall a decisive period in the still-unfinished anticolonial

project, Glissant enjoins us to attend to that opaque "autre chose" of *Le cahier d'un retour au pays natal* or *Les armes miraculeuses*. This "autre chose" cannot be separated from Césaire's poetics of decolonization—the pressure of that moment will always impose itself on the atmosphere of the space in which the poems are reread—but the "autre chose" is also precisely what allows texts to escape being rooted down in a specific historical moment, dug up and consulted only when politically pertinent. It would thus be a mistake to assimilate poetry's influence directly to the political, bypassing its unique ability to reshape the contours of thought—or reorder what Dubreuil calls the "syntax of thought"—on a more basic level (*Empire* 7).

* * *

Poetic influence, similarly, exceeds the methods of chronological tracking, historical analogs, geographical sectioning, or biographical investigation. Poetry disrupts the construction of history as such, beginning with literary history. The poem creates constant flows of influence, confluence, and interfluence. As a space of becoming, the opaque poem in particular disrupts literary history by refusing the logic of filiation. Rimbaud's "Le bateau ivre" was penned well before Glissant's "L'eau du volcan," but as Dubreuil suggests, texts can be contemporaneous even if they are not simultaneous ("Francophone" 43), which allows them to continuously *become* throughout time, particularly as they meet with the influence of other texts. Glissant's fiery visions of Mont Pelée haunt Rimbaud's "cieux de braise" just as much as Rimbaud's rudderless boat collides with Glissant's poet descending "sans guide ni palan […] ni sextant" into the volcano. And Rimbaud's "Péninsules démarrées" take on an entirely new meaning when considered alongside Glissant's project to "archipelagize" Western thought. Similarly, Glissant views Saint-John Perse as a poetic father-figure precisely because Perse's poems call into question the very notion of literary paternity and progeny. He founds "Exil" upon the eternal winds and the shifting

sands ("ma gloire est sur les sables!"); his "dessein […] d'un grand poème délébile" radically undermines the poem's inscription into a literary lineage. Glissant's Perse-like versets, spoken with a long breath and sedimenting upon each with geological weight, do indeed testify to Perse's influence on Glissant. But Glissant influences Perse just as much. How, without Glissant, could a poet who disdained the Caribbean so much become a principal voice for creolization? How, without the poetic reading of Glissant, could a poet so obsessed with his own *francité* become an inspiration for *créolité*? Poetry generates this becoming by guaranteeing that its meaning will exceed the time, space, and social environment of its writing. Thus, poetry must extend itself into a relationship with another before it gains meaning. Relation actualizes the language of the poem, and in the moment of actualization, influence flows in all directions. Influence in Relation is errant or, to riff on Rimbaud, yet another *dérèglement de tous les sens*.

It is fitting that Glissant's farewell to the world comes in the form of the poetry anthology, *La terre, la feu, l'eau et les vents: Une anthologie de la poésie du Tout-Monde*. His final major public appearance, at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in Paris a few months before his death, was organized around this anthology. The volume has no sections and no chronological or geographical order, and although it mostly contains verse, it also finds poetry in texts that are not necessarily called poems. Open it to the middle, and you'll find a quotation of the Cuban artist Wifredo Lam, followed by an excerpt from Balzac, in turn followed by an excerpt from the nineteenth-century Finnish epic poem *The Kalewala*. Turn the page, and a short quotation from the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius precedes an excerpt from Marquez's *Cien años de solidad*. Cyrano de Bergerac is next to Muhammad Ali; Lautréamont speaks to the medieval Arab Andalusian poet Ibn Arabi about the mysteries of the "Grand Tout." Paul Éluard and the Congolese novelist Sony Labou Tansi muse together, in a Levinasian vein, about how poetry puts the *visage* to work: Éluard

says, “Il fallait bien qu’un visage / Réponde à tous les noms du monde,” and Tansi responds, “face aux fusils, face à l’argent qui lui aussi devient un fusil, et surtout face à la vérité reçu sur laquelle nous, poètes, avons une autorisation de pisser, qu’aucun visage de la réalité humaine ne soit poussé sous le silence de l’Histoire” (168–169). In his brief introduction to the anthology, Glissant privileges the “rencontre” of the selections over their completeness. The conversation and mutual influence between texts becomes more important than the exemplarity of single works:

> Quels désordres pourtant, césures prises par bouts et mises bout à bout : diriez-vous qu’un poème peut être coupé, interrompu, que nous pourrions en donner des extraits, morceaux choisis (comme dans les manuels les plus scolaires), et décidés par l’action des vents malins ? Oui, vous le pourrez : quand les morceaux ont la chance c’est-à-dire la grâce de tant de rencontres, quand ils s’accordent entre eux, une part d’un poème qui convient à un autre poème, à cette part nouvelle, et devient à son tour un poème entier dans le poème total, que l’on chante d’un coup. L’imaginaire est un champ de fleuves et de replis qui sans cesse bouge. (15)

The “poème total” is characterized by the incompleteness of its constituent parts, which opens them to dialogue between each other—dialogue that might be unexpected given the fact that the authors of the adjacent texts often are separated by vast distances in time, space, and culture. But poetry is the fabric of the Tout-Monde, demanding to have its weave continued, to be enlaced and enfolded with other presences in the world.

Although my project limits itself to the interaction between only a few of the voices of the Tout-Monde—those of the poets most often interwoven into Glissant’s writing—my broadest purpose has been quite similar to the anthology’s: to think poetry in Relation, to read relationally. By breaking down the linearity of literary history and by questioning the filial structure of poetic

influence as it is generally conceived by historicist and formalist critics alike, this project has sought to recognize the rich conversations that occur between Glissant and his intertexts. More broadly, it strives to eliminate the barriers that too often quarantine authors into a particular area or period. I find that this is the most affirmative aspect of the early writings of the *littérature-monde* movement that officially began in 2007, with a manifesto published in *Le Monde* and signed by forty-five of the most prominent contemporary French-language writers, including Glissant.[4] The document asserts the end of the center-periphery relationship between *littérature française* and *francophonie*. Reviving a desire reminiscent of W. E. B. Du Bois' s dream of a trans-historical, desegregated literary canon in which "I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not" (74), Alain Mabankou, one of the movement's leading voices, proposes a

> littérature-monde, celle qui fonde les complicités au-delà des continents, des nationalités, des catéchismes et de l'arbre généalogique pour ne retenir que le clin d'œil que se font soudain deux créateurs que tout semblait éloigner dès le départ. (61)

Mabankou frames his remark as a rebuke to booksellers and commentators. Why, he asks, are his books shelved and reviewed alongside books in translation, *littérature étrangère*, rather than next to Hugo and Celine? (60). But his critique of a split-canon in French-language literature also speaks to the academic field of French and francophone studies, which too often looks more like French *or* francophone studies. In the U.S. we might teach and write about both French and francophone texts, but not often together at the same time. This split is borne out in faculty job announcements, introductory literature course syllabi (which very often spend three quarters of the semester on metropolitan France until about 1920 and then on *francophonie* for the final unit), calls for conference papers, and in the editorial decisions of book series and journals. In such cases,

texts from “the other side” may be invoked but are rarely engaged in any serious way: at a Caribbean studies colloquium, we might hear of Césaire’s Rimbaldianism and know that we should nod our heads without truly turning our attention to Rimbaud’s work; at a conference on nineteenth-century French literature, we might hear mention of Mallarmé’s *rayonnement* into postcolonial poetry, not often followed up with a rigorous investigation into the ramifications of this claim. Mabanckou was not only speaking to Gallimard and FNAC when he asserted, “La francophonie, oui, le ghetto : non !” He was pointing to the academy.

Certainly, space must exist for Caribbean studies and other subfields focused on the political and cultural legacy of colonialism in specific regions, and those who fought to create that space know better than anyone that it cannot be taken for granted—*The C. L. R. James Journal* and *Small Axe*, for example, are indispensible for ongoing scholarship about Caribbean thought, producing articles and conversation from which I have benefited greatly in the present study. Such areas of study should not only be maintained but should continue to grow. Yet, from Césaire and Glissant to Senghor and Tchicaya U Tam’si to Mabanckou and Dany Laferrière, literature has exceeded local particularities while also resisting a flattening universalism; francophone literature has long engaged with its French-speaking others in a complex conversation and a circuitous network of influence. In order to combat the received impression that influence only radiates from the enlightened metropole, we must do more than establish the “specificity”—to use Peter Hallward’s term—of postcolonial locales. My project has been motivated by the conviction that, for a thinker as complicated as Glissant, cross-currents of influence must be investigated by reading *with* him—and not simply on a philological or biographical level (attempting to retrace his readerly steps) but, more importantly, by following through on the textual connections potent in his work, which often pushes us in directions that Glissant never himself took. This is precisely

Glissant's "poetic intention," which is not an intention that he can master or that can be reduced to his life: "pour l'écrivain, ce qu'il écrit n'est peu à peu que le brouillon de ce que désormais (là, sans cesse) il va écrire" (IP 35). By reading and writing with Glissant, I have found myself beginning an unfinishable process of reading and writing with others, crossing boundaries that I may otherwise have respected, anachronizing literary history, and breaking perceived paradigms of literary lineage. I have attempted to do more than study or examine the poetics of Relation. I have attempted to participate in this poetics, to write not *on* Relation but *in* Relation.

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[1] Dubreuil also embraces anachronism in order to critique of historicist thought's tendency to base its authority upon a confusion between chronology and history; see "Anachronisme et événement." I would add that the confusion of history and chronology—and the voice of authority that always seems to accompany it—is characteristic of root-oriented capital-H *Histoire*, which Glissant wishes, with the help of literature, to fragment into transversal *histoires* (DA 243).

[2] Dubreuil's more recent work, including his graduate seminar Poetry and Mind (Cornell University, January–May 2015), which I audited and to which I contributed, has brought his thinking on intellection to bear on poetry specifically. This seminar and our personal conversations have helped shaped my views on the particularities of opaque language.

[3] Along with Spinoza and Leibniz. See *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (1968) and *Le pli* (1988). His earlier work on Nietzsche, and consequently Heraclitus of Ephesus, contains the seeds of this ontology; see *Nietzsche et le philosophie* (1962).

[4] Glissant's association with the movement includes signing the manifesto and contributing to the collective volume *Pour une littérature-monde*. This volume, published within a year of the manifesto, already demonstrates that different supporters understand the term *littérature-monde* so differently that the category is nearly useless as it stands. Michel Le Bris, for example, uses the term as a chance to attack structuralism's putative reduction of literature to "le formalisme […] le nihilisme […] et le solipsisme"; for him, *littérature-monde* has arisen as a kind of new sunrise of realism after a dark winter night of textual self-reflexivity, as "de plus en plus d'écrivains retrouvaient le gout du monde" (32). The conspicuous lack of poetry in Le Bris's account (along with the rest of the movement in general, with the exception of Glissant's contribution) speaks to the limitations of how the movement has defined its engagement with the *monde* so far. Glissant's concepts of the poetic Tout-Monde and the poetics of Relation seem to have been marginalized, even as the movement has welcomed his personal prestige. I also concur with Christopher Miller's critique of the manifesto: *littérature-monde*'s "future-oriented" geographic remapping of the literary landscape must also motivate an "exten[sion] backwards in time" to reconsider the French canon (33–34).

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