

Cultural Memory for the Political Present: Examining Marie Chauvet's *Love in the Aftermath of Haiti's Earthquake*

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Marie Vieux-Chauvet almost seems to be speaking to us about current political issues from the grave.

Edwidge Danticat, Introduction to *Love*

We dedicate our translation to those lost in the Haiti earthquake of January 12, 2010, and in loving memory of our brother Emmanuel Koenigsmark Réjouis (1970-2010) [...] [who] never gave up hope for Haiti and was proud we were bringing one of its greatest authors to a broader audience.

Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokur

In January of 2010, an earthquake of a catastrophic 7.0 magnitude strikes Haiti and just about destroys its capital city and its surrounding vicinities. A global audience once again turns to face Haiti—this time not as a defiant nineteenth-century slave colony pursuing its independence, nor as a twentieth-century space of despotic political dictators from which its citizens constantly flee seeking refuge. Within this same time the English translation of Marie Chauvet's 1968 Haitian trilogy, *Love, Anger, Madness*, is completed and made available to an English-speaking audience. With *Love*, Chauvet offers a critique not only of a terrorizing government, but also of the aristocracy that socially and fiscally governs the nation. Due to the fact that Chauvet, writing in the 1960s, veiled her critique of the Duvalier dynasty by setting the story in 1939 — four years after the United States ends its twenty-one year occupation of the nation — contemporary readers are invited to find historical parallels between Chauvet's historical moments—1939 and the 1960s— and, our own time of translation, 2010. This timing, as it links to the work of cultural memory for our political present is my concern in this essay. Specifically, I argue that cultural memory has several functions within the central character Claire Clamont's story, namely in the use of narration, the manipulation of time and in the political turmoil that coincides

with Claire's internal madness. Also, in thinking through the three historical moments that this text connects, we are necessarily led to question how and why the colonial past of Haiti resonates in the postcolonial present. Then, lastly and perhaps most importantly, I conclude that reading Chauvet in our political present necessitates a positive reading of Claire's final actions in the novel, a reading that points to overcoming the historical trauma detailed in the story and looks forward, as Édouard Glissant would say, to a new imaginative space, in this case, a new space for Haiti as a nation¹.

The Work of Cultural Memory

By cultural memory, I mean to invoke theorists such as Mieke Bal, who argues that cultural memorization is 'an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and re-described, even as it continues to shape the future' (Crewe et al 1999: vii). A work like Chauvet's text, now associated with three commemorative dates in Haiti's history — 1939, the reign of Stenio Vincent and post-United States occupation; 1960s - the Duvalier regime and a relationship with the U.S. government that effectively silenced the subaltern voice politically; 2010, the earthquake — works to envision or perhaps more accurately, revision (through the connection of these three moments), a future for the country, and especially a more hopeful one. This speaks to the role of cultural memory for Glissant, who argues that what is specific to the Caribbean is a notion of working through in order to 'overcome the cultural traumas of [his] predecessors' and this includes dramatizing a past denied by, in the case of *Love*, French colonialism, and depicting alternative solutions, which, in the case of Claire, might be read as her refusal in the end to be complacent with political strife around her. By depicting 'alternative solutions to historical lack,' Glissant contends that a more hopeful

¹ I think here of Glissant's later works, such as his 2007 work with Chamoiseau, *Quand les murs tombent: L'identité nationale hors-la-loi?*, in which Glissant is committed to what is more typical of current postcolonial theory: a fondness for the idea of hybridity, identity unbound by national borders, and emphasis on the interconnectedness of all people, as opposed to his earlier texts, *Poetics of Relation* and *Caribbean Discourse*, in which there is a commitment to national liberation and a singular, national identity. By invoking this notion in thinking of Haiti now, I mean to draw attention to how revisiting Chauvet's text after the earthquake can positively revision Haiti's image within the Caribbean and the world, as well as demonstrate that, while often pushed to the margins of the regional canon or muted "by the geopolitical realities of the nation's fraught history," Haitian texts like this one can and should be allowed to contribute to larger political postcolonial discussions concerning nation (see Kaiama Glover's introduction in *Haiti Unbound*, in which she discusses the relegating of Haiti and its writers to the margins of the New World).

future is imagined, as the ‘entirety of history is acknowledged’ (qtd. in Thomas 2009: 35). This is a more optimistic reading that critics like David Scott, who characterizes the Caribbean present as tragic, would certainly disagree with². Tragedy, however, often delimits productive options of moving forward. And in the case of Scott, mapping tragedy onto Haiti at this time, for one, contributes to the extensive existent negative rhetoric ascribed to the nation³. After all, Scott uses a single text⁴ written about Haiti as his focus, and goes on to conclude that the current, postcolonial moment is tragic. In light of Chauvet’s critique within *Love* that power in Haiti was in the hands of a few, select elite, the fact is that in our present moment this is once again the case, and the text can be analyzed, particularly in its concluding scene, for the alternatives it offers to such a recurring predicament. As such, it signals the need to, as Glissant would contend, acknowledge the entirety of that historical situation and its role in the present, in order to make a productive move past the label of tragedy. And while one could make a strong case to classify the novella as a tragic story, this is, in light of its publication in English coinciding with the earthquake, simply another way to imagine *Love*’s contribution to the global negative image of Haiti. I will argue that *Love* fits into the genre Donette Francis defines as antiromance⁵, a key feature of which is the concept of transgenerational time, to which I will return, at work in the novella. This aligns with Glissant’s notions of the positive use of cultural memory in a hopeful movement forward, and also allows readers to see an aspect of this text which the tragic reading ignores: that voice is given to a specifically female struggle and, with the recent English publication, the expression of that voice is now more visible to a larger global readership. The text’s current use-value then rests on the very notion of hope that David Scott would contend is lacking in our current moment. In the wake of Haiti’s national disaster, in which news coverage has

² Here I want to invoke *Conscripts of Modernity*, 2004.

³ I am thinking here of Sibylle Fischer’s multiple analyses in *Modernity Disavowed* of the Dominican response to “having been modernized by those who were meant to be slaves” (168) and her discussion of 19th century Cuban “elite artistic expression” which contained anti-Haitian rhetoric. There are also, of course, myriad examples outside of the Caribbean as well, some of which is chronicled in Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in Sophie’s experience of being Haitian in the U.S. and seeing the harsh U.S. sentiment towards Haiti, as well as more current examples of the portrayal of Haiti in the news – with focus primarily placed on the flaws of the recent election and the worsening cholera epidemic.

⁴ C.L.R. James’s *Black Jacobins*.

⁵ Francis’s 2010 book is *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship: Sexuality and the Nation in Contemporary Caribbean Literature*.

depicted Haiti as unable to govern or fend for itself, as a nation in need of the U.S. to take control, a once-silenced text reemerges and has been translated to reach a larger audience. While Scott characterizes the present as identifiable by ‘acute paralysis of will and sheer vacancy of imagination,’ (2004: 2), I argue that the issuing of this novella, for all that it contributes to our understanding of Haiti’s past, present and future, as well as its honest rendering of a female struggle concerning sexuality, race, marriage and motherhood to an English-reading audience is a potential source of hope in terms of the building of a ‘usable future[s]’ (Francis 2010: 144).

Remembering: Haiti in the 1930s and 1960s

Chauvet’s treatment of 1930s and 1960s Haiti in *Love* is instructive in that we can see how the author parallels the two periods and identifies similarities between the racial, political and social tensions present in both moments. We then see the connections that can be made to our postcolonial present, as Danticat describes Chauvet as ‘speaking to us [...] from the grave.’ *Love* takes place at the end of a twenty-year occupation of Haiti by the U.S. Characterizing the country as unstable, the U.S. entered Haiti under the guise of securing democracy, but in fact, they usurped all political power and positions within the government. Chauvet’s actual writing of the novellas took place right after Francois Duvalier’s 1964 declaration that he would be President-for-Life. Most important to the themes of *Love*, Duvalier had run on a platform that promised ‘economic redistribution’ and the promotion of a black middle class (Ferguson 1987: 38). However, after gaining power, all promises of helping the working poor were abandoned, and instead Duvalier succeeded in ‘carefully steering fund generated by overseas corporate investments and governmental intervention from the United States into his own pockets’ (Lee-Keller 2009: 1295). Despite running in opposition to the U.S. occupation of Haiti in this period, he operated like a dictator once in power as well. While playing on Haiti’s ‘strategic location’ in the Caribbean, Duvalier was able to convince the U.S. government to provide increased aid and loans, most of which he kept for himself while a great number of Haitians lived in terrible poverty (Ferguson 1987: 41-42). Any resistance from the people was silenced by the Duvalier police force, Tonton Macoutes.

Similar to Duvalier's reign is Stenio Vincent's from 1930 to 1941. Vincent also established a relationship with the U.S. during his reign that actually served to further oppress Haitians in the period in which Chauvet's *Love* is supposed to take place. A year after the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt's 'Good Neighbor Policy', Vincent went to visit Roosevelt, and consequently Roosevelt withdrew U.S. marines from Haiti. This was the primary reason for Vincent's getting elected, but once in office, he extended his term beyond what was legally allowed, becoming not a president, but more of a dictator (*Time*, 1941). The 'Good Neighbor Policy' had been strongly criticized at that time for promoting dictators and Latin American caudillos 'to perpetuate themselves in office' (*Time*, 1941) and suppress the needs and wants of the citizens.

What must also be taken into consideration in terms of Chauvet's scathing critique of the 1930s in Haiti is the 1937 massacre initiated by Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina to kill 'all 'Haitians' living in the Dominican Republic's northwestern frontier [...] and in certain parts of the contiguous Cibao region' (Turits 2002: 589). Historian Richard Lee Turits's best estimate is that 15,000 Haitians were slaughtered with machetes between the second and eighth of October⁶ that year. This horrific event took place under Vincent's reign in Haiti and is significant in that it further draws attention to and threatened to 'damage the Roosevelt administration's 'Good Neighbor Policy' toward Latin America by calling attention to dictatorship in the Caribbean area, where a generation of consolidated authoritarian regimes developed in the wake of U.S. intervention and the Great Depression' (Roorda 1996: 301). A parallel may be drawn here between Vincent's dictatorship and that of Duvalier's. The character Calédu can be seen to embody either dictator in the novel and is described early on as 'a ferocious black man who has been terrorizing us for about eight years now. He wields the right of life and death over us, and he abuses it' (Chauvet 2009: 8). With Chauvet writing around 1964, this eight years goes back to 1957 when Duvalier began his presidency, or, in the case of Vincent and the novella taking place in 1939, this also goes back to around

⁶ According to Turits, the number of Haitian deaths recorded in the Dominican Republic is 17,000. However, 10,000 Haitians reportedly went to Haiti during and following the massacre, a number that is frequently subtracted from an estimated 30,000 Haitians estimated by a Catholic parish to be in residence there in 1936. Since almost no ethnic Haitians were left in the parish after the massacre, that parish estimates 20,000 Haitians (at least) killed in just that area. These numbers come from Turits's essay, "A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic," which later became part of his book.

the time of his taking office. Later in the same passage, as Claire details the terror of Calédu's authority, she says, '[a]nd cruelty is contagious' thereby linking the presidencies of both men, making the connection that the actions of one dictator (Vincent) may very well be contagious to the next (Duvalier), and connecting the moment in which this story takes place with the moment in which Chauvet was writing (Chauvet 2009: 8). That Chauvet links 1939 to the late 1960s brings to the foreground parallels between despotic modes of governing during the American Occupation and Vincent's rule *and* the Duvalier regime. She forces readers, by drawing these relationships, to examine not only why the historical traumas necessarily repeat, but how moving away from such histories may be possible.

Most significantly, Chauvet's joining of these key historical moments shows Haiti's repeating and (literally) re-presenting past that anticipates and determines future abuses of and on the Haitian body politic. The three presents of the text connected here then demonstrate a function of cultural memory: there is a re-memorization, in each present, of the similar pasts that have come before. The past is re-described, reabsorbed in the present moment as it anticipates the future. While Chauvet was writing in the mid-60s, she moves the narrative forward and backward as Claire reflects on her childhood, dreams in the present of the relationship she desires with her sister's husband, and plans the murder of her sister in the future. Like the Spiralist writers Kaiama Glover studies in *Haiti Unbound*, Chauvet 'generally collapse[s] past, present, and future realities into a single frame – urgent and immediate – and avoid[s] definitive accounts of time's progression' and in doing so 'make[s] plain the extent to which history repeats itself in Haiti and throughout the Caribbean' (Glover 2010a: 103).

Narration, Time and Political Turmoil

One way to attempt answering the question of how cultural memory functions for the present is to observe how cultural memory is engaged in the text. This is seen quite clearly in the utilization of the unique narrative form of the journal entry. During the 1960s in Haiti, writers Jean-Claude Fignole, Rene Philoctete and Franketienne developed what Kaiama L. Glover terms in her article on Fignole's *Aube tranquille* 'a literary ethic-aesthetic' called Spiralism, and because this fiction-writing method was created under the

Duvalier regime, it was meant to be a means of creative expression and sometimes critique veiled so as to work within the confines of the repressive regime (Glover 2010b: 208). As Glover explains of the small movement, the three Spiralist authors ‘necessarily grappled with the issue of how to write the Haitian real at once faithfully and with a certain measure of caution’ (Glover 2010b: 208). Glover goes on to say that the spiral form ‘provided a clear narrative structure from which to present - that is, to literally make present - a relevant and repeating past’ (Glover 2010b: 209). This mode of Spiralism seems to serve the same purpose as Chauvet’s use of the personal journal entry and the insertion of flashbacks without any explanation (or a disruption of the linear progression of time more common to the traditional novel), corroborates allegorically the Spiralist contention of ‘the possible connections between Haiti’s contemporary woes and a failure to properly attend to the unfinished business of history’ (Glover 2010b: 209). That is, Chauvet demonstrates the re-presentation of Claire’s past, through, for example, her complicated and tumultuous relationship with her father, which Claire flashes back to often within her journal entries, and how this relationship has informed Claire’s current negative self-image. There is also the fact that Claire, in the present, being the eldest daughter, has inherited the responsibility of the land, as well as financial burdens associated with her father’s attempted political career. To come back to Glissant’s notion of cultural memory, the relationship the family has to the land and coffee fields is also significant, and the reader sees how issues of class and politics are tied to the physical landscape, as each generation remembers the actions of the previous one. As Glissant writes:

So history is spread out beneath this surface, from the mountains to the sea, from north to south, from the forest to the beaches’ and, perhaps even more to the point I am making here, ‘Our landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. *It is all history.*’ (Glissant 1989: 11, emphasis mine)

In an example of the tie between the land and memory in the text, in which the Clamonts family land literally tells the underside of their family history, Claire says, ‘[t]he 540 acres he had sold to pay for his electoral campaign had come into the hands of black peasants’ (Chauvet 2009: 111). At this point in the story, we already know of Claire’s

rage towards her father for squandering the family wealth on the vain pursuit of his political career that seems all but improbable. The next year, Claire sets her price too low and notes, '[m]y father's farmers paid with their lives for my brilliant idea, because about twenty planters armed with machetes descended on our land and slaughtered them' (Chauvet 2009: 112). Claire goes on: 'No one dared openly attack me, the daughter of a great despotic and merciless landowner, but I was responsible for everything and everyone knew it' (Chauvet 2009: 113). Claire's actions here are one way to attempt answering how cultural memory functions for the present. The ties that her family has to coffee are ties to their class standing, the economy, and through her father's use of the land, the political arena in Haiti. Claire lets the land go in an attempt to enact vengeance on her family, to sever ties she has to her father's political career. However, as Glissant would argue, any attempt to obliterate an aspect of cultural memory – in this case the land that has recorded class struggle and political change for Claire and her family – is also an attempt to obliterate some aspect of history, to not acknowledge the entirety of the colonial history.

In *Memoires des esclavages*, Glissant argues that 'memory is the first recourse and the first means' towards moving forward. Without acknowledging her family's past, in attempting to erase some part of it, we see Claire further entrenched in her anguish and internal conflict (2007: 177). We can read this section of Chauvet's text as a critique of Claire's attempt at erasure and as a cue for action in the present as we attempt to move beyond mapping tragedy onto Haiti.

Danticat's claim that Chauvet is speaking to readers from the grave also resonates when one considers the links to be made between, first Claire's internal turmoil and the social and political change around her, and secondly, the politics of Haiti in the novel and those in the present. Chauvet's choice to use journal-writing blurs any linear understanding of time, as well as the continual move, in Claire's narration, from past to present and often back again, from remembering (her father, her youth, how she came to struggle with her sexuality: 'I imagined sexual relations, caresses, even kisses, to be shameful acts that only the Church could absolve' (Chauvet 2009: 12)) to coming into the present moment, where she continually labels herself an old maid. Readers see the link between internal turmoil within Claire and the political strife around her most clearly

when Claire dreams of killing Calédu, because, as Ronnie Scharfman asserts⁷, ‘Claire’s body is the very site where all conflicts in the novel ‘psychic, social, racial, erotic, and eventually political – wage their wars’ (Scharfman 1996: 242) Because Claire dreams so vividly of killing Calédu, who is easily seen as the representative of the Duvalier Regime in the novel, a man who ‘loves to be feared and to be shown that he is feared’ (Chauvet 2009: 14), readers see just how much Claire has internalized the politics around her – they are literally haunting her dreams. In the dream, Claire waits for and is eventually stabbed by Calédu as an assassination, and through her imagining this, readers see further the connection between the outside world and what is going on in Claire’s mind. Interestingly, while Claire dreams of waiting to be assassinated by Calédu, she is the one to actually stab him in the end. Having internalized the political chaos around her for so long, her final act in the novella of killing Calédu demonstrates that Claire’s internal life is inextricably tied to the politics of Haiti, and, considering Scharfman’s discussion of the female body, we also see how it functions for cultural memory: upon and within Claire’s body is the recording of the violence of Haiti’s political regime. While in the earlier example of the coffee fields the landscape served as a means of cultural remembering in the way Glissant describes it, with land being the recorder of a family or culture’s history, later in the novel readers see Claire’s body functioning in a similar way. This may be read as a critique of the trauma both physically and mentally (as we see in Claire’s intensifying madness all along) enacted on Haitians by not only the Duvalier regime, but also Vincent in 1939, and perhaps also due to American involvement in both periods.

Haiti and America: Then and Now

One might also think of the movement forward and backward in time in the novella as Chauvet’s critique of Haitian politics and the failure following the end of U.S. occupation in 1939 to attend to all social and political issues raised by such an occupation, as well as her suggestion that the trauma of the Duvalier regime might resemble the trauma experienced by Haitians twenty years prior. Because Chauvet chooses to focus on and critique the aristocracy with this novella, we might consider her comment on this matter

⁷ Scharfman’s essay is “Theorizing Terror: The Discourse of Violence in Marie Chauvet’s *Amour Colere Folie*.”

now, as a few elite hold power over Haiti once again. Danticat succinctly summarizes what is so pertinent in Claire's story to Haiti's current moment:

what Claire Clamont and Marie Chauvet are brave enough to say, is that this same country has continued to fail at reaching its full potential, in part because of foreign interference and domination, *but also because of internal strife and power struggles*. What at first seems like personal dramas in this book become microcosms of larger historical conflicts. (qtd. in Chauvet 2009: xi, emphasis mine)

In the 1930s, the 'Good Neighbor Policy' effectively ignored its affects on Caribbean citizens living under dictatorships because the focus was on 'inter-American cooperation' and included 'loans and military assistance' which only served to 'strengthen the regimes' (Roorda 1996: 302). Much of what occurred under Duvalier was strikingly similar to this, that he played into the anti-communist sentiment of the U.S. at the time and subsequently 'siphoned off millions of dollars of investments' which would only serve to strengthen his dictatorship as well (Lee-Keller 2009: 1295). Within *Love*, a rather obvious critique of American involvement in Haiti is seen through the character of M. Long, the American who is director of the Export Corporation. Claire says of him: 'authorities only have one thing on their minds – to get rich by any means necessary, to humiliate those who once humiliated them and crush the arrogant bourgeois – M. Long exploits this desire' (Chauvet 2009: 18) and then comments later, 'M. Long speaks of his country, so rich, so beautiful, so well organized, it seems. What has he come looking for in this hole, if not wealth? What if not to fleece the sheep that we are?' (Chauvet 2009: 21).

Currently, we see U.S. involvement and control in Haiti yet again. A story by *News One* on September 28 opens with: 'Nearly nine months after the earthquake, more than a million Haitians still live in the streets between piles of rubble. One reason: Not a cent of the \$1.15 billion the U.S. promised for rebuilding has arrived' (*News One Online*, September 2010). While money for post-quake relief has been provided, construction of a completely wrecked capital city cannot get underway 'without long-term funds' (*News One*). According to Reporter Nicholas Kristof, 'slow rescue efforts' have been a contributor to the high death toll, and while he acknowledges in his recent op-ed for *The*

New York Times that the U.S. has created jobs through ‘approved trade preferences,’ more aid work in necessary to establish ‘sustainable sanitation and water systems,’ as well as the education of Haitian children, and the sending in of ‘business investors to create jobs’ (2010: A37). Reports on Haiti currently focus predominantly on the negative: an election marred by ID card issues, voting irregularities, and of course, the cholera epidemic. This article does not wish to suggest that these issues are insignificant, merely to highlight that Haiti’s image in the global media is one of a country unable to support itself. Furthermore, this article contends that focusing only on tragedies in the nation does not help to progress the rebuilding; inextricably tied to this fact, but largely ignored in reporting on Haiti now, is the problematic relationship American involvement has had for quite some time with the nation, as seen in the various historical contexts of Chauvet’s text. A minority of reports, like Kristof’s, acknowledge that much more needs to be done, but also shed light on the positive: ‘aid has kept alive many who would otherwise have died’ and the existence of groups like SOIL, has ‘provided 300 dry composting toilets that turn human waste into fertilizer’ (2010: A37). In other words, there are ways in which moving forward, moving past tragedy, is very much possible for Haiti now.

Voicing a Specifically Female Struggle

Significant to the consideration of Chauvet’s text today as it links to the 1960s and is instructive in going forward is Claire’s personal struggle. At the age of thirty-nine, Claire is an unmarried virgin, obsessed with the relationships between Jean Luze and either of her sisters, obsessed with having the darkest skin of all three sisters, and often flashing back to moments with her father in her youth in which she felt belittled and mistreated by him:

My father called me, each day, in his gruff voice, so that I would repeat my lessons and he would pinch my ear at the slightest mistake until it bled. ‘That’ll clear your head,’ he would explain to reassure me of his malice. (Chauvet 2009: 104)

Part of the work that Chauvet’s novella does that links the 1960s to our present moment is to expose issues of sexuality, marriage, patriarchy, race and class as aspects of the daily struggle for Caribbean women. With many Caribbean feminists looking back now to the

portrayal of femininity, sexuality and the ties these have to notions of independence or even citizenship in pre-independence and post-independence texts,⁸ Chauvet's attempts to expose and grapple with Claire's desires and confusion about motherhood and marriage are powerful in that they are often associated with a male-run and horribly corrupt government in Haiti – and this critique remains relevant now.

Claire announces within the opening paragraph of *Love* that she has no husband, 'Doesn't know love,' and is still a virgin (Chauvet 2009: 3). Readers are then meant to see how these issues are central to Claire's understanding of what goes on around her. Within the first section of the novella, she also makes several links between the corrupt men in government and the mistreatment of women. The mayor is first described as 'a plump *griffe* with a taste for women and liquor' (Chauvet 2009: 9) and the police chief labeled a sadist: 'He loves to whip women, and once in a while he has them arrested just like that, one or two at a time for his pleasure' (Chauvet 2009: 14).

While the book was banned upon publication because of its critique of Duvalier, the connections drawn between an oppressive government, a woman's obsession with sexuality and motherhood as well as her voyeuristic tendencies towards the affair between Jean Luze and Annette were most likely other reasons for silencing this novella, due to concerns over respectability. Notions of gender in the Caribbean at the time of publication were certainly fixed, and a character like Claire, who can be seen touching and smelling the sheets upon which her sister and brother-in-law just had sex, 'starving for this smell of seaweed mixed with male sweat' certainly does not fit this socially-prescribed mold (Chauvet 2009: 11).

Michelle Rowley, in her recent essay⁹, discusses how gender has become static in our thinking of the Caribbean, and that what typically dominates the feminist imaginary is a black woman who is maternal, heterosexual, has a certain amount of agency (Rowley 2010: 11). However, what a character like Claire does is disrupt this very notion: she is maternal only towards a doll, the normative definition of maternal cannot apply to Claire.

⁸ Much of the critical work done by contemporary Caribbean feminists speaks to these topics, such as *Framing Silence* by Myriam Chancy, *House, Garden, Nation* by Elaine Savoy Fido, amongst many other works, and most recently, *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship*.

⁹ "Whose Time is It? Gender and Humanism in Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Advocacy." Besides this essay, Rowley's recent book, *Feminist Advocacy and Gender Equity in the Anglophone Caribbean: Envisioning a Politics of Coalition*, provides a more in-depth discussion of this topic.

And though she desires a male, she has never had sex, and was ‘unable to react’ to ‘two acceptable suitors’ because she is too self-conscious about her dark skin to believe any male would have sex with her (Chauvet 2009: 11). She therefore doesn’t fit into a normative understanding of a heterosexual woman. Using the journal entries to record her ravings about life as an ‘old maid’ and her anger especially towards her father, the agency to speak or express herself freely is lacking. Claire makes a distinction in her narration of conversations with Jean Luze for example and what she really thinks and feels as it appears in her journal, conveying a lack of ability to speak honestly or freely in Haitian society as this time. Rowley contends that we now need to ‘critically revisit a number of questions in our scholarship’ concerning the constructed definition of a Caribbean woman and ‘challenge the *function* of this category to produce a more malleable subjectivity and open the terrain for a wider array of feminist politics’ (Rowley 2010: 12). Considered in this way, Claire’s story does challenge the established categories of femininity. Turning to this novella now, as critics such as Rowley are attempting to widen the categories, is another way in which this novella connects the 1960s to the present and moves beyond tragedy in that this text has reemerged for a readership to consider Chauvet’s critiques of the effects of class and a corrupt patriarchally-structured government on female citizens of Haiti and what contribution those critiques now make to feminist studies in the region.

Chauvet’s challenge to the limits of the nation’s conception of womanhood with the use of Claire as the character who murders the dictator figure at the end of the story, is one of the ways in which the novella functions as a formal experiment in pushing the boundaries and limits of Haiti’s national imaginary and ideologies. By demonstrating Haiti’s repeating past, the authors shows readers what is problematic in the nation’s political and social realms in several different periods. While this repetition demonstrates how the grand narrative of Haiti has come to be known to the rest of the world, Chauvet offers, with the surprising conclusion, a positive way beyond such a narrative.

The Political Present

In my case, for some time I have tried to master a time that keeps slipping away, to live a landscape that is constantly changing, to celebrate a history that is documented nowhere. The epic

and the tragic in turn have tempted me with their promises of gradual revelation. A constrained poetics. The delirium of language. We write in order to reveal the inner workings, hidden in our world.

Glissant, 'Concerning Literature,' *Caribbean Discourse*

In *The Other America*, J. Michael Dash reads the conclusion of *Love* as Claire's venturing 'outside to commit an apparently revolutionary act' and that her stabbing Calédu is an 'ambiguous' act and a 'travesty of what Fanon would have seen as liberating violence' (Dash 1998: 111). While there is certainly textual evidence to support this reading, in light of the current moment, I think there is more support for reading Claire's ending more positively. This arises out of Myriam Chancy's claim in *Searching for Safe Spaces* that for Chauvet, the 'legacies of colonialism' are 'undeniable realities which must be confronted in the writing of history and fiction' and that by 'examining the relationship between land [...] history, and class oppression [...] from explicitly female and feminist points of view' Chauvet is able to depict a woman 'struggling to come to terms' with not only 'nationalistic concerns' but also her concerns as a woman (Chancy 1997: 171). Therefore, Chauvet presents the 'possibilities for resistance as represented by women, focusing on women's desires to break free of 'prescribed roles as breeders, mothers, nannies, laborers, and the like,' in which we also hear Rowley's arguments (Chancy 1997: 171). As Chancy highlights in this chapter, 'Exile, Resistance and Home,' while the class struggles in Haiti at this time have been recognized, women's roles in it have been 'systematically obscured' and Chauvet's text works to link storytelling to 'the sociopolitical dimensions of fiction, to already recorded history' (Chancy 1997: 171). In this way then, far from being ambiguous, Claire's murdering of Calédu can be read as the insertion of a woman's action into the political sphere. As a result of Calédu's death, 'The doors of the houses are open and the entire town has risen' (Chauvet 2009: 156). Claire's final action is then hopeful in that Chauvet is suggesting a break from prescribed roles for Haitian women in the future. Also pertinent to Haiti's current place in the global imaginary is that this ending unites the masses, bringing them out of hiding in their homes and back into the streets of their town, where they can now usurp the power from the hands of a violent dictator.

Furthermore, the conclusion of Claire's story provides additional reasoning to contest Scott's arguments about the tragedy of our postcolonial present. First and foremost, Scott contends in his close reading of C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*, that decolonization resulted in the repetition by the previously colonized, of bourgeois nationalism, the very thing responsible for their colonization in the first place. As Donald Pease describes it in his recent essay, 'The Crisis of Critique in Postcolonial Modernity,' Scott proposes 'a different account of post-Enlightenment modernity' (Pease 2010: 190). He conceives of the modern as 'the set of conditions responsible for the comprehensive reshaping of non-modern forms of social life along with the compendious transformation of the epistemological categories defining it' (Pease 2010: 190). Hence, Scott offers the term 'conscripts of modernity,' generated by his reading of Foucault and focus in Scott's book on the conditions of power as they pertain to colonial subjects. Aptly illustrated by Pease, 'the conscript of modernity brings to the fore the conceptual and ideological conditions out of which willing subjects, as well as the new choices confronting them, were simultaneously constructed' (Pease 2010: 191). According to Scott, 'What is at stake here is not whether the colonized accommodated or resisted,' but, perhaps more importantly, 'how colonial power transformed the ground on which accommodation or resistance was possible in the first place' (Scott 2004: 119).

Within his analysis of *The Black Jacobins*, Scott sees Toussaint L'Ouverture as such a conscript. Scott turns to the few paragraphs that James had added to the work in 1963, as they demonstrate Toussaint's 'tragic dilemma' and make him no longer a hero for liberating the slaves in Haiti, but instead place him in a tragic site because of 'the irreconcilable dissociation between Toussaint's expectation for freedom and the conditions under which he sought to realize them' placing him 'between the utopia of his desire and the finitude of concrete circumstances' (Scott 2004: 133). In Pease's critique of Scott, this leads him to the four major claims of *Conscripts of Modernity* that he strongly disagrees with. He writes:

that the emancipationist narrative no longer has political efficacy, that planetary societies now live in the shared single world of global modernity brought into existence by European Enlightenment, [and] that colonial rule is commensurable with European governmentality, and that Haitian slaves acted upon European Enlightenment ideals. (Pease 2010: 199)

Pease contends here that Scott utilizes the notion of 'concept of liberty' to justify the conditions for all of these. In interpreting James's characterization of Toussaint, Scott simply claims, 'it was the error of a conscript' and therefore, as Pease contends, 'the context into which Scott transposes Toussaint's vacillations shifts the focus away from Toussaint's particular act of erroneous judgment and onto the frame of mind that overdetermined it' (Pease 2010: 201). In other words, the notion of the 'conscript of modernity' was not even present in James's text, but was inserted by Scott in his reading of it. Scott claims that it was impossible for Toussaint to not choose modernity: because his choice was between freedom without France or freedom with it, Toussaint 'discovered that these were neither alternatives of his choosing nor alternatives between which he could choose' (Scott 2004: 133).

In his critique, Pease turns back to James and reminds readers of the emphasis James placed on the chorus in *The Black Jacobins* and the role the ex-slaves actually played in Toussaint's tragedy. Pease explains, 'While Toussaint remained trapped within the contradictory categories and prescriptions that emerged at this historical turning point,' the subalterns, or, 'the witness of this liminal population enabled them to remain free from the entrapments of modernity's structuring dilemmas' (Pease 2010: 204). Pease contends that the Haitian Revolution, enacted by people not considered part of modernity, not part of the existent order, is indeed an 'emancipatory event' which has introduced different configurations of human societies and certainly changed what was thought to be possible. Ultimately, Scott doesn't conceptualize or understand the Haitian Revolution without European Enlightenment and modernity, but as Pease points out, 'James emphasizes the impossibility of understanding either the ambition or the limitations of the European understanding of emancipation without Haiti' (Pease 2010: 204). With this critique, Pease brings readers to an understanding of the significance of the ex-slaves, or subalterns, and the fundamental role they played in the Haitian Revolution as those not inscribed in the global order of things.

The conclusion of *Love* brings us to a similar place. The town finally rises again as the elimination of an oppressive dictator has allowed the masses, or the subalterns, to safely come out of hiding and take over the streets. Chauvet ends her text by turning to, as Pease argues James did, those members of Haitian society who have existed on the

border of inclusion in the nation. As Chauvet ‘speaks to us from the grave’ about Haiti’s political present, her text seems to be suggesting a consideration of the significance of those who exist in the liminal space of the nation’s border and how they might better formulate the political direction of the nation than the few elite who have always held power over Haiti in the past.

Moving past a tragic reading of this text, I read *Love* as an antiromance, as defined by Donette Francis in *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship*. This novella, like Francis argues is definitive of the Caribbean antiromance, ‘yields no catharsis [...] no surety of the path forward’ and instead ‘exposes the folly of believing that somehow the national [...] sphere [is a] privileged space for the reconciliation of otherwise impossible differences’ (Francis 2010: 8). Francis goes on to argue that ‘[c]ontemporary Caribbean women writers return to the very private lives of Caribbean people [...] to suggest that a sustained examination of the intimate sphere is necessary to build better futures, especially in our present postcolonial moment’ and perhaps most importantly to Chauvet’s text, Francis asserts that ‘rather than a moment of tragedy, exhaustion, or nightmare, theirs is a moment of hyperconscious awareness that makes use of past failures to build usable futures’ (Francis 2010: 8). What also aligns with Chauvet’s text in our political present is Francis’s use of transgenerational time, or ‘how current and future generations learn the defeats of their elders through [...] practices of remembering in an attempt to possibly chart better futures’ (Francis 2010: 8/9). Despite the many bleak moments for Claire and other Haitians in this text, Chauvet does hint at the possibility for hope early on in Claire’s narration: ‘By what miracle has this poor nation managed to stay so good, so welcoming, so joyful for so long, despite its poverty, despite injustice, prejudice, and our many civil wars?’ (Chauvet 2009: 7/8).

The Caribbean antiromances, Francis writes, ‘discourage idealizing the past or future’ and instead ‘leave open ended possibilities of charting alternative futures, even in the wake of violent pasts and presents, and even in the midst of recurring disappointments’ (Francis 2010: 8). This is the positive reading one must make out of Claire’s end. In the midst of her personal angst concerning her race, her not being married or having children, she is able to take an action against Calédu which inserts a woman into the political sphere in Haiti at a time when, as Chancy reminds us, women’s

roles in such were mostly absent and of course largely ignored. Not only is the woman injected into this political sphere, but Claire's killing Calédu enacts a change, in that the town is able to rise, to come out of their houses, to come out of hiding from the terrorizing government which Calédu represents. Through linking this conclusion to the text's current revival, when a global audience looks at Haiti again in the aftermath of its earthquake, we can see greater possibilities for the charting of a useable future for the nation. Just as Glissant dismisses the label of tragedy in *Caribbean Discourse*, so too must readers of *Love* in order to see more productive movements forward within the text and within Haiti's current political moment, to which this text draws our attention.

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