Bonnie Thomas, *Connecting Histories: Francophone Caribbean Writers Interrogating Their Past*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017. x + 165 pp. (Cloth US\$ 65.00)

Caribbean history requires scholars to attend to the enormous impact of historical and continuing violence, sometimes to the exclusion of the creativity and joy that is equally constitutive of Caribbean experiences. Bonnie Thomas's *Connecting Histories* deftly navigates the responsibility for a full range of responses to the region's pasts by demonstrating how contemporary Francophone Caribbean writers move from traumatic recollection to liberation. In tracing this path, Thomas returns to the distinctions between History and histories to explore how History's losses can be repaired through processes of reconciliation that are invoked in quotidian histories. Working on some of the most important figures in twentieth-century Francophone writing—Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau from Guadeloupe, Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamouiseau from Martinique, and Edwidge Danticat and Dany Laferrière from Haiti—she argues for criticism that reflects the centrality not only of rupture but of connection and healing in their work.

The genres that she identifies as best able to make the connections between History and histories are those that she groups together as “personal narrative”—reflective essays, interviews, and travel writing in addition to autobiography. Although the use of the term “personal narrative” is not essential to the book's argument or contribution to the field, it allows her to organize the book productively around three important points: exploring how individual voices can bring into focus the collective histories that have been denied, framing each writer's aesthetic practices with their biography as focused on their social impact, and interpreting their canonical works through their lesser-known texts, thereby promoting the latter as well. This allows her to offer an innovative interpretive model that opens up new readings of Caribbean literature.

Thomas's aim with each author is to show that they use memory—personal, ancestral, and collective—to create a relationship with the past that can be positively canalized. As is especially evident in the book's first and last chapters (focused on Condé and Laferrière), she reconfigures historical legacies such that the inheritances of trauma also create an opportunity to reshape that trauma into transgenerational healing. This takes place on a personal level as well as a national one, as in Laferrière's autobiographical cycle that also chronicles the fallout of the Duvalier regimes. Intertwining writing and lives spent moving between continents lends itself to the development of an unmistakable style for each author. Thomas sensitively parses their ironizing humor and “self-

conscious role as provocateur[s]" (p. 120) to elicit the life-long construction of personal and communal identities that resist categorization. With Laferrière, she homes in on his "snapshot"-like style that provides both precise description and multiple interpretive possibilities, and with Condé, she shows how coming back to her own family history from multiple standpoints also allows her to write herself into a literary genealogy.

Thomas's method of biographical framing reads these authors' texts as circulating along the same currents as their personal investments. In Chamoiseau's case, she emphasizes how his career as a social worker in Fort-de-France shapes the way he writes about the specificity of identity formation in the context of the changing urban-scapes. And for Danticat, she shows how her humanitarian commitments direct her choice of projects toward the most pressing concerns of Haitians, from questions of migration to the effects of the 2010 earthquake. Throughout, she reads these biographical elements with the aesthetics each writer develops, as in Danticat's characteristic style of collage or the mosaic-like quality of Chamoiseau's writing and philosophy of creolization or Pineau's intertwining of writing with her experience as a psychiatric nurse. Thomas's reading of *Folie, aller simple: journée ordinaire d'une infirmière*, for example, attends to Pineau's list-making style as "fault lines running" through the novel (p. 71) as a representation of the ruptures that the theme of therapeutic writing will then resolve. The argument is robustly tied to the tropes that mark many of Pineau's texts, such as the metaphor of the garden as a dynamic space of death and growth for which Pineau is well known. Braided with aesthetics, Thomas integrates the biographical into her central argument for reconciliation with the past.

As in Thomas's first book, *Breadfruit or Chestnut?* (2007), *Connecting Histories* pointedly investigates theories of gender in the writing of both male and female authors. Here, she stresses the influence of women as historians in Laferrière's writing and the importance of gender, language, and power in Chamoiseau's. Of equal methodological import is her identification of aesthetic approaches to writing history that bridge the very different geopolitical and historical contexts separating Guadeloupe and Martinique from Haïti. This book is a welcome addition to studies of Francophone literature, offering a sensitive introduction to writers whose work is so well known as to hardly need an introduction and yet who become new again through Thomas's work.

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