Jason Herbeck, *Architextual Authenticity: Constructing Literature and Literary Identity in the French Caribbean*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018. x + 330 pp. (Cloth US\$130.00)

In his carefully and persuasively argued study of identity construction in Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, Jason Herbeck takes up two complementary interpretive frameworks: architecture—the human-built dwellings that serve as repositories of history and culture as well as expressions of identity (re)construction in Caribbean literature—and “architexture,” a term borrowed from Gérard Genette designating “the different generic, discursive, lexical, thematic, and structural blueprints from which a given text emerges and is created” (p. 42). This surprising combination yields new perspectives on longstanding debates in French Caribbean writing: How does one construct an authentic self in the wake of colonization, in the absence of an origin, a history, and a language other than the colonizer’s? What role does literature—and, more precisely, literary form—have to play in this construction? Herbeck conceives of the two lenses informing his work not as inseparable, but rather as flexible building materials that can be brought together or deployed independently to generate different insights. This approach allows him to foreground structural concerns while steering clear of a rigid formalism that would impose an unbending interpretive grid on living, evolving identity struggles.

Herbeck lays the foundations of his work in an introduction (“Questioning the Construction of a Dogma”) and opening chapter (“Past and Present Matter(s): Vernacular Architecture, the Caribbean House, and the Building Blocks of Literature”). Among the building blocks he uses are a number of contradictory notions whose tensions help describe the ways in which identity is continually negotiated rather than given in the texts at hand. The title concept, “architextual authenticity,” is one such “intentionally antithetical” term (p. 9), if authenticity is understood to be at odds with the unavoidable colonial influences that French Caribbean writers must work with. The term authenticity itself, Herbeck points out, has two opposed meanings: it designates either conformity to an original, or else a unique creation without a prior model. Given the unavailability of a “pure,” precolonial identity one might authentically adopt, the question Caribbean writers face is how to *adapt*, how to produce an authentic sense of self “from within ubiquitous postcolonial frameworks, mindsets, and paradigms” (p. 6). The Haitian Gingerbread house, a focal point of Chapter 1, provides one response to this question and an example of the kind of authenticity Herbeck sees emerging in French Caribbean literature more generally. Gingerbread houses are composite structures combining preexisting architectural styles, yet they are distinctively “Haitian,” aesthetically and also

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practically, for they are built using local materials and accumulated vernacular knowledge, making them well adapted to Haiti's climate and geology. (Gingerbread houses withstood the 2010 earthquake better than supposedly more "modern" constructions in cement [p. 38].) Like Gingerbread houses, Herbeck argues, Caribbean cultural production represents "more than the sum of its discernable parts," and should be considered "a composite work in progress—a necessarily dynamic construction whose vital yet often intangible properties extend to the evolution and adaptation of its forms and structures over time" (p. 37).

The four chapters that follow carry out detailed close readings of five literary texts in which the *mise-en-abyme* of the creative writing process passes through a house: Édouard Glissant's *La Lézarde* (1958), Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove* (1989), Daniel Maximin's *L'île et une nuit* (1995), and Yanick Lahens's postearthquake works *Failles* (2010) and *Guillaume et Nathalie* (2013). Each chapter considers constructions within the narratives (at the mimetic level, in Genette's terminology) and at the level of narrative form more broadly (the diegetic level), and focuses extensively on intertextuality (in the sense of explicitly cited or implied intertexts present in the works, rather than the broader interpretation Julia Kristeva or Roland Barthes gives to the term). The houses Herbeck studies range from central characters in the text (*Les Flamboyants* in Maximin's novel, a house whose personified voice is incorporated in the narration, or the collapsed building from which Lahens extricates Guillaume and Nathalie, rebuilding her own creative inspiration and force) to the less prominent yet symbolically freighted *Maison de la Source* in Glissant's *La Lézarde* or the haunted Alexis property in Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove*, whose embodiment of the predicaments of Antillean *départementalisation* has gone understudied in previous criticism.

This study helpfully brings literature from Martinique and Guadeloupe together with narratives and interpretive frameworks from Haiti in order to draw out the persistent dilemmas posed by identity construction in the region—problems identified by Albert Memmi in *Portrait du colonisé* (1957), another springboard for Herbeck's work—and also the ways particular locations and ongoing historical changes require and foster differing adaptive responses.

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