Albert James Arnold, *La Littérature antillaise entre histoire et mémoire: 1935–1995*.

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History and memory have long captivated Francophone Caribbean writers, sparking generous critical and theoretical reflection. The temporal boundaries of A.J. Arnold's long half century reflect the emergence of Aimé Césaire at one end, and the high point of *créolité* (and the foundation of local publisher Ibis Rouge) at the other. These years stake out a period during which identitarian discourses flourished alongside, and often stimulated, a remarkably vibrant literary production.

But Arnold's purview is broader than his title suggests, both in space (the book is studded with references to, for example, Cuba, Saint Lucia, and the United States) and time. The first major section, "Formation de l'imaginaire littéraire," shows how the Code Noir (1685), enacted immediately after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, prohibited Jews from the French colonies. Catholicism became, via this double exclusion of Jews and Protestants, synonymous with the planter caste; a strong critique of Antillean anti-Semitism runs through the book. The prologue also interrogates the *pariade*, a term describing the organized, collective rape of captive females on slave ships, held by writers such as Raphaël Tardon and André Schwarz-Bart to be a primal scene of mixing. Arnold asserts that the story has no historical basis, functioning rather as a screen memory that emerged in the mid-twentieth century and passed unquestioned into literary, critical, and even political discourse.

Subsequent chapters range across myths and mythologized figures, probing legends that pass for history and exposing the manipulation, sidelining, or recasting of history to serve the purposes of memory. Arnold shows how, after Abolition (1848), the three castes engaged in a "*travail de mémoire*" that interpreted the past according to their needs in the present. The first chapter, "De la violence," analyzes writings by Victor Schœlcher, Raphaël Tardon, Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, Derek Walcott, and Alejo Carpentier that shape and rework the story of Toussaint to particular ideological ends. If Tardon accentuates mulatto victimization, Césaire's Toussaint is *the* black hero of Haitian Negritude; inconvenient facts such as his ownership of slaves are excised. Glissant, writing postdepartmentalization, imagines Toussaint as a haunting presence rather than a romantic liberator. For Walcott, writing on the cusp of the independence of the Anglophone islands, he is a herald of liberty.

"Éléments du dilemme," the book's second major section, argues that Negritude was less about promoting "African" culture than about suppressing the "middle" term (mulatto) between Black and White. *Tropiques* accentuated Lafcadio Hearn's surrealist vision of Saint-Pierre, ignoring more dubious aspects of

his presentation of Antillean culture. Arnold goes on to criticize feminist critics' championing of certain writers, again detecting the hand of memory rather than history. Mayotte Capécia's inclusion in university syllabi results from shaky research (*Je suis martiniquaise* was conceived to appeal to a metropolitan audience and was largely written by her Petainist lover) and American political correctness. Celebratory readings of Suzanne Lacascade similarly respond to such feminist confirmation bias; *Claire-Solange* is read as a belated colonial, rather than feminist postcolonial, novel. And it is not only women writers who have been subject to such overdetermined readings; Frantz Fanon was appropriated in English translation, first by the radical Black movement of the 1960s, and then by postcolonial theorists in the 1990s. The second half of this section, examining language and geography, ranges from the *conte créole* (Césaire's assertion of common origins for the Creole and the African folktale is debunked) to the symbolic sites of Antillean space, such as the plains, the hills and the volcano. Here, Arnold offers sensitive readings of Césaire, Glissant, and Daniel Maximin.

The final section, "Sortir de l'impasse?," examines Negritude, Créolité and Creolisation. Arnold shows how a novel like Confiant's *Le Nègre et l'Amiral*, while claiming to deploy a Martinican basilect, in fact uses the mesolect to ensure the reader's (local and French) comprehension. The book closes with a discussion of Guadeloupean women writers Maryse Condé, Gisèle Pineau, and Dany Bébel-Gisler. "Serious" feminist readings of Condé's *Tituba* neglect the ludic mischief of a novel that has more in common with the postmodern works of a John Barth. Meanwhile Pineau's memory-suffused novels respond better to metropolitan tastes than Bébel-Gisler's more historical take on creolization, resulting in the celebration of the former and ghettoization of the latter.

Arnold takes no prisoners in this often-polemical study. Not for him the political correctness of the U.S. academy, nor the ahistorical (or worse, anti-historical) narratives perpetuated by generations of writers and critics, nor the too-ready co-opting of particular authors to predetermined ideological ends. Not all will agree with his conclusions, but all will be stimulated by his analysis.

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