MARYSE CONDÉ IS WITHOUT A DOUBT one of the most renowned writers of the Caribbean. Extremely prolific, she occupies a central position in the French-Caribbean literary landscape, even though she evidently has her eccentricities; more than one reader has been shocked by her direct, subversive style. She is one of those writers who does not aim to please audiences and who appreciates (postcolonial) literature for its potential to disturb expectations.¹

¹ The work of the anglophone Caribbean writer V.S. Naipaul pleases her because of what she calls the subversive qualities of his writing: “Aux Antilles comme dans le reste du tiers monde, les intellectuels vivent dans une perspective d’espoir peut-être factice, de foi peut-être forcée. Ils clament que leurs peuples qui triompheraient certainement un jour des dictatures, de l’exploitation et de la mainmise des compagnies américaines, exprimeront alors ces précieuses valeurs culturelles qu’ils ont conservées intactes à travers des siècles. Une fois ôté le baïllon de la langue d’imposition coloniale, ils retrouveront leurs voix et leur parole. Une fois lavés les fards chrétiens, ils nommeront leurs dieux et les honoreront par la musique et la danse. Après l’enfer du temps présent, [...] l’intellectuel dénonce non tant la trahison des leaders que les nouveaux pièges posés sous les premiers pas des nations, et rejette généralement les responsabilités sur le Monde Blanc, sur l’Occident impérialiste. Avec Naipaul, rien de tel”; Condé, La Quinzaine littéraire (16 October 1983): 6–7 (In the Caribbean as in the rest of the Third World, intellectuals...
Her novels, in which we can distinguish African, American and Caribbean phases, and her critical writings on authors from the black diaspora make her a pioneer in postcolonial francophone Caribbean criticism.\(^2\) Equally important is the absence in her work of any firm boundary between fiction and reality, literature and ‘meta-literature’. Condé has, from the very start, practised a kind of *métissage* of different writing practices, a “poetics of hybridity,” to use Ronnie Scharfman’s term.\(^3\) A. James Arnold contends that, in her case, “the author is the critic.”\(^4\) Her connections with writers from the African continent and from America and her job as a professor at Columbia University make her a central figure both in the literary and in the academic world. Needless to say, her acclaim and fame are international; she is one of the few “French” writers to be translated almost immediately (by her husband Richard Philcox), and few postcolonial writers are so frequently invited abroad to participate in debates. Numerous dissertations, articles and essays have been written on her novels, essays, theatre, and children’s books (though the latter are still somewhat neglected).\(^5\) Her

entertain an optimistic view of things that is perhaps illusory, and have a perhaps excessive trustfulness. They proclaim that their people, who will surely triumph one day over dictatorship, exploitation and their takeover by US companies, will then give expression to those precious cultural values that they have preserved intact through the centuries. Having once removed the gag imposed by the language of colonialism, they will find their own voice and words again. Having once washed off the greasepaint of Christianity, they will name their gods and honour them in music and dancing. After the hell of the present age, […] the intellectual does not denounce the treachery of the leaders so much as the new traps being laid to ensnare the first steps of infant nations, and reject wholesale any responsibility for the White World and Western imperialism. With Naipaul, there is nothing of this kind of thing. – tr. G.C.).

\(^2\) Her PhD (Paris III, 1976) was significantly entitled “Stéréotypes du Noir dans la littérature antillaise: Guadeloupe et Martinique.” Condé contributed to journals dedicated to the promotion and emancipation of African and more generally black diasporan literature: *Jeune Afrique*, *Notre Librairie*, and others. Later she wrote for important journals such as *Présence Africaine*; once she was established in the USA, seminal reviews such as *Callaloo* (18.3, Summer 1995) and *World Literature Today* (67.4, Fall 1993) would publish special issues on her work, highlighting her significance as both a critic and a novelist.


\(^5\) Condé is better known and much more widely read than Glissant, who also lives and works in the USA. As for her writing, *World Literature Today* issued a special